KAFKA IN ENGLAND: A STUDY OF KAFKA'S INFLUENCE ON SELECTED NOVELS BY REX WARNER, KAZUO ISHIGURO AND W G SEBALD

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of

MASTER OF LETTERS

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September 2019

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the impact of Franz Kafka's fiction upon three novelists based in England: Rex Warner, Kazuo Ishiguro and W G Sebald. The Introduction briefly considers theoretical issues regarding influence and intertextuality, and distinguishes between the *Kafkaesque* and the *Kafkan.* Chapter One examines 'markers' of Kafka's influence. These can be broadly divided into two groups: 'superficial', readily imitable narratorial/stylistic devices and motifs, such as dislocations in space and time; and 'deep' features, principally resistance to interpretation and the enactment of principal themes. Thus 'double thought' and recursive narrative structures enact Kafka's epistemic and metaphysical scepticism. The following three chapters discuss in turn Warner's *The Wild Goose Chase* and *The Aerodrome*; Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*; and Sebald's *Vertigo* and *Austerlitz*. Throughout I attempt to ascertain precisely *what* these writers borrowed from Kafka; and *why* and *how* they adapted Kafkan tropes and techniques to their purposes. For example, Warner's spatio-temporal anomalies indicate the power of political authorities to manipulate reality; Ishiguro's reveal his protagonist's mental disintegration, and Sebald's, the interwovenness of past and present. And do these writers' works reveal 'deep' markers of the Kafkan? Since one plausible overarching interpretation is available in each case, I conclude that none are in every respect Kafkan.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Rex Ferguson, of the University of Birmingham, for his patient supervision of this dissertation over several years, and Dr Emily Troscianko, of the University of Oxford, for kindly commenting on some of the material in Chapter One.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A: W G Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell and the Author (London, Penguin Books, 2002)

C: Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957)

CD: Franz Kafka, 'A Country Doctor' in F Kafka, *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961) 119-124

G: Frank Kafka, 'Gracchus the Hunter' trans. Willa and Edwin Muir in F Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Writings* (London: A & C Black, 2002) 158-162

M: Franz Kafka, 'Metamorphosis' in F Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961) 9-63

PS: Franz Kafka, 'In the Penal Settlement' in F Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961) 167-199

T: Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953)

TA: Rex Warner, *The Aerodrome* (London: John Lane/The Bodley Head) 1944).

TWGC: Rex Warner, *The Wild Goose Chase* (London: John Lane/The Bodley Head) 1944)

TU: Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (London: Faber, 1995)

V: W G Sebald, *Vertigo*, trans. Michael Hulse and the Author (London: Penguin Books, 2002)

INTRODUCTION

W H Auden famously wrote, 'Had one to name the artist who comes nearest to bearing the same kind of relation to our age that Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe bore to theirs, Kafka is the first one would think of.'[1] More recently, Daniel Medin argues that 'Kafka has been instrumental in the self-discovery of countless authors across Europe and the United States. His "genes" can be detected in much of today's fiction via the physiognomy of literary allusion, thematic variation, and allegorical imitation'.[2] There is ample evidence that, since their first publication in English translation in the 1930s, Kafka's novels and short stories have exerted a powerful influence upon British culture and literature. This dissertation initially examines what I term 'markers' of Kafka's influence on his successors. It subsequently investigates how three novelists writing in the English language responded to Kafka: Rex Warner, Kazuo Ishiguro and W G Sebald. My investigation is intended to shed light, not only on these writers' aims but on Kafka himself. Analysing their borrowings, and what they *fail* to borrow, might help us to understand what is most distinctive about their source.

Scope and Translations

My discussion of Kafka's work is based principally around the novels *The Castle* and *The Trial* (and the incorporated parable 'Before the Law'); and the shorter fictions 'Metamorphosis', 'A Country Doctor' and 'In the Penal Colony'. I refer to these works by their English titles.

[1] W H Auden, 'The Wandering Jew', in Edward Mendelson (ed.) *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden. Prose: Volume II, 1939–1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) p. 110.
[2] Daniel L Medin 'Liebliche Lüge?: Philip Roth's "Looking At Kafka"', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 44, 1-2 (2007) 38-50.

The Scottish poet Edwin Muir and his wife Willa published their translation of *The Castle* in 1930. This was followed by *The Great Wall of China* in 1933 and *The Trial* in 1937. In 1938 A L Lloyd translated 'Metamorphosis' and in the same year the Muirs published a translation of *America*. The Muir translations have long been criticised as inadequate, and numerous others have been published in recent years.[3] Nevertheless, the Muir and Lloyd versions were the only ones widely available in the UK before the late 1990s, and I quote exclusively from these. Few English writers read German, though the German-born Sebald would, of course, have read Kafka in the original. Despite their shortcomings, the Muir translations reflect Kafka's style adequately, as the passages quoted demonstrate. My characterisations of Kafka's style accordingly apply to both the German original and the translations.[4]

I say little about historical, cultural and socio-economic background issues. Nevertheless, the differing circumstances of the writers discussed cannot be ignored. Warner's novels were written in the 1930s and early 1940s, soon after the first publication of English translations of Kafka. They reflect current events and contemporary political thought; and also, perhaps, the religious and psychoanalytical interpretations of Kafka prevalent at the time. Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* appeared over sixty years later. The longer the gap between an originary text and the work under investigation, the greater the likelihood that influence has been mediated through other writers and critical commentary. Thus Ishiguro seems to have borrowed from Beckett, himself influenced by Kafka; and would have been aware of the vast output of the 'Kafka industry' – which, by the 1990s, was amenable to socio-political readings of the fictions. Sebald's novels, in contrast, are heavily influenced by his academic background in German literary scholarship and his own, broadly 'existentialist' interpretations of Kafka.

[3] See Patrick O'Neill, *Transforming Kafka: Translation Effects* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).
[4] I read much of Kafka's work in the original German.

Some Theoretical Issues

I cannot examine in detail the theoretical considerations that underlie my discussion, but must mention some assumptions regarding authorial intentions and the notion of influence. I accept (with reservations) the idea of an author whose inferred intentions are *relevant to* (but do not fix) our interpretations. I also defend traditional notions of influence against postmodernist critics.

On the first issue, I accept (with reservations) Wimsatt and Beardsley's claim that the meaning of a text is not *solely* a matter of authorial intentions, and that E D Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance does not resolve the issue.[5] Hirsch argues that while the meaning of a work is given by the writer's known or inferred purposes, its significance will fluctuate with the reader's understanding and circumstances. Post-structuralist theorists respond that the instability of word-meanings make the notions of determinate intended meaning, and thus of a hard-and-fast distinction between meaning and significance, incoherent. Derrida asserts that the 'logocentric' view of authorial intention – according to which the validity of a reading is guaranteed by the presence to the writer's mind of some purpose – is undermined by the gaps, inconsistencies and contradictions revealed in close readings of the text. Meaning is never fixed or stable, for even the seemingly least ambiguous of texts is susceptible to multiple readings; and there is no final arbiter as to which is 'correct'.

Derrida is correct in denying that the writer 'encases' a fixed meaning within his text. Nevertheless, some postmodernist claims need challenging. According to Julia Kristeva, the non-existence of a 'transcendental signified' – of something standing outside the system of

[5] W K Wimsatt and Monroe C Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy' in W K Wimsatt (ed.), *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954) pp. 3-18. E D Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) pp. 6-8.

signifiers that grounds their meaning – leaves only the 'free play' of signifiers; an inherently unstable system that seems to set no boundaries to the meaning of texts.[6] Nevertheless, 'transcendental signifieds' are probably redundant entities; for, as Wittgenstein demonstrates, the meaning of signifiers is established principally through custom and usage.[7] We can reasonably reliably infer a speaker's or writer's intentions just because these necessarily incorporate conventional elements; and these elements also set limits to plausible interpretations.

Attempts wholly to eliminate authorial intention are also incompatible with the claim, defended below, that Kafka is a cognitive realist.[8] Cognitive realism assumes that a text embodies intentions to communicate: though not, necessarily, that the critic might be able to grasp *the* intentions or the *original* intentions of the author. These expressions suggest that an author possesses pre-formed, relatively fixed and conscious intentions that she puts into effect in her work, but most philosophers and neuroscientists believe that intentions emerge in behaviour – including, in this context, in the act of writing. This conclusion is compatible with Derrida's acknowledgement that Deconstruction does not *banish* the author, but merely questions her ability to fix meaning. Hence 'the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from that place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and system of utterance'.[9]

In Chapter One I distinguish between 'global' and 'partial' interpretations of a text, and suggest that it is impossible to provide all-encompassing, comprehensive and internally consistent readings of Kafka's novels. The assumption that other texts *are* amenable to global

[6] Kelly Oliver, 'Introduction: Kristeva's Revolutions', *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) xi-xxix.
[7] William Irwin, 'Against Intertextuality', *Philosophy and Literature*, 28, 2 (2004) 227-242. L Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G E M Anscombe. 3rd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967) § 43, p. 20.
[8] Cf. Emily Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism* (London: Routledge, 2014) pp. 9-10.
[9] J. Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', *Glyph* I (1977) 172-197, p. 192.

readings does not imply, of course, that those readings would be 'definitive', 'correct' or otherwise 'fixed': merely that they are highly plausible.

The denial that author's intentions determine meaning is closely connected with the postmodernist preference for talking about *intertextuality* rather than *influence*. Traditional understandings of influence assume a dyadic relationship involving the transfer of ideas from one mind to another; a historicist, causal pathway whereby x changes y in ascertainable ways. The indeterminacy of authorial intentions undermines such notions. According to Kristeva, all texts are made up of other texts in an infinitely complex pattern of impersonal interconnections, like segments of a vast three-dimensional web.[10] Rather than a diachronic model by which influence is mediated from an earlier to a later text, we have indefinitely many synchronic relationships between texts. The author's role is reduced to that of (in Roland Barthes's words) the 'orchestrator of the already-written'.[11]

Harold Bloom is the chief defender of the traditional account of influence. In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) Bloom argues that poets both admire and resent the achievements of their predecessors, fearing that that it is no longer possible to produce great and original literature. They accordingly erect a psychological barrier around their work, subtly denigrating their precursors and repudiating their influence. The strong precursor resembles the Freudian father-figure, someone who must be vanquished before the new writer can find his own voice. Original literature emerges from this quasi-Oedipal conflict, leading to 'strong' poets avoiding anything that smacks of repetition or imitation. Bloom offers what he calls six 'revisionary ratios', or strategies to avoid these failings. The most significant involves writers intentionally *misreading* or misinterpreting their precursors.

[10] Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in Toril Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*, trans. Seán Hand and Léon S. Roudiez. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).
[11] Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (London: Cape) 1974, p. 21.

This is hardly the place for a detailed critique of Bloom's theory, but some points deserve mention. Not only does the theory rest on contestable Freudian assumptions but, by insisting that 'poetic influence…*always* proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet', Bloom presupposes a model of influence based solely on conflict and competition.[12] Further, taken literally, the claim that 'all interpretation is misinterpretation' is logically incoherent just because the very notion of misinterpretation, of misreading, implies the possibility of a consistent and comprehensive interpretation, of a 'correct' reading. The initial claim would consequently be incorrect. But in any case, one such interpretation may not exist: as I emphasise below, interpretability is not an all-or-nothing affair, and we must often settle for defensible *partial* interpretations. Additionally, while his successors may have misunderstood Kafka, they were not necessarily attempting to *avoid* his influence. Rex Warner probably misreads Kafka, for example: but only because he is adapting his predecessor's motifs and themes to his own purposes.

Gérard Genette's taxonomy of 'transtextual' relationships between texts offers a more rigorous and systematic approach. His notion of *intertextuality* differs from Kristeva's, for it involves 'the actual presence of one text within another': as in cases of quotation, plagiarism and allusion.[13] It overlaps with *hypertextuality*, which concerns the relation between a text and an earlier text (the 'hypotext') of which it is a transformation or modification. The author rewrites the original to generate a new 'hypertext' in a manner analogous to that of someone erasing and then overwriting the original words on a parchment. The resulting 'palimpsest' will retain 'traces' of past texts. Both intertextuality and hypertextuality involve intended, self-conscious relations between texts, and so presuppose the traditional account of authorial

[12] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) p. 30. My italics.
[13] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature to the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Dabinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982) 1-2.

intentions, influence and sources.[14] It seems impossible, for example, to understand irony, parody and other cases of explicit borrowing unless we assume intentionality and dyadic relationships. *'Architextuality'* signifies the relation between a text and other texts of the same genre; genre membership generating certain expectations in the reader. The notion could be extended to cover adjectives denoting stylistic or thematic affinities. I argue below that a text may be usefully described as 'Kafkaesque' without implying textual (or any other) evidence of direct influence – perhaps because it emerges from a philosophical or socio-political background similar to Kafka's.

Two other approaches merit mention. Jonathan Culler argues that we need not choose between two dichotomous notions; rather, *influence* and *intertextuality* lie on a continuum.[15] At one pole we find cases of straightforward and specific borrowing and allusion, perhaps with documentary evidence of authorial intentions. Here the bounded, dyadic notion of influence is most appropriate. At the other pole the impersonal, amorphous notion of a literary *Zeitgeist* comes into play, with resemblances explained by background ideas and beliefs held in common. Now the anonymous, unbounded notion of intertextuality is apt. And J L Borges makes the seemingly paradoxical claim that Kafka *created* his own precursors. By this Borges means that Kafka-like qualities are discernible in writers as diverse as Zeno of Elea, Kierkegaard and Robert Browning; but in the absence of Kafka's own writings we might not become aware of these qualities.[16]

I mention Freud frequently in the following discussion. In doing so I am not necessarily *endorsing* his theories: which are unfalsifiable (and hence according to Karl Popper, not

[14] E Thais Morgan, 'Is There an Intertext in this Text?: Literary and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intertextuality', *American Journal of Semiotics*, 3 (1985) 1-40 p, 31.
[15] Jonathan Culler, 'Presupposition and Intertextuality', *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).
[16] Jorge Luis Borges, 'Kafka and His Precursors', trans. Eliot Weinberger in J L Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions* (New York: Viking, 1999), pp. 363–365.

scientific); culturally and contextually dependent; and which, some argue, have been largely superseded by cognitive psychology and neuroscience. In particular, neuroscience challenges the claim that memories may be 'stored' in the unconscious and later emerge intact. Nevertheless, there is little consensus on these issues, and several commentators argue that Freudian theory is at least partly compatible with neuroscience. Alfred I Tauber, for example, suggests that the two approaches examine the same phenomena at different *levels*: that of folk psychology, with its emphasis upon beliefs and desires, and that of brain structures.[17] Mark Solms, one of the founders of 'neuropsychoanalysis', argues that we (consciously) experience perceptual and cognitive representations (themselves the result of unconscious processes) only because we are *affective* beings.[18] Perception and cognition are consequently inseparable from the emotional attitudes studied by Freud. Again, while some scientists resist the claim that there exists the stable determinate self presupposed by classical Freudianism, others find support for the traditional conception in neuroscience. Thus Joseph M Moran argues that the brain encodes information about the self in a structure distinct from that which handles other kinds of information, and that one brain network is involved specifically in self-reflection.[19]

Finally, *whether or not* Freudian theory is flawed, unscientific, and were eventually proven 'wrong', it has evidently profoundly influenced twentieth-century writers. Hence (for

[17] Alfred I Tauber, 'Freud without Oedipus: The Cognitive Unconscious', *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology*, 20, 3 (2013) 231-241.
[18] Mark Leonard Solms, 'The Neurobiological Underpinnings of Psychoanalytic Theory and Therapy', *Behavioral Neuroscience* (4 December 2018) https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnbeh.2018.00294/full, accessed 1 January 2020. Solms disagrees with Freud on certain issues. For example, Freud tried to explain certain clinical symptoms by talking about the 'death drive': which he equated with the Nirvana principle (the desire to feel nothing). As Solms points out, the desire to satisfy all immediate needs hardly corresponds to a desire for death. Solms also denies that repressed memories (literally) return: rather, only their affect, their emotional power, returns.
[19] Joseph M Moran, 'Cognitive Neuroscience of Self-Reflection' in John R Absher and Jasmin Cloutier (eds.) *Neuroimaging Personality, Social Cognition, and Character* (Academic Press, 2016) 205-219. For an overview of the issue, see Winston Chiong, 'The Self: From Philosophy to Cognitive Neuroscience, *Neurocase*, 17, 3 (2011) 190-200.

example) Ishiguro's extensive use of Freudian tropes merits discussion, even if their explanatory and predictive power is questionable.

The Kafkaesque and the Kafkan

The term 'Kafkaesque' was first used by Cecil Day Lewis in 1938 to describe Edward Upward's *Journey to the Border*.[20] It rapidly became shorthand for any scenario in which an individual fights helplessly against a sinister, impersonal bureaucracy. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the Kafkaesque as 'of, relating to, or suggestive of Franz Kafka or his writings; *especially*: having a nightmarishly complex, bizarre, or illogical quality'.[21] Setting aside the tautological element, this definition is too broad to apply invariably and exclusively to Kafka's work. Adam Thirlwell, in contrast, denies that 'the Kafkaesque' has any useful sense. It is frequently asserted that the fictions

> …express the alienation of modern man; they are a prophecy of (a) the totalitarian police state, and (b) the Nazi Holocaust. His work expresses a Jewish mysticism, a non-denominational mysticism, an anguish of man without God…The Kafkaesque describes an indescribable sense of menace. All of these truths, all of them are wrong. It is not a very accurate word, this word 'Kafkaesque'.[22]

Thirlwell is correct insofar as the meaning of the fictions cannot be *reduced* to any one of these interpretations, and that 'Kafkaesque' is made to do too much work. Can we nevertheless speak usefully about distinctive features of Kafka's writing, and confidently trace his influence upon subsequent writers? I suggest that another term is needed, *the Kafkan*. Robert Lemon writes that the term 'Kafkaesque' 'gestures toward both the content and the

[20] J Preece (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 223.
[21] *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kafkaesque, accessed 23 Nov. 2013.
[22] Adam Thirlwell, 'Introduction', Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories* (London: Random House, 1992) p. xi.

form of [Kafka's] narratives, their creation of enigmas and refusal to resolve them'; while the 'Kafkan' is 'the more rigorous and restrictive adjective…which 'implies a greater degree of similarity with, and/or the direct, attributable influence of, Kafka's actual works'.[23] Lemon's distinction is one of degree rather than kind, and requires modification. I suggest that '*Kafkaesque*' is reserved for works *reminiscent* of Kafka, and that its use makes no claims about influence. For example, any novel involving arbitrary arrest and trial in a totalitarian society – such as Orwell's *1984* or Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* – might be described as 'Kafkaesque', irrespective of its date of publication, or of textual or extra-textual evidence of influence. Parallels between the work in question and Kafka's will be (in Genette's terminology) 'architextual'; or situated towards the intertextual end of Culler's influence/intertextuality continuum. A '*Kafkan*' text, in contrast, will reveal unmistakable, clear-cut and specific evidence of borrowing from Kafka. In that case it must evidently postdate the publication of Kafka's work.

These issues are complicated by borrowing being both a quantitative and a qualitative matter. A novel in which one short chapter pastiches Kafka (such as David Lodge's *The British Museum is Falling Down*) is hardly Kafkan. Assessing the 'quality' of borrowing is more difficult. I suggest that it involves an (admittedly crude) distinction, between 'superficial' and 'deep' *markers* of the Kafkan. These markers will encompass motifs, themes and stylistic and structural features; and more abstract qualities, such as amenability or resistance to interpretation. We can also distinguish between 'superficial' and 'deep' *modes of employing* markers; and assess whether a writer is merely imitating Kafka or borrowing in order to supplement or enhance the expression of his or her own ideas. For example, Kafka's

[23] Robert Lemon, 'The Comfort of Strangeness: Correlating the Kafkaesque and the Kafkan in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', in Stanley Corngold and Ruth V Gross (eds.) *Kafka for the Twenty-First Century* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 207-221, p. 207.

spatio-temporal anomalies are readily imitable, but in his successors' work often appear an afterthought; an ingredient added to the mix, as it were. In Warner's *Wild Goose Chase* the frequently-occurring anomalies appear extraneous to the narrative; appendages and accessories that mimic Kafka but are ultimately spurious. In Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*, in contrast, the anomalies are external correlatives of the protagonist's mental state and, as in Kafka, suggest his inertia. Their appearance *coheres* with what we learn of the protagonist's character, with the repetitive structure of the novel, and so on. Warner makes superficial use of the motif; Ishiguro displays a deeper understanding of what the anomalies might signify.

'Superficial' markers of the Kafkan discussed in Chapter One include spatio-temporal irregularities, the frequent occurrence of doubles, and motifs related to bureaucracy and surveillance. 'Deep' markers are less readily articulated. They include, firstly, resistance to global interpretation. I suggest that it is impossible to establish the meaning of these fictions *in their entirety*; to provide all-encompassing, coherent and consistent readings; though we may be able to devise plausible *partial* readings. Further, Kafka's texts concurrently *incite* and *repel* attempts at interpretation. Secondly, we find the representation or *enactment* of Kafka's principal themes. Stylistic and narratorial devices – principally, the almost simultaneous assertion, qualification and negation of some state-of-affairs, and repetitive, looping narrative structures – exemplify both resistance to interpretation and epistemic uncertainty, states of unknowing. The reader's preconceptions are continually undermined, leading her to experience something of the existential *angst* that follows from intuiting how limited is our understanding of our world. Thirdly, formal and thematic elements work in unison. They suggest and deny the possibilities of determinate meaning and of gaining reliable knowledge of the world; and also instantiate substantive themes involving self-deception. These are *emergent* qualities of Kafka's fiction, arising from the interaction

between diverse elements. Unlike superficial markers, they cannot be readily tallied and scored.

What, then constitutes 'clear-cut' evidence of borrowing from Kafka? In the absence of unambiguous textual evidence – such as quotations from or explicit allusions to Kafka – how might we decide whether a text is Kafkan rather than simply Kafkaesque? Traditional accounts of definition – which specify necessary and sufficient conditions for *x* being *y* – are of little help. Thus the occurrence of motifs involving arbitrary arrest and labyrinthine bureaucracy are neither necessary nor sufficient for a text being Kafkan: they are absent in *Metamorphosis*, but present in Kleist's (Kafkaesque) *Michael Kohlhaas* (1810). Evidently 'Kafkan' is an 'open-textured' term, the extension of which is ill-defined and without clear-cut boundaries to its application. John Searle's 'cluster' theory of meaning suggests one means of tackling this issue.[24] We might accept a text as Kafkan if it met *most* of a cluster of conditions stipulated as markers of the Kafkan. Searle's theory allows some features to count more heavily than others. Thus simultaneous incitement and resistance to interpretation would carry more weight than the presence of spatio-temporal anomalies. Despite problems inherent to Searle's theory (how many features are 'most', and who decides which are weighted?) it may offer the only tenable approach. After all, literary criticism – an imperfect attempt to investigate an imperfect mapping of an imperfectly known world – will always involve uncertainties, loose ends and ragged boundaries.

As suggested above, a given text may be categorised as *Kafkan* if it postdates the publication of Kafka's work, and incorporates significantly many of the motifs and stylistic/structural features listed below. Chapter One divides markers of the Kafkan into three categories. Features relating to narrative form include a mono-perspectival viewpoint and the

[24] John R Searle, 'Proper Names', *Mind* (New Series) 67, 266, (1958) 166-173.

presentation of dreamlike or hallucinatory states. Recurring motifs, tropes and themes include: seemingly omnipotent and inaccessible authorities that employ cumbersome and meaningless bureaucratic procedures and are associated with sordid physical surroundings and sexual corruption; seemingly unwarranted accusations; quests; maze-like and claustrophobic settings; metamorphoses; father-son conflicts; a sense of *angst*; absurdist humour; and various manifestations of doubling. The category also includes what Philip Weinstein calls symptoms of 'unknowing': uncanny space and time, and fragmentation of the self.[25] Stylistic, structural and narratorial features include the combination of precision of language with fantastical subject matter; the juxtaposition of realistic concrete detail with a dreamlike atmosphere; and the frequent modification and negation of assertions. Of these, perhaps the representation of a dreamlike/hallucinatory atmosphere would be most heavily weighted, though it is not a *necessary* condition for the Kafkan.

This listing of characteristics is not intended to be exhaustive, and is not tailored specifically to subsequent discussion of Kafka's successors. For example, space does not permit discussion of the animal motifs that play a significant role in both Kafka's and Sebald's work.

As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, all the texts discussed meet the criteria for the Kafkan suggested above. The more important questions, however, is whether they also reveal the presence of the 'deep' markers mentioned above, and *how* and *why* Kafkan motifs and techniques are employed.

[25] Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

Previous Studies

Comparatively little has been written about Kafka's influence on English-language writers. Earlier papers make general observations about shared motifs (arbitrary arrests, bureaucracy and the like); the typical background assumption being that Kafka's novels are best interpretable as quests for spiritual understanding. Otherwise there is little discussion of *why* the writer might have borrowed from Kafka. In accounts of specific writers, some commentators are at pains to disavow Kafka's influence. Certainly, few of his successors reveal 'deep' markers of the Kafkan, or employ markers in a 'deep' manner. Nevertheless, given (as I demonstrate) the unmistakable fact of borrowing, it is interesting to investigate precisely what use is made of Kafkan materials – even in the case of a writer like Rex Warner, whose understanding of his sources is relatively superficial.

Two English language monographs on the broader issue have been published. Shimon Sandbank's *After Kafka* makes useful points about Kafka's resistance to interpretation, but focuses principally on European authors and is now somewhat out-of-date.[26] Daniel Medin presents a detailed account of Kafka's influence on novels by J M Coetzee, Philip Roth, and Sebald (*Vertigo*).[27] He offers little theoretical discussion of influence, but employs a modified form of Harold Bloom's account of misreading in order to appraise the 'authenticity' or otherwise of the author's borrowings from Kafka. Medin is scholarly and thorough, but concentrates on enumerating parallels between texts rather than asking why the relevant author borrows from Kafka.

[26] Shimon Sandbank, *After Kafka: The Influence of Kafka's Fiction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).
[27] Daniel L. Medin, *Three Sons: Franz Kafka and the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee, Philip Roth, and W. G. Sebald* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010)

Terminology

I use the term 'Realism' to refer to the nineteenth-century (and later) literary and artistic tradition of describing or rendering the 'real' world in detail. Unfortunately the concept is hard to pin down, and most definitions are question-begging. Such expressions as 'correspondence to the way things are' or 'representing things in a way that is accurate and true to life' assume both the possibility of 'correspondence' or 'representation' and that there is a universally agreed 'way things are'.[28]

The meaning of 'represent' is vague, varying with context. The core meaning is 'to present some idea or event in a different form': as in my assertion that '*The Unconsoled* does not represent a dream'. I occasionally contrast 'represent' with 'describe': writing, for example, that 'Ishiguro resembles Kafka in not merely describing but representing the protagonist's mental state'. By this I mean that rather than *asserting* that Ryder feels (for example) confused and disorientated, Ishiguro creates a sense of confusion and disorientation in the reader through (for example) anomalous shifts in the spatio-temporal setting. The meaning of 'represent' here overlaps with that of 'enact': 'put into practice', 'concretise'. (This definition is again fairly loose, and is inapplicable to the notion of enactment appearing in the '4E' account of cognition discussed in Chapter One.) Thus 'the looping, repetitive narratorial structure and constant digressions enact Ryder's continual sense of frustration and disappointment'. Here 'enact is used metaphorically, the idea being that Ishiguro is reproducing in the reader something of his character's emotions. There is a further overlap with 'instantiate'. To instantiate some quality is to exemplify, to embody it in actual

[28] The latter definition (of 'realistic') is taken from Angus Stevenson and Maurice Waite (eds.) *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 1197.

instances. Thus 'Kafka's writing is characterised by double-thought, 'slipknots' and sudden reversals that instantiate ambiguity and uncertainty'.

I refer frequently to 'the reader' in this discussion: but *the* reader does not exist, for all readers react to texts in different ways. Are we talking about the actual, the ideal, the informed, or any other kind of reader discerned by critics?[29] Context is all: the 'average' British reader of Charles Dickens in the 1850s will differ significantly in their knowledge of the world – though not, perhaps, in their understanding of human emotions – from the corresponding reader of Kafka in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the term remains useful, perhaps unavoidable, shorthand. My focus upon readers, together with my denial that a given text possesses one 'correct', final meaning, indicates that my discussion is tacitly underpinned by some species of reader-response theory. Such theories focus on 'the relationship between text and reader and reader and text, with the emphasis on the different ways in which a reader participates in the course of reading a text…'[30] Constructivist reader-response accounts are perhaps most persuasive.[31] Thus Jonathan Culler claims that competent readers make sense of texts precisely because they have assimilated certain conventions and codes that structure their reading experience.[32] In similar vein, Stanley Fish argues that readers belong to 'interpretive communities' that 'produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features'.[33] Because (most of) their members share similar assumptions, these communities impose their authority upon the process of writing; effectively *creating* the

[29] Cf. Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 7.
[30] J A Cuddon and C E Preston, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London, Penguin, 1998) p. 726.
[31] I have defended Constructivism in other contexts. See, for example 'A Constructivist Metaethics' in David Lockwood, *Moral Rules and Political Action: A Rule-Consequentialist Account of the Relationship Between Ethics and Politics* (Etica Press, 2012).
[32] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1975).
[33] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) p. 14.

possibility of an objective response. Thus when two people from a modern Western cultural background read certain words and sentences, expressed in such-and-such a style, their responses will probably resemble each other. For example, they will probably share the sense of frustration engendered by Kafka's and Ishiguro's recursive narrative structures, and the consequent indefinite deferment of tasks being accomplished. Precisely because most readers react similarly, it becomes legitimate to say that the writers do not merely describe but *enact* this sense of frustration.

The term 'theory of mind' 'refers to the cognitive capacity to attribute mental states to self and others'.[34] It designates the *ability* to attribute mental states differing from our own (beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.) to other persons, and hence to explain and predict their behaviour. 'Empathy' refers to 'a wide range of psychological capacities that are thought of as being central for constituting humans as social creatures allowing us to know what other people are thinking and feeling, to emotionally engage with them, to share their thoughts and feelings, and to care for their well–being'.[35] 'The term refers more specifically to recognising and understanding the *feelings* of others. Empathy involves the ability to adopt someone else's perspective; 'to put oneself in her shoes'.

A 'hallucination' is 'a perceptual experience similar to a true perception but not resulting from stimulation of a sense organ'.[36] Someone might hallucinate a knife-wielding attacker, for example; the visual and auditory sensations exactly matching those of a veridical perception of an attacker – but no such person is present. Strictly speaking, the concept excludes both

[34] Alvin I Goldman, 'Theory of Mind' in Eric Margolis, Richard Samuels, and Stephen Stich (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Cognitive Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 402-424, p. 202.
[35] Karsten Stueber, 'Empathy', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 Edition). https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/empathy, accessed 1 March 2020.
[36] Andrew M Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 329.

dreamt experiences and illusions – the latter involving the misperception or misinterpretation of an actually existing object or event. While I deny that (for example) Kafka's narratives are reports of dreams, there is some overlap between the categories. It is accordingly sometimes uncertain whether the protagonists of Kafkan fictions are experiencing waking dreams, hallucinating or afflicted by illusions.

I use the masculine pronoun when discussing Kafka's texts on the grounds that virtually all his protagonists are male.

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter One discusses the markers of the Kafkan mentioned above. Subsequent chapters provide brief summaries of the texts under discussion and examine how and why the relevant author adapts Kafkan techniques and motifs to his own purposes. Most importantly, does he reveal a 'superficial' or a 'deep' understanding of Kafka? Chapter Two discusses Rex Warner's novels *The Wild Goose Chase* (1937) and *The Aerodrome* (1941); Chapter Three, Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995); and Chapter Four, W G Sebald's *Vertigo* (1990) and *Austerlitz* (2001).

Finally, it might be queried whether Sebald's novels belong unproblematically to *English* literature. They were originally written in German, but translated in close co-operation with the author – a man based in England with a near-native command of English. Perhaps the translations have effectively become new texts, written jointly by Sebald and the translator.

CHAPTER ONE: MARKERS OF THE KAFKAN

INTRODUCTION

I argued in the Introduction that when discussing Kafka's successors it is convenient to distinguish between 'superficial' and 'deep' markers of the Kafkan. Kafka's writings not only provide the standard against which other texts are assessed, but integrate formal and thematic elements such that these distinctions are barely relevant when discussing *his* work. Nevertheless, in order to trace signs of Kafka's *influence*, it is necessary to pick out and isolate certain features: the task of this Chapter. What become, in subsequent writers, 'superficial' markers include (for example) motifs associated with bureaucracy, spatio-temporal distortion and doubles. The principal 'deep' markers are *resistance to interpretation* and *enactment of meaning.* Kafka's writings both *incite* interpretation and *defy* attempts to provide comprehensive, consistent readings; and employ stylistic and narratorial devices that instantiate what Weinstein calls states of 'unknowing'.[37] The 'deeply' Kafkan implies 'hovering' between possibilities and deferral of meaning through 'double thought' – the almost concurrent assertion and denial of propositions – and recursive, nested or backward-looping narrative structures. As readers, our preconceptions are constantly undermined, causing us to *experience* the existential *angst* following from intuiting our limited understanding of ourselves and the world. Kafka's writing is also cognitively realistic, re-enacting ways in which human brains acquire information. It is suffused with a sense of the uncanny, augmented by the use of various defamiliarising techniques.

[37] Weinstein, *Unknowing*, pp. 83-85.

INTERPRETING KAFKA

Resistance to Global Interpretation

The term '*resistance* to global interpretation' is formulated not to exclude *a priori* the possibility of a 'global interpretation' of a text. This would be *comprehensive* (explaining most features); *consistent* (without significant contradictions) and *cohesive* (with mutually supportive elements).[38] It would also be narrow in scope. Kafka's longer works are broadly interpretable as interplays between a realistically depicted world and a fantastical realm dreamt or hallucinated by the protagonist. Events in the parallel world echo or comment upon those in the real world: with, for example, Josef K.'s nightmarish encounters in *The Trial* being amplified versions of 'actual' experiences. This reading, however, also is applicable to other texts, including Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled.* It is accordingly a *partial* interpretation.

Again, consider three once-prevalent global interpretations of *The Castle*: the religious, political and psychoanalytic.[39] Max Brod and Edwin Muir, Kafka's executor and translator respectively, both considered the novel a religious allegory representing a quest for divine grace, the Castle symbolising a God whose purposes are ineffable.[40] Numerous subsequent commentators concurred. Others took it to represent totalitarian government; while psychoanalytic critics read the relationship between authorities and protagonist as that between all-powerful father and recalcitrant son. Nevertheless, considered as would-be all-embracing interpretations, each is internally inconsistent. How, for example, can religious readings be reconciled with the lecherous behaviour of Castle officials? Admittedly, members

[38] Denis Dutton, 'Reichert on Literature', *Philosophy and Literature*, 23 (1978) 258-265. The term 'global interpretation' is my own.
[39] For examples of each, see P F Neymeyer (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'The Castle': A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Prentice-Hall, 1969).
[40] Max Brod, 'Nachwort zur ersten Ausgabe', F Kafka, *Das Schloß* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1951) p. 484. Edwin Muir, 'Introductory Note', F Kafka, *The Castle* (London: Secker, 1930) v-xii.

of religious institutions often prove sexually incontinent; and good and evil are entwined in Gnosticism, Manichaeism and Hasidic Judaism.[41] Kafka, however, suggests that moral corruption is *integral* to the Castle's power over the villagers. Moreover, reductive readings risk muting Kafka's ambiguity and open-endedness. Observing that his fiction 'has been subjected to a mass ravishment by no less than three armies of interpreters', Susan Sontag insists that 'Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable'.[42]

Further, and assuming global interpretations would pertain to the *author's intended meaning*, deconstructive analysis reveals inconsistencies and contradictions that destabilise assumptions about that meaning. And, as Dorrit Cohn writes, indeterminacy of authorial intentions is exacerbated in Kafka by 'unstable and ambiguous narrative voices, reversible and open-ended actional sequences, and enigmas of plot that remain unresolved, flickers of meaning that resist consistent interpretation, contradictory symbolic hints, unstable cultural references'.[43] While the author's meaning is inherently uncertain, that arising from the interaction between text and reader will vary with individual and contextual presuppositions. In either case the notion of a 'final' meaning is incoherent. Nevertheless, it does not follow that 'anything goes'. As Jack Meiland argues, the cognitive status of criticism is threatened, not by the existence of different readings but by mistakenly pronouncing each of equal merit.[44]

[41] Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952) pp. 175-176.
[42] Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation' in S Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966) p. 8.
[43] Dorrit Cohn, 'Trends in Literary Criticism: Some Structuralist Approaches to Kafka', *The German Quarterly*, 51, 2 (1978) 182-188, p. 184.
[44] J W Meiland, 'Interpretation as a Cognitive Discipline', *Philosophy and Literature*, 2, 1 (Spring 1978) 23-45.

Benjamin's Metaphors of Undecidability

Walter Benjamin insists that '[Kafka's] parables are never exhausted by what is explainable…he took all conceivable precautions against the interpretation of his writings'.[45] Benjamin illustrates his argument with two metaphors: theatrical gesture, and sacred texts lacking keys to their interpretation. Kafka's work, he writes, 'constitutes a code of gestures which surely had no definite symbolic meaning…rather, the author tried to derive such a meaning from them in ever-changing contexts and experimental groupings. The theater is the logical place for such groupings.[46] Benjamin insinuates that while theatrical gestures simulate emotions, the emotions 'themselves' – like a text's 'real' meaning – are absent. Take an actor who, on stage, makes gestures that conventionally signal elation but whose meaning – *qua* indicator of actual feelings – is undecidable. Like the theatrical movements of Sartre's waiter, intended to reassure customers that he is *nothing but* a waiter, the gestures *signify* emotions but underlying thoughts remain opaque.[47] Indeed, Kafka's characters often gesticulate in the manner of hamming actors.

Benjamin's second metaphor involves two categories of Jewish rabbinic teaching. *Haggadah* comprise diverse anecdotes, maxims and homilies which are correctly interpretable only with the aid of *Halakhah*, laws and doctrines of the Talmud. Kafka's fictions bear 'a similar relationship to doctrine as the Haggadah does to the Halakah….But do we have the doctrine which Kafka's parables interpret?...It does not exist; all we can say is that here and there we have an allusion to it.'[48] Because the key ('the *Halakhah*') to the meaning of Kafka's

[45] Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka – On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. H Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 111-140, p. 124.
[46] Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', p. 122 and p. 120.
[47] Jean-Paul, Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Barnes (London: Routledge, 1969) p. 101.
[48] Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', p. 119.

fictions ('the *Haggadah*') is fugitive or absent, they remain impervious to determinate readings. Nevertheless, Benjamin writes, the fictions 'don't simply lie down at the feet of doctrine, the way Haggadah lies down at the feet of Halakhah. Having crouched down, they unexpectedly cuff doctrine with a weighty paw'.[49] In other words, Kafka's fictions insinuate esoteric metaphysical mysteries, but deny the existence of a doctrine underpinning such mysteries.

Sandbank concurs: Kafka's writing 'always points to a truth beyond itself but never commits itself to the truth to which it points…[The] message [of the stories] being lost…they can yield no theme, no idea relatable to the real world'.[50] Consequently gaps arise between a text's content and possible readings. These gaps appear at the levels of events 'as they appear in the text…in their original 'natural' order, before they were artistically shaped into the text…and, most important, at the level of the theme'.[51] The first level corresponds to what Viktor Shklovsky calls the *sjužet*, 'the way a story is organised'; the second, to the *fabula*, 'the raw material of a story', the order in which narrated events would occur in real life.[52] At the thematic level, a narrative 'does not merely construct its own world but refers to the real world'.[53] For example, how might we interpret K.'s inability to enter the Castle? Given the absence of obvious impediments, no satisfactory answer is available at the level of either *sjužet* or *fabula*. As Sandbank writes, 'the story of a man incapable of getting to a place within a stone's throw of where he is…is too absurd not to require a symbolic

[49] Walter Benjamin, 'Letter to Gershom Scholem on Franz Kafka' in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* Vol. III (1935-1938) ed. Michael W Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 326.
[50] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 2.
[51] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, pp. 2-3.
[52] Paul Cobley, 'Narratology', *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. 2nd edn. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).
http://www.davidlavery.net/Courses/Narratology/JHGTC/Narratology.pdf, accessed 6 September 2013.
[53] Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958) p. 403.

interpretation'.[54] Nevertheless, as discussed above, ambiguities and anomalies frustrate attempts to decipher Kafka's narrative as *internally consistent* allegory or symbolist tale. It is, Sandbank concludes, 'divorced from any final meaning in the real world'.[55]

The Maze and the Rhizome

The maze and the rhizome offer further models of Kafka's resistance to interpretation. A maze is an intricate system of branching paths offering choices of direction and numerous dead-ends; and (unlike a labyrinth) has no centre, no final destination. Kafka's protagonists are entrapped in self-constructed psychological mazes that have external correlates in convoluted bureaucratic procedures and seemingly endless corridors and confined spaces. The botanical rhizome is a subterranean plant stem lacking a central coordinating system. Used metaphorically, 'rhizome' denotes a non-hierarchical, non-binary configuration with indefinitely many entry and exit points. Deleuze and Guattari write that Kafka's work is

> …a rhizome, a burrow. The castle has multiple entrances whose rules of usage and whose locations aren't very well known...We will enter, then, by any point whatsoever...Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation.'[56]

The 'Signifier' that purports to fix or ground a text's meaning would probably involve an act of 'territorialisation' performed by agents of the dominant culture: who typically impose upon Kafka a 'dreary' reductionist psychoanalytic reading.[57] Denial of entry to the Signifier – refusal to accept one 'definitive' interpretation – is compatible with multiple entrances into the text; with a multiplicity of partial interpretations.

[54] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 3.
[55] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 3.
[56] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) p. 3.
[57] Réda Bensmaïa, 'Foreword: The Kafka Effect' in Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, p. ix.

The Incitement to Interpretation

Kafka's fiction refuses to commit to the *assertion* – still less the *truth* – of any extratextual principle or doctrine; and blocks all moves to decode its meaning. Nevertheless, an underlying 'metaphysical impulse' *goads* us into making the attempt.[58] Kafka hints that if only we possessed the code to his encrypted texts, they would disclose momentous truths concerning, say, the nature of God and the purpose of human life. Moreover, within the fictions the characters submit texts to critical exegeses normally reserved for legal or religious writings. K. meticulously analyses each communication from the Castle authorities – though to little avail, for both verbal and written messages are vulnerable to distortion, loss and misinterpretation. Castle officials whisper their messages; and in *The Trial* the Court Attendant must shout 'through the half-open door of the office', despite being so breathless that he is barely heard (T, 71). The telephone is no more reliable: when K. telephones the Castle he hears only humming and singing. The overt content of a message actually received is typically inconsequential or equivocal, its real import conveyed by the unreliable process of delivery. The 'message' is that there is no determinable, comprehensible message.

Partial Interpretations: (1) Religious and Metaphysical

Kafka's resistance to global interpretation does not exclude the possibility of coherent partial interpretations. For example, I argue below that Kafka narrates from a largely mono-perspectival viewpoint, and represents shifts between normal and anomalous mental states. In respect of *The Trial*, this reading of narratorial *form* harmonises with a plausible interpretation of *content*: namely, that the quasi-legal authorities embody the Kantian conscience, and Josef

[58] Sandbank, *After Kafka,* p. 4.

'arrests' himself. However, since partial (thematic) interpretations generally contradict each other, they cannot 'add up' to one comprehensive reading.

The three interpretative approaches discussed above are all potentially fruitful. While *The Castle* is irreducible to an religious allegory (in which, say an Everyman seeks meaning in a world seemingly abandoned by God), the novel nevertheless insinuates the revelation of esoteric and transcendent metaphysical 'truths'. There are numerous hints of Klamm's quasi-divine nature: characters assert that everything happens according to his will, and make exhortations 'in the name of Klamm'. His constantly shifting appearance suggests God's ineffable and indeterminate nature.

According to Siegbert Prawer, experiences of the numinous have similar origins to those of the uncanny, the decline in religious belief and the rise of psychoanalysis having detached the notions. The uncanny is now associated primarily with individual anxieties; 'unassimilated into any recognizable transcendent or ethical scheme'.[59] The numinous, in contrast, yields an experience of something wholly other than oneself, simultaneously invoking fear and awe.[60] Thus the Man from the Country perceives 'a radiance that streams immortally from the door of the Law' (T, 236) – a radiance that cannot, presumably, be a mere afterglow left by a now-absent God. Moreover, the Castle holds an allure for the villagers reminiscent of the power exerted by religious institutions over their followers – one rooted in reverence for 'the sacred' and fear of the unknown. And when K. attempts to telephone the authorities he hears 'the echo…of voices singing at an infinite distance': the singing, we infer, of celestial beings (C, 26). Certainly Kafka occasionally conveys a sense of the wholly *other*. The uncanny experience, in contrast, perturbs us by retaining much that is familiar.

[59] Siegbert S Prawer, *The Uncanny in Literature: An Apology for Its Investigation* (London: Westfield College, 1965), p. 21.
[60] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).

Kafka may also allude to the notion, espoused in some Eastern religions, of *the God that is not*. This differs both from the Protestant understanding of *deus absconditus*, of a God that hides himself from mankind; and from Nietzsche's claim that God is dead.[61] The idea of God as nothing elucidates aspects of 'Before the Law'. If the (moral) Law derives from God then his non-existence entails the non-existence of the Law: which becomes pure, impenetrable, immutable, and unapproachable. Thus qualities deriving from the Law's non-being confer upon it a power absent from a merely contingently-existing doctrine.

Partial Interpretations (II): Political and Psychological

Writing in the 1950s, Georg Lukács attacked Kafka for his supposed apolitical, ahistorical concern with individual subjectivity, for 'substituting his *Angst*-ridden vision of the world for objective reality'. Kafka's 'aesthetically appealing, but decadent modernism' could not, Lukács believed, tackle the socio-political problems associated with mid-twentieth century capitalism.[62] Several contemporary scholars disagree.[63] *The Trial* represents political features commonly found in authoritarian regimes (and occasionally in self-proclaimed democracies): arrest when no crime has been committed; refusal to specify the grounds for an accusation; covert legal decisions and procedures; secret surveillance; collection of unnecessary data; and, most saliently, the individual's impotence in the face of callous, anonymous hierarchical bureaucracies. Nevertheless, Kafka's authorities rarely intimidate the protagonists directly; and there is little sense of a central controlling intelligence, comparable to Orwell's Big Brother, behind Court or Castle. Their oppressive nature derives rather from their inscrutability, from their identity and purposes remaining unknowable. Nevertheless, more

[61] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), Book III Aphorism No. 108, 'New Struggles'.
[62] G Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 92.
[63] For example, Bill Dodd, 'The Case for a Political Reading' in Preece, *Cambridge Companion*, 131-149.

explicit ideological content emerges in the representation of individuals subjugated by oppressive socio-economic systems. Kafka tacitly censures feudalistic relationships in *The Castle*; and *Metamorphosis* is interpretable as a critique of dehumanising work practices in capitalist society.[64] Gregor is overwhelmed by guilt at inability to pay off debts owed by his parents to his employer; and his transformation instantiates both acute alienation experienced in his tedious office-bound job and a means of avoiding responsibility.

Kafka's political concerns intersect with his psychological insights. Little happens *unequivocally* against the will of his protagonists, who collude in their own oppression and ultimately accept the legitimacy of their oppressors.[65] I argue below that the Court is interpretable as the Kantian conscience. In that case Josef's internal judge *rightfully* accuses him, and becomes conflated with the external voice of authority. The ubiquity of the Court's offices and servants signifies the platitude that he can never escape his own self-judgment.

The psychological processes involved in complicity thrive on self-deception, and are instantiated in Kafkan double thought – one example being alternation between assertion and denial. No sane person intends to connive in her own subjugation, and Kafka's protagonists *edge* circuitously towards complicity. They appear judiciously to consider all options, but in fact defer making decisions and rationalise refusal to accept responsibility for their actions. And assuming (as argued below) that they are part-hallucinating their experiences, they are also *constructing* hindrances by giving concrete form to unjust socio-political forces. (The hallucinating subject is not necessarily *imagining* impediments and oppressors, but may be responding to external stimuli.) Further, Freud's notion of *Thanatos* suggests complicity in

[64] Walter H Sokel, *The Myth of Power and the Self: Essays on Franz Kafka* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press 2002).
[65] Reiner Stach, 'Death by Data: How Kafka's *The Trial* Prefigured the Nightmare of the Modern Surveillance State', *New Statesman* (16 January 2014). http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/01/death-data-how-kafkas-trial-prefigured-nightmare-modern-surveillance-state, accessed 1 April 2015.

the ‘drive towards death’. ‘*Der Proceß*’ means both ‘trial’ and ‘course’ (of an illness); and the novel is part-interpretable as a psychological investigation of how we face an event both ubiquitous and impossible to withstand.

Kafka’s socio-political concerns are also manifested in his representation of self-observation and monitoring. Here he anticipates Michel Foucault, who describes modern governments operating at ‘the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes’.[66] Such ‘disciplinary power’ goes beyond explicit observation to establish a habit of self-surveillance that renders overt coercion largely unnecessary. Foucault draws here on Jeremy Bentham’s notion of the panopticon; a penal institution comprising a central observation tower surrounded by cells with inward-facing windows. This configuration induces ‘a sense of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power...the surveillance is permanent in its effects even if it is discontinuous in its action…the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary…’[67] The panopticon embodies the workings of the Kantian conscience, where each person is observed by an ‘inner judge’ and scrutinises his own behaviour. (The Foucauldian procedure differs in constraints being imposed initially from without: but in both cases the subject internalises prohibitions that run counter to his first-order volitions.) Further, Foucault considers *confession* central to discipline, with the subject willingly yielding control to his confessor.

Kafka’s novels exemplify disciplinary power. His characters are observed continually, with nearly every location being revealed a site of bureaucratic control; and most characters, servants of Court or Castle. After momentary resistance, and never knowing if they are

[66] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, (London: Harvester, 1980), p. 39.
[67] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1975) p. 201.

observed, his protagonists feel impelled to confess their 'guilt'. They collaborate in their own punishment, interpretable as self-imposed retribution for their weaknesses.

One common reading of Kafka is that he 'anticipates' totalitarianism and its associated evils, including the Holocaust and Stalin's Gulag. More accurately, he depicts the *conditions* that facilitate the emergence of totalitarianism: principally, inveigling people into collusion with the forces that subjugate them, and treating persons as objects. The first point, a constant theme of this discussion, involves subtly encouraging people to internalise tacitly-expressed demands. The villagers and minor officials of Kafka's novel carry out the Castle's requirements unbidden: even though these are rarely made explicit and the obliquely-expressed threats of officials never enacted. Amalia commits a rare act of insubordination in rejecting Sortini's sexual advances: but she and her family are punished, not by the authorities but by being ostracised by their fellow-villagers. The second point, regarding depersonalisation, involves the 'archival impulse' discussed below. One manifestation of this impulse is treating persons merely as items to be categorised.

Kafka is also politically significant in being one of the first writers to demonstrate that evil political practices generally originate, not in the actions of wicked individuals, but in dehumanising systems peopled by mediocre 'jobsworths'. The Castle is governed, not by a flamboyantly cruel *grand guignol* villain, but by largely anonymous functionaries passively adhering to established procedures. Likewise most Nazi officials were, in Hannah Arendt's words, 'neither perverted nor sadistic' but 'terribly and terrifyingly normal'.[68] Their wickedness was not extra-ordinary, located (as we comfort ourselves by believing) wholly apart from our everyday lives. It frequently derived not from malice but from a mixture of indifference, self-deceit, a desire for order and a wish to conform. Despite occasional episodes

[68] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Faber, 1963) p. 253.

involving sadistic cruelty, Kafka focuses on the ordinariness, the *banality* of evil. Such banality has outer correlatives in the shabbiness of the castle and law-courts, the petty vanities of officials and their sordid personal lives. Echoing Arendt, Ilana Shiloh writes that 'Kafka was perhaps the first to etch evil in our consciousness as terrifyingly normal'.[69]

The Nazi regime unleashed wickedness on an almost inconceivable scale, but both architects of the system and actual perpetrators were mostly trite, unremarkable persons. The grotesque nature of the mismatch can hardly be conveyed in plain descriptive text. Kafka's defamiliarising methods and his theatricality – the temporal displacement of the 'Whipper' episode and the elaborate staging of Josef's execution in *The Trial*, for example – make manifest, *instantiate*, absurd elements within acts of great cruelty. More generally, mere factual descriptions of the horrors inflicted by the Holocaust would constitute an inadequate response, bordering on disrespect for those who suffered. Here Kafka's resistance to interpretation may be advantageous. Adorno writes that 'Insofar as a social function may be predicated of works of art, it is the function of having no function'.[70] 'Autonomous art' shuns compliance with existing norms; with demands to be 'relevant'. Its bare existence, its (apparent) purposelessness challenges and resists appropriation by the established socio-economic order. Hence a writer's refusal to make his work readily interpretable may constitute a political act. An artwork whose meaning is easily accessible, in contrast, risks becoming *palatable*, and being co-opted by the instrumental rationality that underlies consumerism.

[69] Ilana Shiloh, 'Allegories of Evil: Kafka's *The Castle* and Auster's *The Music of Chance*' in Nancy Billias and Agnes B Curry (eds.) *Framing Evil: Portraits of Terror and the Imagination* (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2008) 13-21, p. 14.
[70] Theodor W Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 336-337.

Readily comprehensible art also tacitly endorses the established order by offering 'consolation'. In contrast, Adorno writes, 'He over whom Kafka's wheels have passed, has lost forever both any peace with the world and any chance of consoling himself with the judgement that the way of the world is bad'.[71] Kafka denies us the feeling of self-congratulatory reassurance provided by assenting to the judgement that the world is evil; reassurance compatible with acquiescence to existing arrangements. Writers who conform to the demands of the 'culture industry' gloss over the horrors that surround us, but social realists are little better. They may inadvertently make a saleable commodity of images and descriptions of suffering, and our initial moral condemnation may '[slither] into the abyss of its opposite'.[72] Rather than fostering a desire for social change, pessimism becomes a 'comfort blanket'. It follows that the arts should combat political coercion, not directly through affirmation of commitment in their content, but indirectly through formal innovation. Rather than merely describe suffering and alienation, Adorno observes, Kafka *enacts* it in subverting the conventions of realism and representing states of unknowing. In comparison with writers whose 'officially committed works look like pantomimes', he '[*arouses*] the fear which existentialism merely talks about'.[73]

To conclude: *The Trial* is not principally an account of miscarried justice; nor *The Castle* a straightforward portrayal of totalitarianism. Nor are the novels directly politically *engaged* – for, unlike (say) Warner's *Wild Goose Chase*, they present no ideal to contrast with the situation described. Overtly committed fiction would shun Kafkan ambiguity and resistance to interpretation. Nevertheless, the points raised above make it abundantly clear that absence of *explicit* political content does not permit us to dismiss Kafka as apolitical.

[71] Theodor W Adorno, 'Commitment', *New Left Review* I, (1974) 75–89, p. 87.
[72] Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 85.
[73] Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 86. My italics.

SCEPTICISM, HOVERING AND DOUBLE THOUGHT

Sandbank writes that Kafka's modernism is revealed 'in his epistemological position and its formal consequences rather than in what is popularly associated with the Kafkaesque: the thematics of alienation and anxiety, the décor of labyrinthine corridors and offices, the prophecies of totalitarianism'.[74] The impossibility of reaching unambiguous global interpretations of the fictions follows in part from Kafka's awareness of human epistemic fallibility and consequent mistrust of all-embracing doctrines. Moreover, Kafka's tendency to *hover* – manifested predominantly in *double thought* – ensures that the meaning of individual passages and sentences is often indeterminate.

Scepticism and Hovering

'Hovering' indicates vacillation and hesitation; a refusal or inability to decide between different possibilities. It is associated with both Pyrrhonian scepticism and Brentano's phenomenology: the latter having, as discussed below, significantly influenced Kafka.

Sextus Empiricus, the leading Pyrrhonist philosopher, argued that we should suspend judgement if uncertain about the truth-status of some proposition; effectively 'hovering' above it rather than asserting its truth or falsity.[75] The metaphor of hovering has literal analogues in Kafka's fictions: his protagonists – K., the man from the country, the emperor's messenger, the country doctor – never achieve their goals, but hover indefinitely on a threshold. Hovering also connotes evasiveness and circuitousness. Face-to-face communication between senior Castle officials and underlings is rare, the former expressing their wishes obliquely or through gesture. An official intending to dictate a letter gives no

[74] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 11.
[75] Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R G Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967)

explicit order but starts to whisper quietly in the vicinity of a copyist. Klamm merely glances offhandedly in Barnabas's direction to instruct him to deliver a message. The most significant events occur by accident, and important revelations – such as Bürgel's disclosing how K. might achieve his aims – are made only parenthetically.

Double Thought

Most significantly, hovering is enacted in various expressions of Kafkan double thought. Kafka's labyrinthine style combines precision and tentativeness. Conventional syntax and chronology provide the illusion of forward movement; but interminable qualifications to what is asserted arrest progress. The expressions 'on the one hand' and 'on the other hand' recur alongside drawn-out distinctions: between (for example) 'definite acquittal', 'ostensible acquittal' and 'indefinite postponement' (T, 169). Reversals and refinements cancel each other out, leaving everything doubtful. The following passage of legalistic prose is typical:

> It was not to be gainsaid that these methods could achieve for the moment surprisingly favourable results for the accused, on which the free-lance Advocates prided themselves, spreading them out as a lure for new clients, but they had no effect on the further progress of the case, or only a bad effect. Nothing was of any real value but respectable personal connections with the higher officials, that was to say higher officials of subordinate rank, naturally. (T, 130)

The final phrase delivers what Weinstein calls a 'slipknot', the preceding conclusion immediately reversed.[76] Learning that 'higher officials' are only subordinates catches the reader in a snare that rescinds any implied assurance of progress. Again, in 'In the Penal Settlement' our judgement of the explorer as an enlightened liberal is overturned in the final sentence. Realising that the soldier and condemned man will try to escape with him, the

[76] Weinstein, *Unknowing*, p. 138.

explorer ‘lifted a heavy knotted rope from the floor-boards, threatened them with it, and so kept them from attempting the leap’ (PS, 199).

The virtually simultaneous affirmation and denial of some claim results in self-cancelling or the constant deferral of meaning. Typically, Kafka’s narrator commences with an apparently categorical assertion, but little-by-little introduces doubt and ends in a flat contradiction or complete uncertainty. Alternatively, he negates a statement in a parenthetical clause but carries on regardless.[77] For example, the Castle Superintendent responds to K.’s request for ratification of his status with ‘There are only control authorities. Frankly it isn’t their function to hunt out errors in the vulgar sense, for errors don’t happen, and even when once in a while an error does happen, as in your case, who can say finally that it’s an error? (C, 66-67)

The most striking instances of double thought occur in passages describing K.’s night-time encounter with Bürgel. K. has an appointment with Erlanger, Klamm’s secretary, at the Herrenhof Inn. Half-asleep and for ‘indifferent, accidental reasons’, K. enters the wrong room and stumbles across Bürgel, Erlanger’s secretary (C, 253). Bürgel reveals that if an applicant surprises an official with jurisdiction over a case, the now-vulnerable official must explain that the applicant need only make his request for it to be granted. K seems about to achieve his aims: a conclusion, Sandbank notes, negated on four levels.[78] Firstly, Bürgel alternately affirms and denies the possibility of gaining permission to enter the Castle:

> And now, Surveyor, consider the possibility that through some circumstances or other, in spite of the obstacles already described to you, an applicant does nevertheless, in the middle of the night, surprise a secretary who has a certain degree of competence with

[77] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 62, n. 17 and n. 18. H G Adler writes that Kafka presents ‘an explanation which is immediately, or soon afterwards, followed by its revocation or even complete invalidation’) (H G Adler, ‘Kafka zwischen den Zeiten’, *Emuna: Horizonte zur Diskussion über Israel und das Judentum* 9, 4 (1974), p. 263. My translation.
[78] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, pp. 8-9.

> regard to the given case…You think it cannot happen at all? You are right, it cannot happen at all. But some night – for who can vouch for everything? – it does happen (C, 251-252).

Secondly, an applicant who comes unannounced outside normal working hours has not received the *right kind* of permission. In granting K. an audience, Bürgel affirms, he has 'actually ceased to be an official'. Thirdly, despite his equivocations Bürgel eventually reveals the 'secret': but K. is already asleep. Fourthly, Bürgel's statements are less disclosures than verbal echoes of *what is actually happening*: a phenomenon linked to what Freud calls the 'remarkable coincidences of wish and fulfilment' within dreams.[79] Bürgel says that the applicant must take an appropriate official unawares late at night, mentions the applicant's fatigue leading him to the 'wrong' room, and that the official hides beneath his blanket. His statements precisely parallel the situation described; being (in Sandbank's words) the 'mirror image of the random present'. If to succeed K. need merely do whatever he happens to be doing, the notion of success loses all force. It is 'the message that there is no message'.[80] Again, Kafka beguiles the reader with hints of resolution, and abruptly retreats.

Further, K.'s desire to enter the Castle is mirrored in the Castle's eagerness to receive him. Bürgel talks of the applicant being 'thirstingly expected'; and affirms that officials are 'desperate', or 'more precisely…very happy' to yield to his request (C, 252). The ostensibly reluctant offer of admittance is a cloudily reflected image of K.'s own wishes. Likewise, just as Josef wishes to penetrate the Court, the Law is attracted to the guilty (T, 12). Kafka's questers find in Court and Castle only echoes of their own desires in their (degraded and attenuated) doubles. Events and outcomes track the protagonists' inclinations: Josef *wants* to

[79] S Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), 123-162, p. 154.
[80] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 9.

die, and K.'s sleepiness masks his apathy; conveniently annulling the opportunity apparently offered him.

The (Double) Bind

According to Gregory Bateson, the double bind – the dilemmatic *situation* implied by double thought – is a significant cause of childhood trauma.[81] Suppose a mother tells her child that he must *reply when spoken to* but not *answer back*. From the child's perspective, whatever he does will be wrong. There are numerous double binds in Kafka. However he acts, K. will be denied admission to the Castle; Josef will be condemned whichever form of 'acquittal' he seeks; and had the prisoner in the Penal Settlement not pleaded guilty he would have been tortured until he confessed.[82] 'Before the Law' incorporates a superficial bind: if the Man from the Country fails to act he remains ignorant of the Law, but will be restrained if he pushes past the Doorkeeper. Further, the parable imposes a double bind on the *reader*, for it seems impossible to reconcile the contradictory claims that the Man is forbidden from entering the Law, but the doorway was intended for him alone. (Derrida's resolution involves verbal legerdemain: if the Man *could* enter then the doorkeeper could not *permit* him to enter.[83]) And critics who seek all-encompassing interpretations likewise face being ensnared in double binds: for Kafka's fictions provoke interpretative activity, as discussed above, but refuse to yield satisfying resolutions.[84] Kafka is not setting traps for the reader out of mischief or playfulness. He insists that a book should 'hit us on the head like the blow of a fist' and be

[81] Gregory Bateson *et al.* 'Towards a Theory of Schizophrenia', *Behavioral Science,* 1, 4 (1956) 251–264.
[82] John Zilcosky, 'Surveying the Castle: Kafka's Colonial Visions', in James Rolleston (ed.) *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002) 281-324, p. 309.
[83] J Derrida, 'Before the Law', trans. Avital Ronell and Christine. Roulston, in Derek Attridge (ed.) *Acts of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992) 181-220.
[84] F R Ankersmit, 'The Ethics of History: From the Double Binds of (Moral) Meaning to Experience', *History and Theory*, 43 (2004) 84-102.

'like the axe for the frozen sea in us'.[85] The double bind is no mere intellectual *aporia*, but is intended to shock us out of conventional modes of thought. It bears affinities with the *koans* of Taoism and Zen Buddhism. A *koan* is a question posed such that no 'logical' answer is possible; it provokes frustration, doubt and (perhaps) therapeutic enlightenment in the hearer.

The Compulsion to Repeat

The Freudian notion of repetition compulsion – the near-obsessive impulse to re-enact even embarrassing and painful events – has its parallels in Kafka's writing. Freud moved away from his early belief that dreams simply articulate unfulfilled wishes to investigate 'the mysterious masochistic trends of the ego'.[86] These were exemplified in the tendency of soldiers returning from the First World War to relive traumatic experiences in their nightmares. Freud also observed his 18-month-old grandson re-enacting his mother's departure and return by throwing a spool with a string attached from his cot and retrieving it, saying *fort* ('away') and *da* ('here') as he did so. Freud interpreted what he named the '*fort-da* game' as the child's attempting to master his anxiety at his mother's absence by controlling the presence or absence of an object representing her. Significantly, the boy often threw the spool away without trying to retrieve it: interpreted by Freud as preparing himself for a world lacking his mother. On a related issue, Freud argued that if an adult forgets or misremembers a traumatic incident she may 'repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of…remembering it as something belonging to the past'.[87] Having repressed memories of, and so failed to 'work through', the past experience, she will constantly relive

[85] F Kafka, letter to Oskar Pollack dated 27 January 1904. F Kafka, *Briefe 1902–1924* (New York: Schocken, 1958) pp. 27-28.
[86] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920] (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 7
[87] Freud, *Beyond*, p. 12.

that experience in the present; and may be unable to break out of a pattern of destructively repetitious behaviour.

Kafka's protagonists seem prone to repetition compulsion, insistently replaying events in slightly different forms in futile attempts to allay their anxieties. Josef repetitively attempts to discover the crime of which he is accused; K. to gain acceptance by the Castle. Since they have neither a substantive history nor significant memories, we do not know the origin of the trauma which they apparently re-enact.

The phenomenon of repetition compulsion has several repercussions. It is instantiated in formal features of Kafka's texts, with re-enactment of subject matter being re-enacted in style (the assertion/denial pattern) and in the looping, repetitive narrative structure. It also permits the subject to defer acting. Here repetition compulsion bears affinities with the Lacanian understanding of anxiety, characterised by Žižek as occurring 'not when the object-cause of desire is lacking' but by 'the danger of our getting too close to the object and thus losing the lack itself'.[88] Hence deferral of achievement is both deferral of failure and deferral of success, 'success' being a form of failure insofar as it entails losing the absence of what is supposedly desired.

NARRATIVE FORM

Kafka's writing is focussed almost exclusively upon the subjective mental experiences of his protagonists. This focus is manifested in four closely related features of narratorial form: the largely mono-perspectival viewpoint, the use of 'free indirect speech', 'cognitively realistic' descriptions, and the representation of anomalous states of consciousness.

[88] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 8.

Kafka's emphasis on inner experience may be attributable partly to idealist tendencies inherited from Kant, probably via Schopenhauer; and from phenomenological psychology. Kant's Transcendental Idealism holds that we apprehend only perceptible phenomena; not the putative underlying noumena, the 'things-in-themselves'.[89] Schopenhauer similarly argued that 'the basis of philosophy is limited to the facts of consciousness'; and in *The World as Will and Representation* describes a castle without an entrance, perhaps one source of Kafka's motif: '…we can never get at the inner nature of things *from without*. However much we may investigate, we obtain nothing but images and names. We are like a man who goes round a castle, looking in vain for an entrance, and sometimes sketching the facades'.[90] We should not infer Kafka's Castle to be the locus of transcendent metaphysical truths: rather, he borrows the image of a doorless building to represent the mind's inaccessibility.

Franz Brentano's 'descriptive psychology', the immediate forerunner of Husserl's phenomenology, also seems to have influenced Kafka's writing.[91] Brentano insisted that *intentionality* was central to perception, the subject *directing her attention* to particular aspects of phenomena. Differing intentions thus might yield differing perceptions. Hence, perhaps, the unstable appearance of people and places in Kafka's work: with accounts of both Klamm and the castle varying with the observer's mood. Moreover, like the Pyrrhonian sceptic, the phenomenologist is noncommittal respecting the truth-value of empirical claims. We have absolutely certain knowledge only of our *sensations*, and must suspend judgement about the nature of their causes. This stance is reflected in Kafka's propensity to 'hover'.

[89] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929) A 249, p. 266.
[90] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. II, trans. E F J Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) p. 5 and p. 99. Cf. John Zilcosky, 'Kafka Approaches Schopenhauer's Castle', *German Life and Letters*, 44 (1991) 353–369.
[91] Arnold Heidsieck, *The Intellectual Contexts of Kafka's Fictions: Philosophy, Law, Religion* (New York: Camden House, 1994) p. 29 ff.

Kafka's Mono-Perspectivism

Friedrich Beißner argues that Kafka's fictions adopt a predominantly mono-perspectival viewpoint.[92] The ostensible third-person narrator, who traditionally comments on events from 'above', is largely absent. Rather, Kafka effectively writes first-person narratives told in the third-person. Walter Sokel agrees: all is 'perceived by a single consciousness, that of the protagonist'.[93] Since (as discussed below) the dreaming mind is also mono-perspectival, the claim harmonises with my proposal that Kafka depicts persons slipping between normal and hallucinatory or dreamlike states.

Kafka's writing is not, however, consistently mono-perspectival. Ritchie Robertson notes that because the reader learns about Gregor's transformation in *Metamorphosis* in the very first sentence, protagonist and narrator cannot be identical. Indeed, the duality of perspective 'makes us experience what it is like to have one's knowledge contradicted by one's sensations.' We 'share intimately in [Gregor's] feelings, despite having superior knowledge'.[94] Dorrit Cohn likewise notes third-person references indicating a narrator's presence.[95] We adopt Gregor's perspective when reading that he 'had nearly forgotten' that his mother and sister are watching him: but see him subsequently from the women's viewpoint as a 'huge brown mass on the flowered wallpaper' (M, 41). And while a purely mono-perspectival viewpoint would prevent us hearing what other characters are thinking, Kafka relates how Gregor's parents reflect that their daughter 'had bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure' (M, 63). Moreover, Gregor is, ironically, more anxious about his inability to get to work than about his transformation. Irony involves a discrepancy between matters as

[92] Friedrich Beißner, *Der Erzähler Franz Kafka* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1952).
[93] Sokel, *Myth of Power*, p. 14
[94] Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1985) p. 75.
[95] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978) 111–112.

they are and as perceived by a character, so we cannot grasp the absurdity of his assessment unless we assume an external viewpoint. Occasionally, however, Kafka shifts mid-sentence from an impersonal narrator's ironic detachment to the protagonist's self-aware thoughts.[96] In *The Castle*, for example, Kafka writes 'At the mere thought of those facts, K. was often in danger of considering his situation hopeful; nevertheless, after such fits of easy confidence, he would hasten to tell himself that just there lay his danger' (C, 59). Here the clause commencing 'nevertheless' relocates the thought from narrator to K.

Many critics take Kafka's narrator-protagonists to be untrustworthy: questioning whether, for example, K. *is* a land surveyor summoned by the Castle authorities.[97] Traditional accounts of unreliable narrators assume that dependable information is available to contrast with, and thereby demonstrate, their unreliability. Since Kafka effectively walls up the reader in the protagonist's consciousness, it seems that there is little sense in questioning narratorial reliability. In William Riggan's classification of unreliable narrators, Kafka's protagonists are less 'liars' than 'madmen': simply because a hallucinating subject cannot straightforwardly be described as untruthful.[98] Nevertheless, the self's opaqueness to itself – especially in a hallucinating subject – ensures that any (effectively) first-person narration is vulnerable to self-deception and false memories. In short, Kafka's' mono-perspectivism is compatible with the unreliability of his narrators. It also explains why we so intimately share Kafka's protagonists' sense of bewilderment, entrapment and unease.

[96] Ruby Cohn, '*Watt* in the Light of *The Castle*', *Comparative Literature*, 13, 2 (1961) 154-166, p. 156.
[97] Erwin R Steinberg, 'K. of The Castle: Ostensible Land-Surveyor', in Peter F Neumeyer (ed.) *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'The Castle': A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Spectrum, 1969) 25-31. Walter Sokel, 'K. as Imposter: His Quest for Meaning', in Neumeyer, *Twentieth Century Interpretations*, 32-35.
[98] William Riggan, *Pícaros, Madmen, Naïfs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981).

One symptom of mono-perspectivism is the use of 'free indirect speech'. The customary narrator of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel reveals a character's unspoken thoughts and beliefs by embedding them in subordinate clauses introduced by 'he thought' or similar phrase. Kafka, however, presents such thoughts as free-standing propositions.[99] In *The Castle*, for example, he writes

> …the young man soon recovered his assurance, and lowering his voice, sufficiently to appear considerate of K.'s sleep, while yet speaking loudly enough to be clearly heard, said to the landlord: 'I'll ring up and inquire by telephone.' So there was a telephone in this village inn? They had everything up to the mark. The particular instance surprised K., but on the whole he had really expected it (C, 11-12).

The passage initially resembles a conventional third-person narrative but in the sentences commencing 'So there was a telephone' Kafka presents K.'s thoughts without the intermediary implied by the clause 'He thought…' Free indirect speech blurs the boundary between ostensibly third-person reports of past events and first-person present experience.

Kafka also embeds dialogue within the typeset text, with minimal punctuation: further collapsing the distinction between objective narration and subjective experience. Separating dialogue from narrative with paragraph breaks, in contrast, tends to distance speaker from narrator.

Kafka's 'Cognitive Realism'

Mono-perspectivism implies that the viewpoints of narrator and protagonist are identical. The reader would consequently acquire information about what this individual perceives in his environment in 'real time', just as he does; rather than from a timeless and omniscient author

[99] Heidsieck, *Intellectual Contexts*, pp. 87-89.

positioned ‘above’ the text. Such is the case with Kafka: a feature of his work that Emily Troscianko calls ‘cognitive realism’.[100] As I have emphasised, Kafka is not consistently mono-perspectival, and Troscianko’s account does not presuppose any particular narratorial perspective.

Cognitive realism is a literary correlate of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological account of perception and of what is sometimes called the ‘4E’ account of cognition.[101] This account takes cognitive processes to be *embodied* and *embedded* within human physiology; *enactive*, insofar as they involve dynamic interaction with the environment; and *extendable* via such devices as computers. Our embodied state determines how we perceive and think, and what actions we can perform. Our perceptions and actions structure our cognitive capacities to conceptualise and categorise the world; the concepts and categories thus formed in turn determining our perceptions and actions. Crucially, perception involves, not the mind’s passive reception of data from ‘outside’ but active engagement with a world that reveals itself bit-by-bit to consciousness.

According to Troscianko, Kafka persuasively conveys the enactive nature of our engagement with the external world; and the reader’s response to his resultant cognitive realism is a prime indicator of ‘the Kafkan’. For example, according to the long-established ‘pictorialist’ model of visual perception, seeing involves forming successive mental representations of our surroundings; ‘pictures in the head’ that are viewed in the mind’s ‘Cartesian theatre’. This account is philosophically incoherent because it tacitly assumes a homunculus viewing an internal ‘screen’, and hence entails an infinite regress of homunculi and screens. It also seems disproved by contemporary findings in cognitive psychology; and

[100] E Troscianko, ‘Reading Kafka Enactively’, *Paragraph*, 37, 1 (2014) 15-31.
[101] Shaun Gallagher, *Phenomenology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). R A Menary, ‘Introduction to the Special Issue on 4E Cognition’, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 9, 4, (2010) 459-463.

specifically by the sensorimotor account of vision.[102] Psychologists have demonstrated that *seeing* involves constantly changing exploratory interactions with the world; that it depends upon our understanding how perceptions change with bodily movements and our ability to predict how things *would* look if perceived from a different position. The sensorimotor account also postulates that while the surrounding world is always *available* to perception, at any one moment we register only that part that we must engage with. There are consequently numerous gaps in our perceptions.

The traditional realist novel tacitly assumes the soundness of the pictorialist account. It often opens with a scene-setting description intended to create 'pictures' in the reader's mind. Dickens's *Bleak House*, for example, commences with an extended account of a foggy London November afternoon. Kafka apparently nods towards this convention in *The Castle*:

> It was late in the evening when K. arrived. The village was deep in snow. The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village K. stood for a long time gazing into the illusory emptiness above him. (C, 9)

This passage, while evocative, actually tells us little. Kafka provides minimal contextual detail, instead letting us acquire information concurrently with his protagonist. We 'see' what K. does, fashioning mental images of his surroundings in line with *his* piecemeal perceptions – not with those dictated by a narrator. In Troscianko's words, we find the '"just-in-time" emergence of precisely those aspects of the world which K. needs to interact with, and which we therefore need to know about in order to enactively imagine what he sees'.[103] Indeed, because the extended descriptions of realist texts do not correspond to our perceptual

[102] J Kevin O'Regan and Alva Noë, 'A Sensorimotor Account of Vision and Visual Consciousness', *Behavioral and Brain* Sciences, 24, 5 (2001) 939-973.
[103] Troscianko, 'Reading Kafka', p. 18.

experience, they hamper our ability to form mental images.[104] Kafka's sparse prose, in contrast, may allow room for the reader's imagination to create mental images. These are *not*, we must reiterate, 'pictures' viewed in the head, but rather constitute imaginative *re-enactments* of perceptions.

As noted above, phenomenological psychology holds that what we see is part-determined by what we *need* to see and consequently *pay attention to*. We often notice pertinent specifics of our surroundings while disregarding the whole. The meticulous but highly selective detail occasionally incorporated into Kafka's descriptions is consistent with this observation. Unlike Dickens, Kafka does not reconstruct entire scenes in words but offers visual fragments, isolated slices of the world.

Troscianko suggests, then, that Kafka's enactivist method of conveying perceptual experience corresponds to how we actually perceive the world. The opening passage of *The Trial* illustrates her claims. We read that Josef was 'watching from his pillow the old lady opposite' and that 'feeling both put out and hungry, he rang the bell. At once there was a knock at the door…' (T, 7). These phrases are instances of what Troscianko calls 'maximally efficient minimalism'.[105] We infer that Josef lies in bed near a window, a bell is nearby, and the bedroom door is closed. Kafka also relies on readers' prior knowledge and expectations: of what apartments look like, the routines involved in getting up, and so on. Hence only minimal prompts are required.

In *The Castle*, K. initially sees an integrated structure from afar, but on approaching sees a small town. He *perceives* the castle as one and the same entity as he walks; but progressively shifts his attention from the concept of *castle* to that of *small town*. And in *Metamorphosis*,

[104] Anežka Kuzmičová, 'Fidelity without Mimesis: On Mental Imagery from Visual Description', in Gregory Currie and others (eds.) *Mimesis: Metaphysics, Cognition, Pragmatics* (London: College Publications, 2012) 273–315.
[105] Troscianko, 'Reading Kafka', p. 17.

Gregor's physiological nature is revealed only gradually through blurred and partial perceptions. He awakes knowing nothing about the lower part of his body, which 'he had not yet seen and of which he could form no clear conception' (M, 13). His awareness expands through perceptions intentionally directed towards other body parts; and is supplemented by other characters' reactions.

The claim that we perceive Kafka's worlds through his protagonists' eyes might suggest that we are reading an interior monologue, akin to a Jamesian 'stream of consciousness'.[106] Nevertheless, we have little sense of one steady flow of experiences experienced by a unitary being. Rather Kafka seems to present what Daniel Dennett calls 'multiple drafts', or 'threads' that combine in normal persons to produce the illusion of unified conscious experience.[107] This process involves Kant's 'Transcendental Unity of Apperception'; the brain's ability to bind together multifarious perceptions.[108] Abnormal mental states result in the 'threads' failing to combine successfully, and hence in spatio-temporal and causal discontinuities.

Troscianko writes, 'Kafka's writing taps into the fundamentally non-linear, non-pictorial processes of perception, precisely by evoking the fictional world through the perceptual enaction of it…'[109] And it is precisely *because* Kafka is cognitively realistic – because he accurately reflects our perceptual experience – that he is also unsettling. We are accustomed to the reassuring 'word-painting' with which realist writers creates their worlds, and Kafka's fragmentary descriptions force us 'to recognize that our conception of perceptual processes as reliable and complete representations of the world is an illusion'.[110] Moreover, Kafka's re-enactments of perceptual processes involve both omitting mention of what the protagonist

[106] W James, *The Principles of Psychology* [1890] ed. G A Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 239.
[107] Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston, MA and London: Little, Brown, 1991).
[108] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 135-161.
[109] E Troscianko, 'Kafkaesque Worlds in Real Time', *Language and Literature* 19, 2, (2010) 151–171, p. 159.
[110] Troscianko, 'Kafkaesque Worlds', pp. 162-163.

need not notice, and emphasising his errors, misperceptions and forgettings. Characters frequently fail to notice or hear something, or to recognise people – their mistakes and inattention often being attributable to fatigue. K.'s drowsiness in *The Castle* causes him to miss the opportunity seemingly offered by Bürgel. In *The Trial* Josef recognises the three men assigned to accompany him after his arrest *as* junior staff at his bank only by redirecting his attention, following the Inspector's identification of them. In the dimly-lit cathedral he sees 'a large triangle of candle-flames [that] flickered on the high altar' but 'could not have told with any certainty whether he had noticed them before or not' (T, 225). Such slippages in awareness correspond closely to the disparities and incompleteness in *our* perceptual experiences. Hence our sense of unease when reading Kafka is exacerbated by our partaking, as it were, in his protagonist's errors and oversights.

Kafka's tacit endorsement of enactivism implies rejection of the Cartesian model of a unified self with privileged access to and control over mental events. Moreover, we tend to impose a unidirectional, end-driven narrative upon our life-experiences rather than construct a *post hoc*, backward-looking account. Traditional realist fiction reinforces this tendency by imposing a linear, purposeful design upon characters' lives. Kafka not only disorientates the reader by undermining the notion of a stable, enduring self, but shatters the comforting illusion of a teleological pattern to our lives.

To conclude: Kafka's refusal of the role of omniscient author, his permitting his characters only an incomplete knowledge of events, are further manifestations of his scepticism. His predominantly mono-perspectival viewpoint combines with his cognitive realism to ensure that we experience the protagonist's world – with its uncertainties and ambiguities – much as he does. Kafka thereby intensifies our sense of disquiet. His method *instantiates* doubt and indeterminacy; it *re-presents* states of unknowing rather than merely showing their effects.

Kafka's reader experiences the anxiety that follows from intuiting how limited is our understanding of ourselves, other people and the world around us.

Altered States of Consciousness

Our sense of unease is further exacerbated by numerous indications that Kafka represents atypical states of consciousness; states that depart significantly from those of 'normal' observers in everyday waking reality.[111] His protagonists experience sudden and inexplicable spatial and/or temporal shifts, and disrupted causal relationships. They are generally unsurprised by incongruous events, which (significantly) often only they notice; and are continually frustrated by their inability to complete important tasks. Further, subsidiary figures lack significant attributes other than those imposed by their role. They belong to fixed categories, members of each category being psychologically indistinguishable. They come into existence as the narrative demands, and vanish when no longer required.

As discussed below, *The Trial* is interpretable as Josef punishing himself for having broken the moral law; the notion concretised and assigned a bureaucracy and powers of arrest and trial. Gregor conceives his shame at daily self-abasement in his lowly job as being transformed into worthless vermin. Here Kafka conforms to Freud's dictum that dreamers handle disturbing thoughts by giving metaphors tangible form.

Again, we focus on minutiae in dreamlike states, and persons and places are visually unstable. As mentioned above, Kafka offers sharply-defined details while blurring or ignoring the larger picture. We learn about the appearance of some figures only through disparate snippets of information. In *The Castle*, for example, Klamm's appearance fluctuates with the observer's mood. Olga remarks, '…he's reported as having one appearance when he comes

[111] A Harris Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Studies in the Novel*, 45, 4 (Winter 2013) 603-619, p. 610.

into the village and another on leaving it…and…he's almost another person up in the Castle. (C, 167). Only Klamm's black morning-coat establishes that different sightings are of the same person. At one point K. no longer recognises Jeremias: the assistant 'seemed older, wearier, more wrinkled, but fuller in the face; his walk too was quite different…' (C, 218). Jeremias's explains his sudden aging by saying 'When I'm by myself, then all my youthful spirits are gone': suggesting that he comes fully into existence only when perceived by others. We are reminded that phenomenology is rooted in idealism, above which hovers Berkeley's notion of *esse est percipi*.

Although we share their sense of frustration, we seem to *care* little about Kafka's protagonists; we do not react to them normatively, via our customary empathic response. Hillel Broder argues that our emotional detachment derives precisely from Kafka modelling the consciousness of characters in autistic/amnesiac or dreamlike/hallucinatory states.[112] Empathy depends upon 'mind-reading', upon interpreting characters' words, actions and gestures as reliably indicative of coherent internal states. Dreaming fictional characters, however, cannot be ascribed the 'theory of mind' necessary to grasping their motives. These remain opaque, unreadable, void of determinate meaning

Finally, in dreamlike states we often believe ourselves about to learn some portentous and significant secret: an experience comparable to reading a text that hints at but refuses to yield its meaning.

All these factors indicate that Kafka's narratives present dreamlike experiences. We need, however, a more precise description of their ontological status. They are probably too long and structurally cohesive to be transcribed *reports* or *re-creations* of dreams. Notwithstanding discontinuities and the episodic structure, an intelligible narrative thread runs through *The*

[112] Hillel Broder, 'Attending to the Gesture in Experimental Modernism; or, Reading with(out) Theory of Mind', *Philosophy and Literature*, 38, 1 (2014) 230-247, p. 233.

Trial, starting with Joseph's arrest and ending in his death. I suggest, rather, that Kafka is recreating *hallucinatory* states.

Hallucinations are anomalous waking states during which subjects may experience distorted visual and auditory perceptions.[113] They are related to amnesia and fugue, and similar dissociative states accompanying psychiatric disorders and drug and alcohol abuse. Oneiric and hallucinatory states differ: while the dreamer's mind generates (virtually) all his experiences, the hallucinating subject's perceptions are often delusional versions of actual events. Hallucinated objects appear objectively real and located in external space. Unlike dreams, hallucinations may persist for long periods. Time may appear to dilate and distances to contract, or *vice versa*.[114] Subjects may also perceive doubles of themselves – as Kafka apparently did during hypnagogic episodes.[115] (A hypnagogic image is 'A dreamlike image, often vivid and resembling a hallucination…experienced by a person in the transition stage from wakefulness to sleep'.[116])

Like dreams, hallucinatory states make it impossible (in Mark Levy's words) 'to transcend one's current perspective, to reflect on, monitor, or consider alternative views…As in dreaming, one is trapped in the "now"'.[117] Kafka's protagonists are locked in inward-looking worlds largely of their own making, and cannot grow, mature or make any progress in their lives. They are entirely self-centred, focussed only on their own concerns. As Freud writes, 'Dreams are completely egoistical. Whenever my ego does not appear in the content of the dream, but only some extraneous person, I may safely assume that my own ego lies

[113] Fiona Macpherson, 'The Philosophy and Psychology of Hallucination', in Fiona Macpherson and Dimitris Platchias (eds.) *Hallucination: Philosophy and Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013) 1-38.
[114] Peter Naish, 'Hallucinations in Hypnosis' in Macpherson and Platchias, *Hallucination*, 121-147, pp. 129-130.
[115] Patrick Bridgwater, *Kafka's Novels: An Interpretation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) 14-16.
[116] Colman, *Dictionary of Psychology*, p. 355. A *hypnopompic* image, in contrast, is experienced 'in the transition stage from sleep to wakefulness' (p. 355).
[117] Mark Levy, 'Altered Consciousness and Modern Art', in Etzel Cardeña and Michael Winkelman (eds.) *Altering Consciousness: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (ABC-CLIO, 2011) 327-354, p. 342.

concealed, by identification, behind this other person…'[118] Other persons are concretised projections of the protagonists: not necessarily imaginary, but versions of flesh-and-blood persons encountered in real life.

Dreams and hallucinations are not discrete phenomena, and Freud considers them receptive to similar investigative methods.[119] We may be justified, then, in interpreting Kafka's fictions in the language of dream-analysis. For example, several commentators argue that 'A Country Doctor' exhibits Freud's notion of the dream narrative as a 'condensation' of waking experiences, with emotions 'displaced' in symbolic form as (predominantly) visual images. The tale is interpretable as expressing the protagonist's yearning for a sexual relationship with Rosa, manifest content masking repressed latent desires.[120] Likewise, in *The Trial* the protagonist externalises feelings of guilt and self-loathing as the machinery of the law.

A H Fairbanks argues that Kafka's protagonists exist *only* in a dreamworld, one from which they will not awake.[121] Were he correct, however, there would be no means of recognising that events depicted *are* anomalous. As Gilbert Ryle writes, responding to Descartes's claim in *Meditations I* that we might always be dreaming, '…just as it makes no sense to talk of counterfeit coins when there are no genuine ones to contrast them with, so it makes no sense to talk of illusory experiences like dreams without waking and veridical ones to contrast them with'.[122] We lack the perspective from which to assess the claim that *everything* experienced is a dream. Perhaps the reader's own waking-world reality provides that perspective: but in that case how would Kafka's self-sufficient dreamworld be reported to

[118] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* [1900] trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books 2010), p. 338.
[119] Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 63-64.
[120] Sokel, *Myth of Power*, p. 175 ff. Louis H Leiter, 'A Problem in Analysis: Franz Kafka's "A Country Doctor"', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 16, 3 (1958) 337-347.
[121] Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique', pp. 603-604.
[122] Gilbert Ryle, *Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) pp. 94-85.

us? Wholly self-contained, permanent hallucinatory states would entail similar ontological difficulties. Hence, I suggest, Kafka's protagonists slip intermittently between anomalous and relatively normal waking states. His world and its inhabitants are not *solely* constructions fashioned by a hallucinating mind.

The Kantian Voice of Conscience

Interpreting the narrative form of the principal fictions as the representation of inner experience suggests a (partial) thematic reading: namely, as self-interrogation by the Kantian 'voice of conscience'.[123] Kafka would have encountered this notion in reading Schopenhauer.[124] The Court externalises a self-imposed inner tribunal, and Josef's killing, suicide. *The Castle* likewise involves punishment of the protagonist, though the trappings of a legal system are absent.

Kant writes

> Every man has a conscience, and finds himself observed by an inward judge which threatens and keeps him in awe…conscience, has this peculiarity in it, that although its business is a business of man with himself, yet he finds himself compelled by his reason to transact it as if at the command of another person. For the transaction here is the conduct of a trial (causa) before a tribunal. But that he who is accused by his conscience should be conceived as one and the same person with the judge is an absurd conception of a judicial court; for then the complainant would always lose his case. Therefore in all duties the conscience of the man must regard another than himself as the judge of his actions, if it is to avoid self-contradiction.[125]

Each person conceives his judge simultaneously *part of* and *other than* himself.

Interpreting *The Trial* thus explains several of the novel's puzzling features. Firstly, Josef has broken, not civil or criminal laws but the *moral* law which (according to Kant) he voluntarily

[123] Patrick Bridgwater, *Kafka's Novels*; Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism*.
[124] Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E F J Payne (Providence: Berghahn, 1995) p. 109.
[125] Immanuel Kant, 'On Conscience', from *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Part II, 'The Doctrine of Virtue', trans. Thomas K Abbott, in I Kant, *On the Metaphysics of Morals and Ethics* (Wilder Publications, 2008) p. 113.

imposes upon himself. Josef has many character flaws: he is egotistical, prone to self-pity, capricious and calculating. He treats other people instrumentally, as means to his ends rather than as ends-in-themselves; berates those weaker than himself, is sexually exploitative, and has a 'passive-aggressive' personality, expressing resentment and hostility in a roundabout manner. Secondly, as the reification of his conscience, the Court appears wherever Josef happens to be. Thus he remembers a warden saying 'an attraction existed between the Law and guilt…[so]…it should really follow that the Interrogation Chamber must lie in the particular flight of stairs which K. happened to choose' (T, 43). Here the Kantian reading meets the Freudian, this being another 'coincidence of wish and fulfilment'. Thirdly, denial of guilt reveals ignorance of the moral law, and so is indeed proof of guilt.[126] Hence the Priest's response to Josef's protestation of innocence: 'that's how all guilty men talk' (T, 232). Fourthly, Josef's ordeal becomes a 'trial' only if he recognises it as such, by acknowledging the inner voice of his conscience. As the Priest remarks 'The Court makes no claims upon you. It receives you when you come and it relinquishes you when you go' (T, 244).

How, though, might we explain the corrupt behaviour of Court authorities? While Kant takes the conscience to originate in tacit submission to the categorical imperative, manifested in the demands of the internal judge, Freud (more plausibly, perhaps) finds its origins in the internalised commands of authority figures from one's childhood. While the subject may view these commands as emanating from Kantian judge or superego, their actual source – the father admonishing his offspring for their failures – may himself be deeply flawed.

[126] Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism*, p. 101.

SYMPTOMS OF 'UNKNOWING'

According to Weinstein, Enlightenment thought assumes both the human subject and the external world, though not fully understood, to be in principle *knowable*: *Coming to know* enacts an Enlightenment premise of rational correspondence between the individual and the world. Thanks to the lawfulness of time and space, a subject learns to map the outer world accurately and, thereby, to achieve inner orientation as well.[127]

The intelligibility of time and space constitutes a precondition of an enduring sense of self and reliable knowledge of the world. These ideas are mirrored in the realist novel, which portrays generally stable characters making orderly progress through their lives. Modernism, however, tacitly critiques these epistemological assumptions; much modernist fiction demonstrating the protagonist's state of 'unknowing'. Space is no longer mappable and homogenous but *uncanny*; time is no longer unilinear and irreversible, but *unbounded*; and the subject is no longer an integrated Cartesian self but plural, perhaps conflicted.[128] Her spatial and temporal stability is undermined, leaving her unable to orientate herself, and she loses a robust sense of self. No longer inhabiting a friendly world disposed to meeting her needs, she becomes an object in an often incomprehensible and uncontrollable environment.

Freud and the Uncanny

According to Weinstein, Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' (1919) provides a conceptual map of the modernist triad of disrupted space, time and self.[129] Freud notes that uncanny sensations arise in several situations: when repressed infantile desires or fears involving Oedipal and

[127] Weinstein, *Unknowing*, p. 2.
[128] Adapted from Weinstein, *Unknowing*, p. 83.
[129] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003) 121-162.

castration complexes re-emerge; when primitive beliefs – typically involving inanimate beings apparently coming to life – seem momentarily corroborated; and during encounters with *Doppelgängers* and experiences of *déjà vu*. The common thread is the incursion of the unfamiliar into everyday life, provoking anxiety about the stability of world and self. Indeed, the uncanny is simultaneously alien and familiar; a tendency manifested in the overlapping meanings of *heimlich* ('homely', 'familiar' *and* 'secret', 'concealed'); and *unheimlich* ('unfamiliar' *and* 'revealed').

Several of Freud's observations about the uncanny in literature are exemplified in Kafka's fictions. Thus Freud writes, 'the sense of the uncanny can arise only if there is a conflict of judgement as to whether what has been surmounted and merits no further credence may not, after all, be possible in real life'.[130] Consequently the author must make a show of verisimilitude before permitting the intrusion of the fantastical: '…he betrays us to a superstition we thought we had "surmounted"; he tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then goes beyond it. We react to his fictions as if they had been our own experiences. By the time we become aware of the trickery, it is too late…'[131] The reader must, accordingly, share the relevant character's perspective.

Adorno suggests that Kafka introduces accounts of dreams into his fictions in order to confirm, by contrast, the 'reality' of extraordinary and bizarre events. Otherwise such events would become explicable and no longer uncanny.[132] I argue, rather, that Kafka's protagonists slip unobtrusively between normal and anomalous mental states; uncanniness arising from uncertainty about when the slippage occurs. The 'Whipper' episode, for example, is disturbing precisely because of its ambiguous ontological status.

[130] Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 156.
[131] Freud, 'The Uncanny', p. 157.
[132] Theodor W Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983) p. 248.

Uncanny Space and Time in Kafka

Kafka's proclivity for spatio-temporal distortions may be partly attributable to his awareness that Einstein had shown the Enlightenment understanding of space and time to be inadequate; that the categories are co-dependent.[133] More pertinently, however, writers have always understood that although living in an objectively measurable world, we experience *subjective* space and time. Age and size affect perception of spatial relationships, and the sensation of time slowing down is caused by the brain laying down denser memories when under stress[134]. Kafka was widely read in Gothic literature and folk-tale – genres that play freely with space and time. Indeed, different manifestations of uncanny space in Kafka correspond closely to tropes of fantasy and fairy-tale. K.'s inability to reach the Castle exemplifies the 'inaccessible location' trope; the lumber-room in Josef's bank resembles the 'magic shop' that randomly appears and disappears; and distances contract, as they do for wearers of magic boots. Kafka's work is also reminiscent of Expressionist cinema – with its dreamlike atmosphere, abrupt cuts between scenes and contorted narratorial perspectives.[135]

Tacitly abiding by Freud's observations, Kafka introduces spatio-temporal discontinuities in matter-of-fact, sober language. The irruption of the fantastical is not heralded by a change in manner; by melodramatic or hyperbolic language. Rather the boundary between commonplace reality and the unreal is eroded gradually, leading us to *experience* the protagonist's unease as he enters 'a poorly concealed, integral part of the taken-for-granted

[133] Klaus Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1958) p. 174.
[134] David M Eagleman, 'Brain Time', *Edge* (23 June 2009) edge.org/conversation/brain-time, accessed 1 February 2016.
[135] Hanns Zischler, *Kafka Goes to the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Peter Beicken, 'Kafka's Visual Method: The Gaze, the Cinematic, and the Intermedial', in Stanley Corngold and Ruth V. Gross (eds.) *Kafka for the Twenty-First Century* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011) 165–178.

reality'.[136] The tension between undemonstrative style and bizarre content is an analogue of that between familiar and unfamiliar events, and likewise yields the uncanny.

In fantasy or science-fiction novels, anomalies are explicable as (respectively) supernatural or previously unknown scientific phenomena: but Kafka's work lacks both the explanatory framework required (or assumed) by these genres, and the associated motifs and devices.[137] His causal and spatio-temporal irregularities have another source, being most consistently interpretable as resulting from transient hallucinatory episodes. Kafka's protagonists do not *encounter* anomalies; rather, abnormal mental states collapse the gap between objective and subjective perceptual states. Thus the normal brain makes allowance for shifting perspectives and changing distances as we move, ensuring that we perceive gradual rather than abrupt variations in shape and size. The hallucinating brain is less able to regularise perceptions, and has a heightened awareness of sudden perspectival shifts. Likewise, we normally automatically compensate for dissonance between objective, 'clock' time and the subjective, 'felt' experience of time passing: but disparities are amplified in abnormal states.

Whatever their source, difficulties in locating oneself securely in space and time are profoundly unsettling. Moreover, a person's sense of selfhood depends partly on her memories; and if her temporal stability is undermined, so is her ability to consider events as happening to one person. Accordingly, spatio-temporal irregularities may be less a cause than a *symptom* of the 'fragmented' selves of Kafka's protagonists.

[136] Reza Banakar, 'In Search of Heimat: A Note on Franz Kafka's Concept of Law', *Law and Literature*, 22, 3, (2010) 463-490, p. 474.
[137]

Spatial Distortions

In Kafka's short stories distances often shrink or expand indefinitely in length. The protagonist of 'A Country Doctor' travels ten miles instaneously, 'as if [his] patient's farmyard had opened out just before [his] courtyard gate'; but returning, worries that he will never reach home (CD, 120). Most notably, K. cannot approach the Castle; for 'the main street of the village did not lead up to the Castle hill, it only made towards it and then, as if deliberately, turned aside, and though it did not lead away from the Castle, it got no nearer to it either' (C, 17).

Conventional fantasy often signals a shift between real and unreal via a portal or intermediary. K., however, only gradually appears to leave the everyday world. Other discontinuities are more conspicuous, with figures moving unaccountably quickly between locations. Barnabas vanishes immediately after leaving the inn, and although 'K. yelled the name with the full force of his lungs…from the distance came a faint response, so far away was Barnabas already' (C, 32).

Physical space is similarly disconcerting in *The Trial*. Josef discovers Franz and Willem being whipped in a lumber room within the bank. Returning twenty-four hours later he finds 'Everything was still the same…the Whipper with his rod and the warders with all their clothes on were still standing there, the candle burning on the shelf' (T, 100-101). Josef barely questions this intrusion of the fantastical into his everyday world, merely giving orders for the room to be cleared. Again, he discovers court offices behind Titorelli's studio, despite this being 'almost at the diametrically opposite end of the town from where the court held its meetings' (T, 156). In fact the Court is omnipresent, its offices 'in almost every attic' allowing it to insinuate itself into every area of Josef's life. (T, 182). The most economical

explanation of such contraventions of physical laws, and of the protagonist's equanimity when confronting them, is that Kafka is recreating hallucinatory episodes.

Temporal Dislocations

Several conceptions of non-linear time are distinguishable. In a *timeless* state, everything co-exists in an eternal present. Alternately, different times (as measured by clock and calendar) may be *superimposed*, temporal layers occasionally shifting and merging. Kafka, however, disrupts linear time with abrupt *discontinuities*: most frequently, by accelerating the passage of time.[138] On returning to the inn, for example, K. finds that it is evening: 'Had he been gone for such a long time? Surely not for more than an hour or two, by his reckoning. And it had been morning when he left' (C, 23). Nevertheless, the representation of what K. experiences as events speeding up contributes, seemingly paradoxically, to the reader's experience of stasis.

I discuss in subsequent chapters how Kafka's successors differ in their treatment of time. Ishiguro and Sebald employ Kafkan temporal dislocations, but additionally superimpose different times to show how memories influence present events. Kafka's protagonists, in contrast, disclose very few memories, and their former lives remain shadowy. We learn nothing of K.'s past save that his home town has a church tower resembling the Castle's; nothing of Josef's save that his irascible Uncle Karl was formerly his guardian and has a daughter. Both men frequently *forget:* about tasks they must carry out, about the appearance and even the existence of others. Other characters do likewise. The landlady says, of Klamm: 'Anybody that he stops summoning he has forgotten completely, not only as far as the past is concerned, but literally for the future as well' (C, 83). The near-absence of memories may

[138] Margaret Church, 'Time and Reality in Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 2, 2 (1956) 62-69.

have extratextual origins of which we remain ignorant. It is a prime source of the dissolution of autonomous subjectivity manifested by Kafka's characters. Lacking memories, they are trapped in a perpetual present, and incapable of development.

Kafka's temporal shifts and the effective amnesia of his characters contribute to a sense of inertia: one strengthened by labyrinthine narrative structures and circumlocutory language. Yet in the principal novels Kafka tampers infrequently with space and time, and never draws attention to incongruities or exaggerates their scale. The sense of uncanniness arises rather through the accretion of low-key incidents. It is not attenuated by knowing that we read about mental phenomena; for Kafka's restrained style and humdrum detail disposes us to ignore the ontological status of events narrated.

Incursions from the Real World

Although Kafka describes particular objects in precise detail, his locations remain largely indeterminate and atemporal. A semi-feudal relationship exists between Castle authorities and villagers, and K's assistants arrive 'by carriage': but telephones are ubiquitous and buildings lit by electric light. *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial* touch upon the lives of early twentieth-century office workers in what are evidently European cities; that of the latter novel containing a medieval cathedral. The wider picture, however, is absent; and we learn virtually nothing of the government or social structure of Kafka's worlds. Richard Robinson assumes that it is based on the moribund world of the Habsburg Empire, with its remote and labyrinthine bureaucracy. The Empire was stranded in space, 'neither one place nor another'; and stranded in time, 'caught between Old Europe – dynastic, etiquette-ridden – and New Europe – democratic or demagogic'.[139] To modern eyes it borders on the ahistorical, the

[139] Richard Robinson, *Narratives of the European Border: A History of Nowhere* (Springer, 2007) p. 173.

timeless. Hence Kafka's references to 'extra-diegetic reality' – to actually existing locations and objects – not only fail to anchor his narrative in the real world, but further accentuate the sense of unreality.[140] Mentions of modern technology likewise raise disconcerting questions. Adorno notes that Kafka's fictions all 'take place in the same spaceless space, and all holes are so tightly plugged that one shudders whenever anything is mentioned that does not fit in'.[141] In *The Castle* Frieda casually proposes travelling 'to the south of France, or to Spain' (C, 132). This reference to familiar geographical terms might cause us to 'shudder', for the novel's world momentarily becomes one with our world. What initially seems merely inappropriate becomes *uncanny*, for we grasp that we are not visiting some alien world but are already *at home*. In Iurii Mann's words, 'the other world does not begin somewhere beyond, but is in the middle of this world ... hiding somewhere in the folds of everyday being'.[142]

The all-but-imperceptible transition as Kafka shifts from the everyday to the extraordinary undercuts our sense of security precisely because he does not enter another world. He also describes artworks that exists in the extra-textual world while introducing changes that subtly alter their meaning: a technique that might be called 'distorted ekphrasis'. For example, in *America*, the raised arm of the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour holds a sword, not a torch. Irrespective of Kafka's possibly satirical intentions – a symbol of enlightenment having been replaced by one indicating aggression – the effect is highly disorientating.

The Modern Cityscape

Kafka's representation of the modern cityscape and the urban wanderer has profoundly influenced his successors. The iconic nineteenth-century *flâneur* of Baudelaire's 1863 essay

[140] Lemon, 'Comfort of Strangeness', p. 207.
[141] Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka', p. 256.
[142] Quoted in Neil Cornwell, *The Absurd in Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2006) p. 185.

'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' was a connoisseur of the rich and vibrant experiences offered by the metropolis. He strolled through fashionable shopping arcades and thoroughfares, bombarded by a multitude of disjointed visual and auditory sensations; experiencing what Benjamin calls a dreamlike 'phantasmagoria of the marketplace'.[143] Kafka, in contrast, portrays the modern city less as spectacle than the site of isolation and alienation. Occasionally he parodies the traditional image of the *flâneur* as dandy.[144] Josef dresses elegantly, even when going to his death, and closely observes his surroundings. *The Trial* is set largely indoors, however; cramped apartments, dimly-lit hallways, attics and offices merging into one labyrinthine space. Josef is continually observed by voyeuristic onlookers and eavesdroppers, but they remain indifferent, disengaged. Three neighbours stare curiously from a window opposite Josef's when he is arrested, retreating only slightly when he shouts angrily at them. Trying to find the law courts, he encounters scenes of colourful proletarian vitality: men in shirt-sleeves leaning from windows, women gossiping, street vendors, laughter and shouting, children playing. Unlike the true *flâneur*, however, Josef has no sociological or aesthetic interest in urban life, being motivated only by instrumental concerns. He is often an intruder. Walking up the staircase to the interrogation chamber, he disturbs children playing and determines that in future he must bring either 'sweets to cajole them with or else a stick to beat them (T, 43).

Although Josef moves between distinct locations – lodging-house, bank, the working-class suburb containing the tenement buildings where the first interrogation takes place, the lawyer

[143] Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne', *Le Figaro* (26-29 Nov. and 3 Dec. 1863). Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 14.

[144] Rolf Goebel, 'The Exploration of the Modern City in *The Trial*' in Julian Preece (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 42-60, p. 43. By the early twentieth century the flâneur had become an anachronism: with motor traffic, crowded pavements and the replacement of arcades by department stores rendering his leisurely pastime much less attractive.

Huld's residence, the painter Titorelli's studio, the cathedral, and the semi-rural site of his execution – we cannot connect these places in a coherent topography. Our inability is partly attributable to Kafka's cognitive realism, for we acquire only fragmentary, though sharply realised, details of Josef's environment. These details do not, as indicated above, combine to present a geographically or historically locatable setting. In this respect, Kafka's cityscape anticipates the contingent, transient 'non-places' of Ishiguro and Sebald – sites whose architecture echoes the fleeting nature of metropolitan encounters.

The Fragmented Self

Several commentators argue that Kafka's protagonists instantiate the modern 'fragmented self'.[145] They suffer, in Weinstein's words, a 'deficit in being, a nameless singularity, a passivity unenlightened by memory…'[146] Weinstein argues that spatio-temporal anomalies are symptoms of the destabilisation of the self's aspiration to unity and integrity. I suggest that these anomalies originate in mental states associated with anomie and alienation, and are manifested in hallucinations, amnesia and fugue. Mental instability causes both fragmentation of self and aberrant spatio-temporal perceptions. The motivations of Kafka's protagonists are, moreover, opaque. Despite their near-obsessive desire to establish their status – in Josef's case, to discover why he has been accused; in K.'s., to be accepted as surveyor – their ultimate objectives remain not merely unknown but indeterminate. Much of K.'s behaviour is purposeless, his claims 'simultaneously asserted and emptied of intention'.[147] Other characters are likewise impenetrable. We read that Sordini, a Castle official, 'literally distrusts everyone; even if, for instance, he has come to know somebody, through countless circumstances, as the

[145] For example, J P Stern, *The Dear Purchase: A Theme in German Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 415.
[146] Weinstein, *Unknowing*, p. 170.
[147] Weinstein, *Unknowing*, p. 172.

most reliable man in the world, he distrusts him as soon as fresh circumstances arise…' (C, 65). Klamm is both visually indeterminate and his motives utterly obscure. He calls out the name of his mistress, Frieda: but, the landlady says, 'who can tell what he was thinking of?' (C, 52). As noted earlier, Hillel Broder argues that readers normally ascribe a 'theory of mind' to characters, assessing their motives and intentions by assuming that their actions, words and gestures are reliably indicative of comprehensible mental states. Kafka, Broder suggests, is one of the first writers to 'demonstrate aesthetically the limits of normative [Theory of Mind] by experimenting with non-normative methods of narration'.[148] We cannot ascribe a theory of mind to his characters, and their intentions remain unreadable. They act, they gesticulate: but we cannot reliably say what, if anything, their actions and gestures mean. On a closely related point, unlike those of the traditional nineteenth-century novel, Kafka's characters have virtually no sense of what philosophers call the 'narrative self' – a selfhood constituted by the teleologically-orientated stories that we tell about ourselves – but live from moment to moment; inattentively and forgetfully.[149]

Kafkan Anxiety and Humour

The sense of unease evoked by Kafka's fictions is superficially attributable to seemingly tangible threats: Josef's arrest; the hostility of Castle officials; Gregor's transformation. These threats, however, are not only the part-product of hallucinations, but are less significant than the uncanny nature of the protagonist's experiences, experiences that undermine confidence in the stability of the everyday world.

[148] Broder, p. 233.
[149] According to Charles Taylor, we cannot make sense of our experience unless 'we grasp our lives in a narrative' (C Taylor, *The Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 47). Galen Strawson, in contrast, insists that only *retrospectively* do people impose shape and meaning upon their lives (G Strawson, 'The Self', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4, Nos. 5-6 (1997), 405-428).

The psychologist's definition of anxiety might be 'A state of uneasiness, accompanied by dysphoria and somatic signs and symptoms of tension, focussed on apprehension of possible failure, misfortune or danger'.[150] The philosopher's account differs in that it assumes no specific cause or object of fear. According to Kierkegaard, anxiety 'differs altogether from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite…Anxiety is a *sympathetic antipathy* and an *antipathetic sympathy*'.[151] Rather as the uncanny is evoked by the blend of familiarity and strangeness, anxiety involves simultaneous sensations of attraction and repulsion. Being directed towards no particular object, it forces upon us understanding the contingency of our existence and the constant possibility of annihilation. Further, Kierkegaard writes, anxiety 'is the dizziness of freedom'; it follows from awareness of our capacity for self-determination and our consequent indecisiveness – the deferral of choice becoming a further cause of anxiety.[152] Such deferral is instantiated in hovering, again a cause and symptom of Kafkan anxiety. His characters' contradictory, self-cancelling statements, together with his resistance to interpretation, seemingly results in the assertion of nothing.

Numerous commentators from Freud onwards observe that a primary function of humour is to deflect anxiety. Kierkegaard's 'dizziness of freedom' brings about simultaneous sensations of exhilaration *and* awareness of the ultimate futility of human endeavour: to which absurdist humour seems the most appropriate response. Indeed, Kafka considered himself a comic writer in the tradition of Gogol, and frequently employs slapstick humour reminiscent of that found in silent comedy films. Minor characters often act the clown; and in *Metamorphosis* the cleaner strides boisterously around the apartment, slamming doors and

[150] Colman, *Dictionary of Psychology*, pp. 45-46.
[151] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Oriented Deliberation in View of the Dogmatic Problem of Hereditary Sin* [1844] trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014), p. 51.
[152] Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, p. 75.

treating Gregor like a recalcitrant child. Josef's first cross-examination takes place in a room containing a gallery with ceilings so low that spectators carry cushions to protect their heads (T, 47): a comical image that deflects insinuations of claustrophobia.

Kafka's humour is typically accentuated by his deadpan style, but it also has a carnivalesque quality. Carnivalesque humour is often satirical and subversive: in revealing the topsy-turvy logic that underpins conventional power relations it can defy authority, becoming a means of achieving what Bakhtin calls the 'victory of laughter over fear'.[153] Nevertheless, the carnivalesque celebration of chaos, of the world turned upside-down; and the temporary license to challenge power, are *also* employed by authoritarian tendencies. As many tyrants have learned, promoting irrationality and sowing confusion are effective tools for defusing opposition and masking savagery. Kafka's comical policemen and assassins, and clowning assistants, become profoundly sinister agents of the oppressors.

The carnivalesque is closely related to the melodramatic and the theatrical, which likewise disguise the exercise and the brutality of power by turning repression and punishment into performance. Legal systems almost invariably acquire theatrical qualities – with officers of the law wearing status-denoting costumes, adopting predetermined roles and performing ceremonial tasks. Their theatrical self-representation is intended to intimidate those outside the system; with (in Ritchie Robertson's words) 'authority [resulting] from the performance of authority'.[154]

Unsurprisingly, *The Trial* is suffused with theatrical language and imagery. Josef's initial arrest resembles 'a comedy [which] he would insist on playing…to the end (T, 11). He subsequently acts out the incident to impress Fräulein Bürstner, becoming wholly 'absorbed in his role' (T, 35). At the first interrogation the spectators are described as an 'audience',

[153] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Wiley, 1984).
[154] Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

some of whom ‘applaud’ Josef’s speech (T, 57). When his executioners arrive Josef is already appropriately costumed, in black. He describes the two top-hatted ‘gentlemen’ as ‘Tenth-rate old actors’, and asks ‘“What theatre are you playing at?”’ (T, 245). The killing itself resembles a ritual. More generally, the behaviour of every character, including Josef, is defined and established by their role in the drama. As the Whipper says ‘I am here to whip people, and whip them I shall’ (T, 97). There is accordingly an intimate connection between Kafka’s theatricality and his doubling tendencies: for two actors playing the same role become functional doubles, and minor figures are effectively interchangeable.

DOUBLING

Notions of the human double are rooted in various manifestations of dualistic thought, including belief in the soul’s survival after death and in Cartesian mind-body dualism. During the nineteenth century Dostoevsky, Hofmann Poe and Stevenson revived the double of folklore and fairy-tale; while scientific studies of mental illness shifted the concept away from that of supernatural being to externalisation of the self’s ‘evil’ impulses. Freud considered the double to originate principally in narcissistic self-esteem and the child’s attempt to protect itself against annihilation by creating multiple selves. He also notes that we frequently ‘double’ ourselves in dreams – assuming, for example, the roles of both pursuer/judge and pursued/accused person. Indeed, ‘the ego may be represented in a dream several times over, now directly and now through identification with extraneous persons.’[155] Further, ‘the modern writer [is inclined] to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and in consequence to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes’.[156]

[155] Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 338-339.
[156] Sigmund Freud, ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’ [1912] in Servulo A Figueira *et al*. (eds.) *On Freud’s ‘Creative Writers and Day-dreaming’* (London: Karnac Books, 2013) p. 10.

The double is uncanny because it involves repetition of the familiar – the self – in the other. Poised between identity and alterity, its status remains ambiguous. The double also exemplifies repressed desires, forcing the subject to acknowledge their presence in herself.

Critics often conflate the terms 'double' and '*Doppelgänger*'. Since the latter literally means 'double-goer', it implies a *copy* of a *living* person; and is accordingly strictly inapplicable to 'split' personalities or physical/psychological stand-ins. The term 'double' is wider in scope. Several varieties may be distinguished, each differing in origin and rationale: the *actual* physical duplicate (including identical twins); the author's double in the narrator/protagonist; the physical lookalike; the mimetic double; 'good' and 'evil twins' (the double, respectively, as superego and as id); the psychological double; and characters whose functional and narratorial roles are identical. Kafka's *Trial* and *Castle* includes examples of each category save the first. Some overlap: characters playing the same functional role are often psychological doubles. Further, the author may simultaneously double *himself* in the protagonist and project *aspects* of himself upon subsidiary characters, who in turn become psychological and/or functional doubles of each other. Doubling consequently generates intricate narratorial structures.

Doubling of the Author

Since Kafka's novels principally represent mono-perspectival, hallucinatory inner worlds, each character reflects in some way the protagonist's viewpoint. There are also good grounds for reading Kafka's protagonists as versions of himself. He often wrote during self-induced hypnagogic states, and occasionally experienced visions of autoscopic doubles, of shadow

selves that acted (he believed) outside his control.[157] His protagonists have *alter ego* names; the one-letter surnames of K. and Josef being placeholders for 'Kafka'. The 'someone [who] must have been telling lies' about Josef is probably Josef himself (T, 7). This supposition is strengthened by Josef being told, after his arrest that, like the warder named (like the author) 'Franz', he must wear black. In line with the Kantian reading discussed above, the protagonist arrests himself; and punishes himself in the flagellation episode.

Aaron Mishara argues that '*Literature documents and records cognitive and neural processes of self with an intimacy that is otherwise unavailable to neuroscience'*.[158] Writing resembles looking in a mirror and coming to understand oneself as both subject and object; as both *being* a self and possessing the brain structure and functions that constitutes *having* a self. Creating other versions of himself permits dispassionate self-observation on the author's part; and by doubling protagonists in other characters, he observes himself observing himself. Nevertheless, Kafka's subsidiary characters are perhaps better described as his *projections* than his doubles; externalisations of traits associated with roles as conscientious legal bureaucrat, dutiful son, would-be lover and family man, and writer.

Physical Lookalikes and Mimetic Doubling

K's assistants, Artur and Jeremias, in *The Castle* provide the pre-eminent example of physical doubles in Kafka's work. K. is unsettled by the extraordinary similarity of the two seemingly naïve young men. He makes a double-take in mistaking one for the other, complaining that they are 'as like as two snakes' (C, 24). Unable to distinguish them, K. plans to call both 'Artur', but now cannot ascribe responsibility to either. Gradually, however, the two figures

[157] Bridgwater*, Kafka's Novels*, p. 108.Aaron L Mishara, 'Kafka, Paranoic Doubles and the Brain: Hypnagogic vs. Hyper-Reflexive Models of Disrupted Self in Neuropsychiatric Disorders and Anomalous Conscious States', *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*, 5, 13 (2010) 1-37.
[158] Mishara, p. 3.

differ and become estranged: Artur returning to the castle and Jeremias starting a relationship with Frieda. Kurt Fickert suggests that 'their destiny reflects the insolubility of K.'s dilemma, his inability to effect a compromise between the need to write and the need to lead a so-called normal life'.[159] The assistants represent two sides of Kafka's character, the ascetic pursuit of an ideal and the yearning for bourgeois domesticity: the seemingly irresolvable conflict between art and life that constitutes a persistent theme in German literature.

Later K. and Jeremias seem to swap roles, the now older-looking assistant taking on his master's wiliness and deviousness. According to René Girard, desire is essentially mimetic: our desire for something is not self-contained but incited by another person's desire.[160] It swiftly morphs into jealousy and antipathy. Hence, Peter Goldman argues, Jeremias mimics K. because he is a rival for Frieda's attentions. K. himself is 'an intensely mimetic character' who desires Frieda primarily because she is Klamm's mistress.[161] K. also treats the Castle as a rival. He interprets the news that he has (apparently) been acknowledged as land surveyor as 'unpropitious…for it meant that the Castle was well informed about him, had estimated all the probable chances, and was taking up the challenge with a smile' (C, 12). His reaction reflects his own suspiciousness and aggressiveness; the Castle having instantly become a rival to be mimicked and defied. His mimicry – which connotes simulation and fakery – is also akin to theatrical gesture, a metaphor for indeterminacy of meaning.

[159] K J Fickert, 'Kafka's "Assistants" from the Castle', *The International Fiction Review*, 3, 1 (1976) 3-6, p. 5.
[160] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), pp 99-102.
[161] Peter Goldman, 'The Meaning of Meaning in Kafka's *The Castle*', *Anthropoetics*, XV, 2 (2010) http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap1502/1502Goldman.htm, accessed 30 September 2017.

Good and Evil Twins

The putative phenomenon of 'dual-personality disorder' generates 'good' and 'evil' versions of one subject. In Freudian terms, the ego projects the id's undesirable traits onto an imagined person, one given concrete form in Poe's and Stevenson's tales. The evil twin need not be a physical duplicate: indeed, Jekyll disowns his shameful impulses by projecting them onto a markedly different man, Hyde.

In *The Castle* Sordini, a diligent bureaucrat, constructs an evil twin-double in the morally corrupt Sortini, Amalia's would-be seducer. Kafka does not describe Sordini, but Sortini is a 'small, frail, reflective-looking gentleman' with a heavily furrowed forehead (C, 177). The similarity of their names (derived from Italian *sordo*, 'deaf') indicates that they are one and the same person. In *The Trial*, the relationship between the examining judge and Josef superficially resembles that between superego and id. It does not, however, create a good twin-double: a judge who owns books containing indecent pictures hardly functions as a morally upright version of Josef. William Wilson's double in Poe's tale, in contrast, is both William's physical lookalike and moral exemplar.

Psychological and Functional Doubles

Psychological doubles (persons with similar character traits) are frequently also functional doubles (persons sharing social/occupational roles) just because traits often determine roles, and *vice versa*. Kafka's extensive employment of such doubles was probably influenced by Dostoevsky's example.[162] There are, after all, few literary examples of multiple psychological/functional doubling *within one text*, such as we find in Kafka. Dickens, in

[162] Lawrence Kohlberg, 'Psychological Analysis and Literary Form: A Study of the Doubles in Dostoevsky', *Daedalus*, 92, 2 (1963), 345-362.

contrast, includes minor stock figures whose virtues and vices echo those of major characters, but only one or two of each type appears in each novel.

Artur and Jeremias are (initially) both physical lookalikes and psychological/functional doubles. Franz and Willem, the policemen who arrest Josef, are functionally identical: though Willem is older and fatter than Franz. The three junior staff-members assigned to keep watch on Josef are all 'insignificant anaemic young men' who, like K's assistants, laugh and clown around much of the time. Kafka's brief descriptions are compatible with their being physically similar: Rabensteiner is 'stiff' and '[swings] his arms'; Kullich is 'fair' with 'deep-set eyes'; and Kaminer has an 'insupportable smile, caused by a chronic muscular twitch' (T, 22). The two men who eventually kill Josef (completing the task initiated by Franz and Willem) are physical doubles: both are 'pallid and plump' with 'fat double chins', and wear frock-coats and top hats (T, 245-246).

Subsidiary characters in the principal novels are generally unidimensional ciphers, with minimal individuating characteristics. Their insignificance as individuals is underlined by many being referred to only by their job titles: the Advocate, the Examining Magistrate, the Student, the Whipper, the Judge, the Priest. Even the painter, Titorelli, bears only an 'artist's name', his real name being unknown. They fall into six groups: powerful figures with quasi-divine qualities (the judge and Priest in *The Trial*; Klamm in *The Castle)*; obstructive petty officials; self-professed 'experts' and advisors; the protagonist's unreliable (and possibly treacherous) assistants; his mistresses; fellow victims who make their own demands (the businessman Block simultaneously employs six advocates); and indifferent bystanders. Some figures stand outside the scheme: Barnabas, both impersonal Castle messenger and convivial family man, is probably a doubled and idealised version of K. Members of each group bear an almost invariant relationship to the protagonist, and interact only weakly among themselves.

Josef's mistresses resemble each other insofar as they are attracted to the 'guilty'. Those who promise to assist him – the lawyer Huld, uncle Karl, and Titorelli – are ineffective meddlers who differ in externalities but are effectively interchangeable. All advise Josef to accept the Court's authority and are, we suspect, its agents. They appear from nowhere, and disappear without explanation when no longer needed.

Psychological and functional doubling generates patterned relationships and, because a character's functional role also determines her narratorial role, it structures the narrative itself. Hence the constant recurrence of all-but-identical situations: though most encounters lead nowhere. Plans are discussed and tasks initiated only for their accomplishment to be endlessly deferred. Hence doubling contributes to an impression of stasis. Any bureaucrat, advisor or mistress could be substituted for any other, and each configuration of characters is reiterated, with only minor variations, until the narrative is arbitrarily terminated.

Deleuze and Guattari on Kafka's Doubles

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari reject Freud's claim that doubling originates primarily in an author's narcissistic impulses. Kafka's characters, rather, create doubles in the act of speaking: thereby become both 'subject of enunciation and…subject of the statement'.[163] A speaker generates an endless 'proliferation of series'; of different selves created in the process of becoming subject of his own speech-acts. Attempting to rein in this proliferation – to 'unblock a situation that had closed elsewhere in an impasse' – Kafka creates multiple new *embodied* versions of his characters.

Deleuze and Guattari's point is debateable. Assuming the self to be a relatively unified mental entity – in part Kant's binding capacity, the precondition of intelligible experience; in

[163] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, p. 53.

part constructed through memory and social interactions – everyday speech-acts create, a proliferation not of selves but of *aspects* of the self. In *The Castle*, K.'s 'doubles' are externalisations only of facets of his character; *projections* of specific emotions and desires. Klamm represents K.'s fears; Jeremias, his jealousy – and so on. Persons of each type are, however, unambiguous doubles of each other.

Kafka's doubling yields a sizeable cast of subsidiary figures; and becomes a primary means of moving the narrative forwards: though not of *progressing* it. The relationships between Josef and his women friends invariably reach an impasse and can develop no further. By creating doubles, and repeating the situation in slightly different form, Kafka unblocks what would otherwise be structural dead-ends – but without permitting any form of resolution.

LEGAL TROPES, BUREAUCRACY AND ARCHIVAL MOTIFS

Kafka's Unseen and All-Encompassing Authorities

Kafka's extensive use of law-related tropes is partly attributable to his legal education and employment. His protagonists constantly make ineffective appeals to quasi-legal authorities, requesting meetings that are invariably refused or avoided. Officials at every tier of the Court and Castle hierarchies are subordinate to higher officials, who are invisible or hide behind various disguises. The 'highest Court of all', however, is inaccessible to all (T, 175); and the Castle's owner, Count Westwest, never appears. We suspect that neither exists. Fruitless petitions to unseen powers and the absence of any final authority suggest necessarily unanswered appeals to a non-existent God. (Since *Verwest* means 'decomposed', perhaps the

Count is Nietzsche's dead God.[164]) Official decrees consequently lack ultimate grounding or foundation: precisely as we would expect in fictions permeated by devices and motifs signifying suspension and deferral. Indeed, Kafka instantiates Derrida's claim that 'To be invested with its categorical authority, the law must be without history, genesis, or any possible derivation'.[165] A law traceable to a specific source would possess merely contingent authority.

The reach and remit of Kafka's authorities are seemingly all-encompassing. Josef discovers judicial offices in every corner, and nearly everyone he encounters is connected with the Court. His speech of attempted self-exoneration at the first cross-examination is addressed to a disorderly crowd in an airless smoke-filled room. The crowd appears initially to be divided into factions favouring and opposing Josef's case: but all are Court employees. The protagonists' mistresses and assistants are likewise unreliable. Most literary questing heroes have a companion or sidekick who provides comic relief, acts as a foil, or provides running commentaries. These figures – the archetype being Don Quixote's Sancho Panza – are often foolish but trustworthy, and permitted to speak unwelcome truths to their masters. Artur and Jeremias, however – the childlike, unfailingly cheerful, and obsequious young men who claim to be K.'s 'old assistants' – belong to a different category: that of cunning servant able to achieve what his master cannot. Free to enter and leave the Castle at will, they are probably its spies. K.'s isolation and want of dependable friends and confidants significantly exacerbate the unease experienced by the reader.

[164] Sanja Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 135.
[165] Jacques Derrida, 'Before the Law' in J Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. D Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992) 181-220, p. 191.

Physical and Moral Corruption Allied with 'Spirituality'

Sandbank notes two 'recurring elements' in Kafka: 'shabbiness and decline on the one hand, celestiality and radiance on the other.'[166] The authorities are located in shabby physical surroundings, and frequently associated with sexual misconduct. Officials take vulnerable young women as mistresses, and conceal 'indecent' pictures in law books. As noted above, *global* readings of Kafka's inscrutable authorities as symbols of divine providence seem irreconcilable with the sleazy behaviour of their representatives. Nevertheless, physical and moral squalor in the seat of authority is juxtaposed with occasional intimations of 'spiritual' aspirations.

Kafka's castle is a prime example of power located in unprepossessing buildings, its crumbling structures reflecting the moral corruption of its inhabitants. Seen from below, the castle is 'clearly defined in the glittering air', but K. soon perceives that it is

> …neither an old stronghold nor a new mansion, but a rambling pile consisting of innumerable small buildings closely packed together and of one or two storeys; if K. had not known that it was a castle he might have taken it for a little town…Swarms of crows were circling round [the tower]…in his mind he compared the church tower at home with the tower above him. The church tower, firm in line, soaring unfalteringly to its tapering point, topped with red tiles and broad in the roof, an earthly building – what else can men build? – but with a loftier goal than the humble dwelling-houses, and a clearer meaning than the muddle of everyday life (C, 15).

The tower is initially described as 'graciously mantled with ivy' and 'pierced by small windows that glittered in the sun'; but the glitter is 'somewhat maniacal', and the structure resembles one 'designed by the trembling or careless hand of a child'. It was 'as if a melancholy-mad tenant who ought to have been kept locked in the topmost chamber of his house had burst through the roof and lifted himself up to the gaze of the world' (C, 15-16). As with his construction of slipknots, Kafka alternatively raises and dashes our expectations. The

[166] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 119.

castle lies on the summit of a hill, but is a ramshackle collection of low-lying buildings. The tower suggests attempts to transcend worldly concerns, but is dilapidated and sinister.

The Trial likewise locates power and authority in degraded and dilapidated environments. Josef's first interrogation takes place, not in an imposing judicial edifice but in a nondescript apartment block in an impoverished suburb. Court offices later spring up in dingy attics, generating what Sandbank calls the 'paradox of the commonplace secret': 'All things become charged with secrecy, but secrecy itself becomes charged with banality and may prove trivial at any minute'.[167] And although other-worldly light streams from the doorway to the Law, the Door-keeper wears a flea-infested fur collar.

Theoretical Approaches to the Archive

As discussed above, Foucault emphasises the intimate connection between power and knowledge: and the primary repository of bureaucratic knowledge is the archive.[168]

Derrida observes that the Greek *arche* means both 'origin' and 'residence of archons' (magistrates) – the seat of authority. The archive is both record of past events *and* a tool for organising persons in the future. Control of archival procedures and of subsequent access to archives yields power; in part because the archive resembles an abstract version of the panopticon, exerting disciplinary power by using the subject's awareness or suspicion of information held about him to encourage self-surveillance. Moreover, Marlene Manoff notes, archives are not neutral repositories of documents and artefacts offering transparent, unmediated access to past events. They invariably record and categorise 'from a particular

[167] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 88.
[168] Marlene Manoff defines 'archive' as 'the contents of museums, libraries, and archives and thus the entire extant historical record' (Marlene Manoff, 'Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines', *Libraries and the Academy*, 4, 1 (2004) 9-25, p. 10).

perspective'.[169] Archivisation involves selection and interpretation – procedures evidently susceptible to subjective bias. Power may be mediated merely through categorisation: which, Foucault notes, inevitably oversimplifies; generating 'a binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal)'.[170] Archival records classify people according to the system's rules, subjugating individuals to its demands. Moreover, Derrida notes, 'the archive is never closed. It opens out onto the future'.[171] It is 'a self-generating, self-referential system that entails a perpetual deferral of the moment of completion'.[172] The impulse exhaustively to conserve and to catalogue is self-defeating, for the constant accumulation of material impedes retrieval and errors become inevitable.

Archives in Kafka

Kafka's principal novels manifest several fundamental features of the archive.[173] Administrators of the Castle's filing system insist on its rationality, infallibility and comprehensiveness. The bed-ridden Superintendent denies that K. was summoned in error, for the 'Head Bureau' insists that 'the very possibility of error must be ruled out of account' (C, 67). Archives govern every aspect of life in the Castle and adjacent village, but yield only chaos. Files are constantly lost or given to the wrong persons, as happens during the pantomime antics attending the morning distribution of papers at the Herrenhof Inn. The Superintendent orders his wife to locate the files demonstrating the 'unpleasant truth' that the Castle has no need of a land-surveyor:

[169] Manoff, 'Theories of the Archive', p. 14.
[170] M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 181.
[171] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 68.
[172] J J Long, *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 154.
[173] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, pp. 9-10.

> The cabinet was crammed full of papers. When it was opened two large packages of papers rolled out, tied round in bundles…The papers now covered half the floor. 'A great deal of work is got through here,' said the Superintendent, nodding his head, 'and that's only a small fraction of it. I've put away the most important pile in the shed, but the great mass of it has simply gone astray'. (C, 62)

The complexity of archiving procedures ensures that they exceed the cognitive grasp of any individual, and the archive tends to become a self-perpetuating mechanism with a life of its own.[174] Likewise, Castle and Court systems apparently function without human agency. The Superintendent affirms that decisions may come '...suddenly in a flash...It's as if the administrative apparatus were unable any longer to bear the tension, the year-long irritation caused by the same affair – probably trivial in itself – and had hit upon the decision by itself, without the assistance of the officials'. (C, 70)

Kafka's archives signify bureaucratic dysfunctionality, but remain effective tools of control. Just as the prisoner held in the panopticon remains uncertain whether he is watched, even disorganised and unreliable archival knowledge instils self-monitoring habits by evoking fear. And disordered systems give rise to mistaken identity, with Josef initially believing his arrest follows from being confused with someone else.

The largely arbitrary categories and hierarchies imposed by the archive attain 'reality' in being accepted. Subjects may acknowledge its power to authenticate their very existence, and adjust their behaviour accordingly. Discussing Nazi concentration camps, Zygmunt Bauman observes that the 'sheer existence of bureaucratically defined categories of varying degrees of rights and deprivations prompted frantic efforts [among inmates] to obtain a "re-classification", to prove that one "deserves" to be assigned to a better category.'[175] Prisoners' desperate struggles for self-preservation resulted in widespread violence, bribery and

[174] Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
[175] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013) p. 295.

extortion: behaviour which their captors took to justify their being labelled degenerate. Categorisation became a self-fulfilling process. 'Ideally', Bauman writes, 'the Nazis themselves would limit their own role to that of detached observers'.[176] Hence inhabitants of the camps became complicit with their own moral decline; inveigled into collusion with their oppressors. Similarly, Kafka's protagonists accept – however grudgingly – the power of oppressive bureaucrats to define their lives, and seek validation by the very forces that oppress them. K. believes his inability to gain recognition by the Castle authorities stems from records of his invitation having been lost; and Josef hopes to extricate himself from the Court once he has identified the charges laid against him. Both men accordingly spend much of their time attempting to locate files and identificatory documents.

Authorities generally restrict access to archives, but rather than explicitly prohibiting right of entry, they use indirect means of deterring applicants. These include architectural and spatial techniques: guarded entrances, inhospitable waiting areas and claustrophobic interview cubicles.[177] Accordingly, K.'s protagonists are forced to wait in labyrinthine corridors listening to the ramblings of obstructive officials.

Unlike Sebald's characters, Kafka's protagonists are not archival in nature: neither collecting archival material nor relying on archives as substitutes for memory. Nevertheless, Kafka's manner of writing echoes the archive's simultaneous aspiration for and denial of the possibility of finality and totality. In seeking to comprehend every eventuality through a dialectical pattern of repeatedly revised statements and counter-statements, Kafka indefinitely defers the assertion of substantive claims: rather as the archive's moves towards completion are indefinitely postponed.

[176] Bauman, *Modernity*, p. 313. See also my discussion of H G Adler's influence on Sebald in Chapter Four.
[177] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 83.

Finally, numerous staff are required to manage complex archives; and Kafka's Court and Castle are dominated by vast and intricate bureaucracies in which minor officials perform myriad superfluous tasks and enforce pointless petty rules. As in many hierarchical systems, junior staff disclaim responsibility for outcomes by inflexible adherence to established procedures, and those at higher levels are faceless and unapproachable. The absurdist humour of Kafka's description of Castle officials hardly exaggerates the meaninglessness of much white-collar work:

> There's no express command given by the official, nor is the dictation given in a loud voice, one could hardly tell that it was being given at all, the official just seems to go on reading as before, only whispering as he reads, and the clerk hears the whisper. Often it's so low that the clerk can't hear it at all in his seat, and then he has to jump up, catch what's being dictated, sit down quickly and make a note of it, then jump up one more, and so on (C, 169).

STYLISTIC AND STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF THE KAFKAN

Kafka's Style

As we have seen, Kafka reports bizarre and fantastical events in precise and transparent language, and shuns colourful or metaphorical expressions. He intermittently provides concrete detail: with, for example, a quasi-scientific description of the monstrous creature of *Metamorphosis*. While the German word *Ungeziefer* ('vermin') leaves its precise nature uncertain, Kafka mentions a 'dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed-quilt could hardly keep in position…' (M, 9). In combining (in Amit Chaudhuri's words) 'biological naturalism' with 'domestic detail'. Kafka 'confounds binary

oppositions of fantasy and reality'.[178] Here, as elsewhere, sharply-defined individual items are embedded within vague descriptions of locations.

Kafka does not herald moments of transition by stylistic changes, but employs the same understated, unemotional language before, during and after the event. Shifts from everyday to anomalous conditions, from possible to impossible states-of-affairs, are accordingly all-but-imperceptible. In avoiding the 'poetic' or dramatic language adopted by some writers to signal the shift, Kafka imparts an enigmatic, dreamlike quality to the entire narrative. His prosaic style also beguiles the reader into overlooking the logical absurdity of events. It does not neutralise their disquieting nature but accentuates their uncanniness by making them believable. The familiar confronts the unfamiliar: homely bed-quilt and giant insect; reticent style and grotesque content.

Kafka constantly casts doubt on the truth of what is asserted by employing the subjunctive mood, and expressions like *doch* ('however') and *als ob* ('as if). Characters fastidiously analyse the claims of others, and pedantically modify and refine their own statements: but almost invariably tail off into ambiguity or self-contradiction. Their circuitous language, with its numerous subordinate clauses, virtually simultaneous assertions and denials, and long-winded digressions, frustrates resolution and closure.

Kafka's wordplay and use of symbolic names cannot be readily conveyed in translation. '*Das Schloß*' means 'castle', 'sealed enclosure' and 'lock'; and K's profession is given as *Landvermesser*: which, like the more common *Landmesser*, means 'surveyor' but also echoes *vermessen* ('presumptuous').[179] Several names derive from members of the crow family, and hence both reference the author (*kavka* being Czech for 'jackdaw') and symbolise death. The protagonist's name in 'The Hunter Gracchus' derives from Latin *graculus*, 'raven'. The

[178] Amit Chaudhuri, 'Unlike Kafka', *London Review of Books*, 17, 11 (8 June 1995) 30-31, p. 31.
[179] Bridgwater, *Kafka: Gothic and Fairytale*, p. 46.

German *Klamm* means ‘ravine’ and the Czech *klam*, ‘delusion’: suggesting that Klamm is both obstacle and product of K.’s imagination. The Castle authorities constantly demand *Ehrfurcht*, ‘respect’ *and* ‘reverence’: lending credence to religious readings of the novel. The pattern of vowels and consonants in ‘Samsa’ suggests a coded form of ‘Kafka’: but Czech *sám* means ‘alone’.

Kafka’s Narrative Structures

Kafka’s style accentuates his repetitive narratorial structures, likewise organised around adjournment and deferral; and, more specifically, around the protagonists’ invariably thwarted attempts to achieve some goal. Each faces a seemingly infinite series of obstacles, and every slight achievement reveals only further obstacles. Gregor Samsa thinks all will be well *if only* he can get dressed, eat breakfast, catch his train, explain himself to his boss: but the accomplishment of each task would only bring to light more difficulties. Likewise Josef and K. believe that *if only* they can reach the appropriate official their questions will be answered: but as soon as one obstacle has been overcome another takes its place. In Dennis McCort’s words, Kafka’s protagonists seem ‘forever emerging from within an infinite set of Chinese boxes’.[180]

There are no expositions: Kafka’s fictions commence with a highly condensed account of the incursion of baffling and unexplained events (Josef’s arrest, Gregor’s transformation) into everyday life. Thereafter events follow a superficially conventional chronological sequence: but there is little linear development towards a resolution. Rather Kafka presents an *assemblage* of loosely connected episodes and discontinuous segments, with new narrative

[180] Dennis McCort, *Going Beyond the Pairs: The Coincidence of Opposites in German Romanticism, Zen, and Deconstruction* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001) p. 104.

lines almost arbitrarily initiated and terminated. Character arrive from nowhere and disappear without trace, only for their functional doubles subsequently to reappear playing very similar roles. As Patrick Bridgwater writes, Kafka's narratives manifest 'infernal circularity', with 'fractal' rather than 'teleological' structures that threaten to loop backwards in an infinite regress.[181] In 'A Message from the Emperor', the Messenger encounters infinitely many obstacles while attempting to reach the Emperor's palace: recalling the infinite number of points that must be traversed in Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. According to Jorge Luis Borges, Zeno's paradoxes form the structural basis of Kafka's fictions: '*regresus in infinitum*…is an intellectual procedure common enough in etiology and metaphysics, but rare in literature; and we could say that with the exception of a few precursors, which were in some way invented by him, it was introduced by Kafka'.[182] While the principal novels are not regressive in their entirety, they incorporate numerous small-scale, limited regresses that impede plot development. Eventually, like 'Shaggy Dog' stories, they end anti-climactically – often with an ironic reversal, described in terse and laconic language, that renders everything thus far achieved pointless.

Kafka's oblique style, incessant qualifications and self-cancelling language, together with his recursive narrative structures, mirror his concurrent provocation and resistance to interpretation. They *enact* these properties. Again, alternation between assertion and denial *instantiates* the psychological processes involved in the evasiveness and self-deception that are prerequisites of complicity in one's own subjugation. Few openly embrace complicity, rather edging towards collusion with oppressors.

[181] Bridgwater, *Kafka: Gothic and Fairytale*, p. 31.
[182] J L Borges, 'Jorge Luis Borges habla del mundo de Kafka' in Franz Kafka, *La metamorphosis*, trans. Nélida Mendilaharzu de Machain (Buenos Aires, Ediciones Orión/ Embajada de Austria en la Argentina, 1982), 5-28, p. 5. My translation.

Defamiliarisation and the Photographic Way of Seeing

According to Viktor Shklovsky, the intricate detours of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* disrupt the novel's forward momentum in a process of 'retardation' – in turn defamiliarising the text and forcing us to reappraise it.[183] Elsewhere Shklovsky writes that 'art exists that one may recover the sensation of life'. It does so by making 'objects "unfamiliar"…to increase the difficulty and length of perception…'[184] What might be called Kafka's 'photographic' way of seeing has a similar effect. Carolin Duttlinger considers Kafka to have been decisively influenced by photography, a medium which – like his narratives – simultaneously 'fragments' reality while denying the possibility of synthesis.[185] Photographs 'contribute to a profound sense of distance and alienation'; in part because of their 'emphasis on apparently random details which suddenly undermine the overall meaning of a scene; the focus on surface, facades, and appearances; and, above all, the rift between photographically detailed descriptions and their promise of underlying meaning…'[186] Sandbank makes a similar point in discussing the 'commonplace secret': because Kafka treats everything on the same level, all phenomena are potentially both charged with mystery and utterly banal.[187]

A naïve observer might assume photographs to depict unadulterated reality, in which case they would foreclose on interpretation. Nevertheless, by employing strictly *photographic* techniques – including shooting from unusual viewpoints, and other methods not involving image manipulation – the photographer may reveal properties of objects unavailable to the direct human gaze. As noted in my discussion of Kafka's spatial distortions, the hallucinating

[183] Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* [1921] trans. Benjamin Sher (Dalkey Archive Press, 1990) 146-170.
[184] Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' [1917] in Lee T Lemon and Marion J Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.
[185] Carolin Duttlinger, *Kafka and Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 18.
[186] Duttlinger, p. 14 and pp. 258-259.
[187] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 88.

subject may be unable to process sudden shifts in perspective and apparent size that are ordinarily normalised by the brain. Likewise, familiar objects become mysterious when viewed in close-up, divorced from their surroundings. Photographs capture momentary impressions just because the camera (obviously) lacks the brain's normalising capability. They defamiliarise their subject-matter, however, only if they possess the clarity of our everyday perceptions. A blurred photograph of, say, mannequins in a shop window does not defamiliarise; because *all* remains nebulous. The image (literally) lacks the sharp initial focus on the familiar essential to evocation of the uncanny. Further, by revealing how perceptions change with variations in distance and angle of view, photographs expose the provisional nature of our understanding. A seemingly realist medium manifests idealist tendencies, suggesting a world lying behind appearances.

Kafka's precise descriptions of the physical minutiae of experience echoes the photographic way of seeing. He evokes the particularity, the *presence* of objects: both rendering them uncanny through defamiliarisation; *and*, by hinting at noumena beyond phenomena, incites interpretation.

CONCLUSION

According to Walter Benjamin, 'There are two ways to miss the point of Kafka's works. One is to interpret them naturally, the other is the supernatural [theological] interpretation'.[188] Benjamin implies that *any* reading will go astray. Shimon Sandbank concurs, arguing that while Kafka's fictions tease the reader with the appearance of interpretability, with the prospect of finding a 'key' that unlocks their meaning, they remain radically uninterpretable. And in seeking coherent, consistent, and all-encompassing readings, the critic risks not only

[188] Benjamin, 'Frank Kafka', p. 127.

misrepresenting but *diminishing* the text. In Sontag's words, the 'modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys…'[189] We can, nevertheless, devise explanatorily plausible *partial* thematic interpretations. With respect to narratorial *form*, I have argued that Kafka's novels are re-creations of part-hallucinatory mental states from a largely mono-perspectival viewpoint. This reading is consistent because the dreaming/hallucinating mind is not only mono-perspectival, but prone to amnesia, spatio-temporal distortions and 'doubling' of the self. Since the narrator-protagonist (usually) reports only what he perceives in the immediate environment, Kafka's mono-perspectivism harmonises with his cognitive realism. And since hallucinations are amenable to Freudian readings, we may credibly read some motifs as concretised and externalised manifestations of unconscious desires and emotions

Kafka's circuitous manner of writing *embodies* resistance to interpretation; it *instantiates* epistemic doubt and uncertainty via the employment of stylistic and narratorial devices which insinuate hovering and double thought. Further, Kafka *embraces* the blankness, the void that results from endlessly repeated, self-cancelling operations – in one memorable image, the 'inexplicable mass of rock' that remains after examining different versions of the legend of Prometheus.[190] Kafka's fastidious style follows from struggling to express the inexpressible: by destabilising his own thoughts, contradicting himself, leaving everything undecided and undecidable. His characteristic language of promise, deferral and denial has multi-layered repercussions. It is the correlate of a repetitive, backward-looping narrative structure based around adjournment and deferral; and represents the evasiveness and self-deception pre-requisite to complicity in one's own oppression.

[189] Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, p. 3.
[190] F Kafka, 'Prometheus' in F Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir; ed. Nahum N Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) p. 432.

Kafka's fragmentary, cognitively realistic descriptions convey the enactive nature of our engagement with the world; indicating that our senses provide only incomplete and unreliable representations of our surroundings. Moreover, Kafka defamiliarises and makes disturbingly alien the familiar and everyday – partly through seamless transitions into the unreal, partly though a photographic way of seeing. Every feature, thematic and formal, works in tandem: enacting states of unknowing and inducing a sense of unease in the reader. The ground beneath our feet constantly shifts, threatening our notion of ourselves as stable selves leading purpose-driven lives in a reliably-known and orderly world.

In subsequent chapters I discuss *what* Kafka's successors appropriated from him, the *use* made of their appropriations and, most importantly, *why* they borrowed. As Sandbank suggests, their aims are often transparent. Rex Warner's *Wild Goose Chase* is an explicitly ideological novel; Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* explores a mind damaged by trauma; and W G Sebald demonstrates the unreliability of memory and archival knowledge. All three novelists employ Kafkan motifs, tropes and techniques – spatio-temporal discontinuities, epistemic uncertainties, doubled characters and the like. But Kafka's stubborn resistance to interpretation, his indeterminacy and evocation of disquiet, are inseparable and *emergent* features of his work. They arise from interaction and interplay between diverse stylistic, narratorial and thematic elements: which, in his successors' works, risk becoming formulaic appendages.

CHAPTER TWO: REX WARNER'S 'ANTI-FASCIST FAIRY TALES'

Rex Warner was frequently described as 'the English Kafka' in the 1940s.[191] This chapter examines two of his novels: *The Wild Goose Chase* [*TWGC*] (1937) and *The Aerodrome* [*TA*] (1941) – the latter praised by Anthony Burgess as 'the best, perhaps the only, English Kafka novel'.[192] I summarise the novels, noting documentary evidence suggesting Warner's indebtedness to Kafka; briefly examine the relationship between politics and literature in the 1930s; and discuss Warner's distinction between two kinds of allegory. Several recent commentators have downplayed or even denied significant links between the writers, but I show that Warner's novels incorporate sufficiently many Kafka-derived motifs and tropes to substantiate their being described as *Kafkan*. Kafka provided, moreover, an apt model for Warner's political messages. Nevertheless, Warner's novels do not manifest the *deep* markers of the Kafkan discussed in Chapter One – principally, resistance to global interpretation; and instantiation and enactment of their themes.

PLOT SUMMARIES

'The Wild Goose Chase'

TWGC was written between 1929 and 1932, around five years before its publication by Boriswood in 1937. Willa and Edwin Muir's translation of *The Castle* was published in the

[191] For example, H A Mason, 'The English Kafka', *Scrutiny*, 14, 2 (December 1946) 156-158. N H Reeve notes that 'the notion of Warner as an 'English Kafka' began to gain credence' in the 1940s (N H Reeve, *The Novels of Rex Warner: An Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989) p. 16). The first issue of the journal *Focus* was largely devoted to 'A Symposium on Kafka and Rex Warner' (Balachandra Rajan and Andrew Pearse (eds.) *Focus One* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1945)).

[192] Anthony Burgess, *The Listener*, 75 (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1966) p. 253). References are to Rex Warner, *The Wild Goose Chase* (London: John Lane/The Bodley Head) 1944) and to *The Aerodrome* (London: John Lane/The Bodley Head) 1944).

UK in 1930, and Warner read it the following year.[193] The Muir version of *The Trial* was published in 1935, and several episodes of *TWGC* are so heavily indebted to that novel that they must have been late interpolations.[194] Peter Neumeyer quotes Warner as saying 'I certainly came across Kafka first in the Muir translation (I can't read German anyway)...'[195]

TWGC is divided into two sections. In Part I, 'The One Remains' an anonymous narrator relates the picaresque adventures of George and his brothers. Part II, 'The Many Change' describes how George instigates a Marxist rebellion against the fascist government.[196]

George and his elder brothers Rudolph and David separately leave their seaside home in an unnamed country (evidently based on 1930s England) in search of an ill-defined ideal, the mysterious 'Wild Goose'. George possesses innate commonsense and compassion but lacks specific talents. He resembles the happy-go-lucky third son of fairy-tale who overcomes the limitations imposed by his lowly position. Rudolph is a bluff military adventurer and David, a literary intellectual. Part I mimics diverse narrative genres, ranging from didactic travelogue to mythic quest; from Wellsian dystopian science-fiction to *Boy's Own*-type yarns; from slapstick comedy to boy-meets-girl romance. George crosses an invisible frontier into a country dominated by a city wholly enclosed by an enormous wall and roof. (The trope of *crossing the frontier* is a common literary trope. While it often signifies entering a dreamworld, it carries a more specific meaning in some novels of the 1930s, such as Edward Upward's *Journey to the Border*. Left-wing middle-class intellectuals – often disparagingly called 'public school communists' – tended to be individualists. They were faced with three

[193] Stephen Ely Tabachnick, *Fiercer Than Tigers: The Life and Works of Rex Warner* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2002) p. 107.
[194] Some commentators who deny that *The Trial* influenced *TWGC* apparently believe that the Muir translation was first published in 1937 by Alfred Knopf, and are ignorant of the fact that Victor Gollancz had published it in England in 1935.
[195] Peter F Neumeyer, 'Franz Kafka and England', *The German Quarterly*, 40, 4, (1967) 630-642, p. 634).
[196] I use the term 'fascist' loosely here, for the authorities of *TWGC* seem to be motivated less by ideology than by a desire for power.

choices: they might become leaders; remain detached commentators, on the sidelines; or 'cross the frontier' by committing to solidarity with the masses – thereby risking their individual identity being subsumed.) The Government uses the countryside-dwelling peasants as slaves, employing a brutal police force to monitor and subjugate them. George becomes friendly with Joe, a farmer, and falls in love with Joe's daughter, Joan. He considers staying in the countryside, but is repelled by the gullibility and submissiveness of the peasants. He accordingly enters the city, a futuristic dystopia akin to Fritz Lang's Metropolis, where workers live in underground hovels and the middle-classes under a 'Sky-Dome'. All are kept under constant surveillance by a high-tech equivalent of the panopticon. George meets David and is shown the Anserium, a magnificent temple where the local deity is worshipped. This is merely a stuffed domestic goose – a parodic inversion of a symbol of freedom – and the episode reprises another fairy-tale trope; that of the naïve person who alone discerns and speaks the truth. George gives a lecture on Shakespeare's *Othello* at the 'Convent', the town's educational establishment, and referees a rugby-match between 'Pros' and 'Cons', teams representing, respectively, opponents and supporters of the regime. The score has been pre-determined, and the losing team, the Pros, are executed by the police.

George also encounters various narcissistic, hypocritical and obsessive intellectuals who spend their time on pointless investigations, and invariably turn out to be fools or traitors. Professor Pothimere, for example, conducts barbaric scientific experiments into sexual behaviour. In a probable reference to Kafka's Whipper episode, George discovers a masochist being whipped in the Department of Ethics. Warner reserves his strongest condemnation for Don Antonio, a reclusive self-professed 'philosopher' and aesthete. A lazy, lecherous pedant, Antonio pontificates on beauty while treating his servants as slaves. His religious brother Albert is a pacifist who allows his wife to suffer terrible humiliation: demonstrating that

passivity in the face of evil is barely less blameworthy than cruelty and selfishness. Warner's message is clear: detached from real-world problems, abstract thought is not only useless, but damages our capacity for empathy. Antonio's third brother, Joe, in contrast, has spent his life working for political revolution.

Most significantly, George meets three 'Kings' of the city. Each propound their doctrines. The first argues for a neo-Nietzschean programme, 'a modern aristocracy of Action and of genius [that] will usher in the new age'. Headed by virile young men, this will replace 'the old morality' (*TWGC*, 218). The second King is a scientist and technocrat who boasts of the surveillance system that monitors all the country's inhabitants, and is blind to the ethical implications of his work. The third is a suave clergyman, the Rev. Hamlet, whose apparent empathy masks a ruthless determination to cling to power. Eventually George escapes the town, and through subsequent conversations and encounters gradually converts to socialism. Individuals cannot act alone, he soliloquises: 'only the organized movement of masses can shake that Government, and my place is on no pedestal of my own, but shoulder to shoulder with the peasants…' (233).

Part II works through the ramifications of this conclusion, focussing on a paradox that has long troubled revolutionaries. The self-assertive qualities required of the heroic individuals who lead a revolution become counter-productive once success has been attained. Leaders must now accept self-effacement and submergence in the masses. Since Warner is uncertain how society might nourish both individual and communal values, he does not show the revolution's aftermath. George now focusses on practical matters, and there are fewer digressions and musings of assorted eccentrics. A final battle takes place, the city being defended by huge robotic policemen and elderly clergymen concealing deadly weapons.

'The Aerodrome'

The Aerodrome has a bucolic setting; an unnamed village in a parallel England of the 1930s inhabited by a procession of archetypical characters who seem to have strayed from a country-house detective novel – Rector, Squire, servants, buxom rosy-cheeked barmaids and ruddy-faced, forelock-tugging yeoman farmers. It is essentially a vision of the 'Deep England' that Angus Calder identified as playing a crucial role in British wartime propaganda.[197] On his twenty-first birthday the narrator, Roy, learns that he is not the Rector's son, as he believed, but was adopted at birth. He overhears a long soliloquy in which the Rector makes an extravagant confession to God about murdering Anthony, his best friend and love-rival, in what was apparently a mountaineering accident. Roy also discovers that his sweetheart, Bess, has been unfaithful with his friend, the Flight-Lieutenant. The plot becomes increasingly convoluted and melodramatic, with violent deaths, bizarre coincidences, the return of people long believed dead, and the disclosure of family secrets involving legacies and adulterous, perhaps incestuous, relationships. The revelations resemble those delivered by Hercule Poirot at the close of an Agatha Christie novel. Repelled by the moral chaos and disorderliness that underlies village life, Roy joins the Air Force – a shadowy authority that assumes near-complete control over the village. He becomes the *protégé* of the charismatic Air Vice-Marshal at the nearby aerodrome, a man who spurns family commitments, love and sympathy as weaknesses. It later turns out that Anthony had survived the Rector's attempt to kill him, eventually becoming the AVM and having a son, the F/L, with the Squire's sister. The F/L kills the Rector in a shooting accident, and falls in love with Eustasia. Both are killed

[197] Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Cape, 1991).

on the AVM's orders. The AVM dies in his turn when his aeroplane, already sabotaged by the F/L, crashes.

The AVM urges air force recruits to forget their previous lives. Being 'poised for a brief and dazzling flash of time between two annihilations', the airmen's duty is 'To be freed from time. From the past and from the future. From shapelessness' (*TA*, 121 and 150). Their goal is to make the world 'clean' by casting off 'the stupidity, the ugliness, and the servility of historical tradition' (196); and to obtain freedom 'through the recognition of necessity' (205) and 'the acquisition of power' (207).[198] In a final appeal to Roy, the AVM laments the mess the Squire and Rector have made of their lives:

> What a record of confusion, deception, rankling hatred, low aims, indecision!…I urge you to escape from all this, to escape from time and its bondage, to construct around you in your brief existence something that is guided by your own will, not forced upon you by past accidents, something of clarity, independence and beauty? (327-328).

For Roy a doctrine of clarity, order and discipline, allied with the allure of modern technology, offers an escape from the lies, deceit and shabby compromises of village life. The contrast between the two worlds is conveyed linguistically. The AVM's speech is crisp and concise, while the village is described in sprawling sentences and frequent images involving mud. The AVM describes ordinary people as 'earthbound, grovelling from one piece of mud to another' (*TA*, 247), and asserts that '"parenthood", "ownership", "locality" are the words of those who stick in the mud of the past' (195). Airmen must cease contact with their parents; 'channels or conduits through which [they] have all in varying degrees been infected with the stupidity, the ugliness, and the servility of historical tradition' (196).

[198] Warner echoes Kafka's priest's insistence that 'it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary' (*T*, 243).)

Like the three Kings of *TWGC*, the AVM displays ruthless fascistic tendencies.[199] While the authorities of the earlier novel, however, are shambolic, absurd, and slightly comical, *The Aerodrome* contains authentic ingredients of 1930s German and Italian fascism. It incorporates an elite uniformed core whose members are unswerving in their dedication to their ideology, an emphasis on self-control and regimentation combined with a license to rape and kill dissidents, talk of purity and cleansing, and near-worship of technology. Flying represents the antithesis of 'grovelling' in the mud, permitting the airman to survey the world from a position of cold detachment. Here Warner indirectly references Guido Mattioli's claim that 'Every aviator is a born fascist'.[200] The AVM also invokes Nietzsche and Social Darwinism by talking of 'a new and more adequate race of men' whose self-mastery will enable them to cleanse the world of its impurities (*TA*, 206). He does not, however, advocate the superiority of one racial group over another, and would scorn the Nazi belief in quasi-mystical links between 'blood and soil'.

Michael Moorcock suggests that *The Aerodrome* portrays a 'very English kind of fascism'.[201] Paradoxically, in view of the AVM's contempt for established customs, the supposedly quintessentially English qualities of reticence and insistence on good manners ensures that most villagers come, almost imperceptibly, to submit to the Aerodrome's authority. Even those who refuse to work there accept its control over their lives, albeit resentfully and grudgingly. In short, habitual deference and passivity leads people to sleepwalk towards compliance with totalitarianism.

[199] The Air Vice-Marshal may have been based on the founding father of the RAF, Air Vice-Marshal Trenchard. T E Lawrence describes an organisation 'moulded after the image of one man', a man to whom 'we submit our nature to his will, trustingly' (Chris Hopkins, A Source for Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome*', *Notes and Queries*, 40, 1 (1993) 68-69).
[200] Quoted in Robert Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination 1920-1950* (Yale University Press, 2005) p. 308. Compare Yeats's aviator in 'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' (1919), a man driven by a Nietzschean 'lonely impulse of delight'.
[201] Michael Moorcock, *London Peculiar and Other Nonfiction* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012) p. 244.

John Gray notes that 'The defining feature of dystopian literature is that it denies the appeal of the utopias it satirises. It makes us see them as wholly repulsive.'[202] Most readers find the societies depicted in Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* abhorrent, for example; and grasp immediately why the protagonists are dissenters. *The Aerodrome*, in contrast, shows how intelligent, disillusioned people might be drawn to fascist ideology. Warner considers this a psychological phenomenon, a state of mind emerging among insecure individuals repelled by what they perceive as a moral, political and social vacuum. In *The Cult of Power* he argued that fascism's appeal lay in its seeking 'to reconstruct a general system of belief to replace the vagueness and uncertainties of unregulated liberalism'.[203] Significantly, while fascism in 1930s Europe was also fuelled by financial insecurity, economic factors are barely mentioned in Warner's novel. As Hena Maes-Jelinek writes, 'By…dissociating fascism from the particular circumstances which gave rise to it on the Continent, Warner concentrates on the essence of what is to him a moral disease'.[204] Unlike Huxley and Orwell, Gray suggests, Warner understands that fascism expresses 'a thwarted religious need'. In appealing to a quasi-mystical impulse towards self-transcendence, in offering freedom from time and contingency, the Air Vice-Marshal's object is less political power than to change 'the souls of the people themselves' (*TA*, 246).

Rex Warner later wrote that he 'wanted to show two states of mind. The apparent ineffectiveness since the last war of such generally accepted ideas as bureaucracy, democracy, liberalism, and the rest; on the other hand and rising out of this, was a growing enthusiasm for efficiency, for getting things done – for results however ruthlessly these results might be

[202] John Gray, 'Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome*', *New Statesman* (2 December 2002) http://www.newstatesman.com/200212020039, accessed 3 September 2014.
[203] Rex Warner, *The Cult of Power: Essays* (London: John Lane, 1946), p. 131. Similar factors are at play today.
[204] Hena Maes-Jelinek, *Criticism of Society in the English Novel between the Wars* (Liège: Presses universitaires de Liège, 1970) p. 492.

obtained'.[205] The conflict in *The Aerodrome*, however, is not between liberalism and fascism but between *conservatism* and fascism, between traditional ways of 'muddling along' and established hierarchies, and a drive for efficiency and order. Roy eventually realises that the 'fumbling conventions that had centred around church, manor, and public-house' (*TA*, 289) are incalculably preferable to the dictatorial, clinical Code offered by the AVM; one that 'in spite of its symmetry and its perfection' amounted to 'a denial of life, its difficulty, its perplexity, and its suffering, rather than an affirmation of its nobility and its grandeur' (315). Moreover, the AVM's private life has been as messy, hypocritical and self-deceived as those of people he despises. He requires Air Force recruits to renounce family life, but has himself fathered two sons in adulterous liaisons, and cold-bloodedly murders the Squire's sister, mother of the Flight-Lieutenant, to prevent the truth emerging. In short, the AVM's beliefs have been shaped as much by hot-blooded emotions – by anger at being betrayed by his friend, a desire for revenge and personal ambition – as by ideology.

POLITICS AND ALLEGORY

Politics and Literature in the 1930s

The journal *Left Review* (started in 1934) promoted literary realism – styles and genres that presented 'things as they really were', especially in the world of the proletariat – in order to pave the way for a new socio-political order. How, though, might left-wing writers demonstrate political commitment if they were uncomfortable with this demand? [206] Not only did most middle-class writers have little experience of working-class life; but many favoured

[205] Rex Warner, *Personal Impressions: Talks on Writers and Writing* ed. Marian B McLeod (Sydney, Australia: Wentworth Press, 1986) p. 3. Warner's remarks are more relevant, perhaps, to *The Professor* (1938): a novel that lays bare the failures of tolerant liberal principles when dealing with ruthless fascists.
[206] Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976). Warner was a friend of Auden, Stephen Spender, C Day Lewis and Christopher Isherwood; and contemporary of Edward Upward

experimental and speculative fiction – apparently proscribed by the diktats of *Left Review* – over 'kitchen-sink' realism. Others considered realism inexorably linked to bourgeois ideology just because it tacitly accepts and sustains existing power structures and relationships. Fantasy, in contrast, might undermine the authority of realist discourse. Moreover, realism might depict social relations effectively but offered an inadequate vehicle for *discussion*. The evaluation of complex political concepts seemed to require a different genre, the novel of ideas; and all instances of this genre in English literature – such as *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Gulliver's Travels* – have an allegorical element.

Allegory, a close relative of fable, resembles both the *Bildungsroman* and traditional fairy-tale insofar as one common motif is the protagonist's education – principally through tasks undertaken under duress, and encounters with true and false friends. Further, while characters and plots superficially involve real-world events, they also represent abstract ideas. The allegorist seeks to render these ideas more comprehensible and memorable than if they were merely asserted in the narrative. He can also test ideological and metaphysical arguments by presenting encounters between the protagonist and representatives of competing theories. The allegorical tale comes to resemble an extended philosophical thought-experiment, measuring abstract ideas against practical experience: though frequently conclusions are predetermined. It is implicitly didactic and teleological, and proceeds dialectically, via Socratic conversations and demonstrations of the consequences of adopting different worldviews. These conversations and demonstrations structure the plot; and the author generally relies on broad character types. Psychological subtlety must yield before the need to present a variety of viewpoints. The political allegorist, in particular, seeks to examine the interplay of social and economic forces; and is accordingly less interested in individual idiosyncrasies than in peoples' social roles and functions

The realist novel requires plausible characters and credible plots. It cannot readily accommodate explicit and extended discussion of different ideas, for such discussion rarely occurs in everyday life, and impedes narrative flow. Accordingly, and despite his expressed contempt for philosophy, Warner was effectively obliged to adopt the allegorical form if he wished to explore political ideas. Allegory offered as the ideal vehicle for presenting different responses to totalitarianism; and also, perhaps, allowed Warner to indulge a taste for fantasy and adventure while avoiding the charge of escapism. *TWGC* attempts to reconcile George's quest for 'spiritual' enlightenment with his dawning realisation that liberal individualism is ineffective and only collective action can topple the dictatorship.

On a related point, some committed writers object to the epistemic and moral certainties implied by realism; favouring instead the *indirect* investigation of political issues. Christopher Caudwell argues that the 'uncanny story' allows the rational, 'materialist' modernist to acknowledge the 'obsessions and archaic presences' revealed by psychoanalysis. 'Simple faith' is insufficient; the writer must acknowledge 'chinks in his armour'.[207] In Margaret Cohen's terminology, 'Gothic Marxists' are left-wing anti-realist writers suspicious of the deterministic and reductivist tendencies of 'vulgar Marxism'. They are attracted to 'the realm of a culture's ghosts and phantasms as a significant and rich field of social production rather than a mirage to be dispelled'; and embrace 'a notion of critique moving beyond logical argument'.[208]

While shunning kitchen-sink realism, in other respects Warner accommodated his writing to left-wing thought. Some commentators were suspicious of Modernism: it both encompassed the work of writers on the political right, and its more 'experimental' forms

[207] Christopher Caudwell, 'Introduction', *Uncanny Stories*. (London: Nelson, 1936) pp. xi-xii.
[208] Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (University of California Press, 1995) p. 11.

seemed addressed to an educated elite and remote from the concerns of ordinary people.[209] Now, Warner displays some modernist tendencies in *TWGC*: the mixing of genres, the consequent fragmentation of the narrative, and the spatio-temporal incongruities all indicate an interest in experimentation. Nevertheless, the overt didacticism, and accessibility prose suggest anti-modernist continuity with the nineteenth-century novel. For Reeve, Warner's generation of writers were 'intent on a radical and often histrionic break with such modernist trends as they associated with the sterility and frustration of their world'.[210] Glyn Salton-Cox reads *TWGC* as 'the paradigmatic novel of thirties utopianism, in which the popular spirit of the English radical tradition, energized by Bolshevik revolutionary élan, overthrows the dystopian forces of British imperialism and central European fascism'. [211] The novel's formal complexity arises from its blend of provincial and cosmopolitan elements – which range from English allegory to Expressionism and Russian socialist realism – rather from modernist tendencies. It is, Salton-Cox concludes, 'a dystopian anti-fascist fable derived from Central European Expressionism and driven by the plot of *Tom Jones*'.[212]

Two Kinds of Allegory

Writing in 1943, Warner suggested that Kafka's *Trial* and *Castle* had 'given allegorical expression to the pervasive sense of guilt which…marks the modern man in a world of war and insecurity, believing in his individuality, but all the time at the mercy of abstract forces, economic, political or psychological'.[213] Forty years later, Warner told a researcher

[209] Marianne DeKoven, 'The Politics of Modernist Form', *New Literary History*, 23, 3, (1992) 675-690.
[210] Reeve, p. 26.
[211] Salton-Cox, 'Syncretic Utopia', p. 115.
[212] Salton-Cox, 'Syncretic Utopia', p. 127. Like Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) *TWGC* has a picaresque plot and involves a series of sexual conquests.
[213] Rex Warne, 'The Uses of Allegory', *Penguin New Writing* 17 (London: Penguin, 1943), 139-148, p.148.

> I've always liked the allegorical thing from the beginning. I mean *Pilgrim's Progress*, Plato, all sorts of things. I certainly was impressed by Kafka – the first book of his I read was *The Castle*. I certainly must have got something from that but I was not doing the kind of thing he was doing at all. His was psychological investigation – and mine was certainly on the whole, political.[214]

Most commentators agree, however, that Kafka is *not* straightforwardly an allegorist. He does not present competing ideas for assessment; and while the persons encountered by his protagonists are generally one-dimensional creations, they embody specific psychological and functional traits rather than representing different political or philosophical opinions. Most significantly, far from employing a pre-established framework indicating how his work should be interpreted, Kafka resists interpretation. And while it oversimplifies matters to claim that Kafka's main concern is psychology – for his characters experience few emotions, and their motivations remain opaque – his work is more inward-looking than most allegory. Perhaps, drawing on a distinction first made by Coleridge, Kafka is more symbolist than allegorist.[215] The Romantic symbol discussed by Coleridge suggests rather than asserts, and shifts unpredictably in meaning. It expresses fundamental truths indirectly, and is hostile (in the words of Jean Moréas) to 'plain meanings, declamations, false sentimentality and matter-of-fact description'.[216] While allegories often incorporate symbols; the allegorical symbol has a more-or-less determinate meaning given by its narratorial role. Nineteenth-century Romantic writers tended to disdain allegory as programmatic; an academic exercise that imposes pre-existing ideas on experience. They constrain the author's imagination, and disregard subjectivity.

[214] Andrew Cramp, *Prose Fiction in the 1930s: A Study of Elizabeth Bowen, Rex Warner and Patrick Hamilton* (PhD thesis) (Loughborough: Loughborough University, 1985). Appendix I: Interview with Rex Warner, p. 360.
[215] Nicholas Halmi, 'Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol' in Frederick Burwick (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 345-358.
[216] Jean Moréas, 'Le Symbolisme', *Le Figaro* (18 September 1886).

In ‘The Allegorical Method’ Warner distinguishes between ‘overt’ and ‘occult’ allegory. The overt variety, exemplified in Bunyan and Swift, is intended ‘to give vigour and vividness to a definite belief’.[217] Occult allegory, in contrast, involves ‘the art of expressing a relation between things which is not ordinarily perceived’. It attempts ‘fantastically to throw some light on what is beyond the ordinary reach of words’.[218] Elsewhere Warner writes that ‘a style of “strangeness” is necessary if one is to fully understand and deal with fundamental aspects of our existence. The ordinary will not suffice…the whole essence of this allegorical technique is to explore rather than define, to hint rather than to state’. Further, ‘the greatest interest in Kafka’s way of writing is that he uses his words and images as exploring feelers or tentacles groping into the kind of reality that is just outside the barriers of ordinary thought and language’.[219] In short, Warner calls ‘occult’ allegory what other writers call symbolism. As a politically committed writer he belongs principally to the overt category, with clearly-defined beliefs and goals. Even so, his inclusion of symbols with no clear-cut meaning (such as the Wild Goose) indicates aspirations towards the occult variety.

CRITICS WHO DENY OR DOWNPLAY KAFKA’S INFLUENCE ON WARNER

Several commentators deny that Warner was significantly indebted to Kafka. A A Devitis, Richard Johnstone and John Coombes agree that Kafka’s concern with individual psychology and ‘existential’ questions is incompatible with Warner’s political commitment.[220] Andrew Cramp additionally argues that Warner’s themes, motifs and narrative devices were taken

[217] Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* is probably a prototype of *TWGC*.
[218] Rex Warner, ‘The Allegorical Method’ in Warner, *Cult of Power*, pp. 109-111. See also Edwin Muir’s introduction to his translation of *The Castle* (London: Secker, 1930) p. ix.
[219] Rex Warner, ‘Reflections on Franz Kafka’ in Warner, *Personal Impressions*, pp. 21–22.
[220] A A Devitis, ‘Rex Warner and the Cult of Power’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 6, 3 (1960) 107-116. R Johnstone, *The Will to Believe: Novelists of the Nineteen-thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). J Coombes, ‘The Novels of Rex Warner’ in Patrick J Quinn (ed.) *Recharting the Thirties* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1996) 221-232.

principally from sources other than Kafka.[221] Shimon Sandbank and N H Reeve accept that Warner borrowed liberally from Kafka. Nevertheless (they argue) while Kafka's symbolism resists interpretation, Warner is a straightforward, readily interpretable allegorist.[222] Joseph Strelka and Maes-Jelinek point to Warner's optimism; his (apparently) confident belief that life has worth and meaning meaning.[223] I take these points in turn.

Warner as a Political Writer

One persistent theme in Kafka criticism is that the fantastical and introspective features of his writing disallowed him as a model for committed political literature – which, critics affirmed, must be realistic and outward-looking. For example, Edward Upward wrote

> I am so glad that at last someone has noticed that *Journey to the Border* is not really a 'Kafkaesque' novel. Insofar as it is influenced by Kafka at all – and I had read *The Castle* before I started writing J to the B – I would say that it is an anti-Kafka novel. Its 'message' obviously (?) is 'stop being fantastic, stop being like Kafka's K, stop searching about within your soul for a solution of your problems and start trying to find a solution by means of action in the external world.[224]

Warner recalled Edwin Muir writing that his work 'seemed, while using some of the methods of Kafka, to be directed in a quite different direction, being rather extravert than introvert'.[225] Several contemporary critics likewise insist that Kafka's supposed apoliticality is irreconcilable with Warner's political commitment. Devitis finds Warner's 'allegorical implications…so undisguisedly political that the reader is impressed rather than horrified…The terrors are not nameless; they are all too easily named'.[226] In other words, the

[221] A Cramp, '*The Wild Goose Chase*: Theme, Symbol, Structure' in A L McLeod (ed.) *A Garland for Rex Warner: Essays in Honour of his Eightieth Birthday* (Mysore, India: The Literary Half-Yearly Press, 1985).
[222] N H Reeve, *The Novels of Rex Warner: An Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).
[223] Joseph Strelka, 'Kafkaesque Elements in Kafka's Novels and in Contemporary Narrative Prose', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 21, 4 (1984) 434-444.
[224] Edward Upward, quoted in Neumeyer, 'Franz Kafka and England', p. 634.
[225] Neumeyer, p. 634.
[226] Devitis, 'Rex Warner', p. 109.

bizarre perils faced by Warner's heroes are 'real'; not the outer correlates of mental states. They are endangered, not by their own fears but by only too real external threats from brutal authorities. And while Kafka suspects that human life is meaningless, Warner believes in social solidarity. He is accordingly 'quite removed from Kafka in purpose as well as theme'. Hence 'No Kafka hero ever reached the point of assurance that Roy does in *The Aerodrome*'.[227] Johnstone concedes the presence of 'specific echoes' of Kafka in Warner – 'endless corridors, enigmatic seductresses, bland inquisitors', and a constantly frustrated quest for meaning – but also finds 'vital differences'.[228] Warner is not meditating upon existential problems but urging specific political action. Cramp takes a similar line: while Kafka writes about 'the powerlessness of man', *The Wild Goose Chase* is 'about the strength of the masses'.[229] Coombes argues that comparisons are 'unprofitable'. While Kafka's Josef gradually internalises the Court's authority, effectively imprisoning himself, George moves 'from innocence to knowledge, from subjective experience to collective action'.[230]

I have two sets of responses to these claims. Firstly, Kafka's very indeterminacy might allow writers to bend him to their own purposes. Julian Symons writes that Kafka's 'apparatus of ambiguity could be used for all sorts of purposes, chronic, tragic, or merely mysterious, and that such a technique might produce anti-Fascist fairy tales of great power and beauty'.[231] Shimon Sandbank agrees, discerning 'an openness' in Kafka, 'a refusal to commit himself to any system of symbols existing in the real world, which, though reactionary from the Marxist point of view, could be made politically useful'.[232] Kafka's

[227] Devitis, 'Rex Warner', p. 116.
[228] Johnstone, p. 48.
[229] Cramp, *Prose Fiction*, p. 235.
[230] Coombes, pp. 222-223.
[231] Julian Symons, *The Thirties: A Dream Revolved* (London: Cresset Press, 1960) pp. 152-153.
[232] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 115.

fiction might, accordingly, provide a 'blank slate' upon which writers could inscribe political messages.

Secondly, Kafka's supposed apoliticality is a myth. *The Trial* and *The Castle* describe numerous features of repressive regimes; and even if these are principally external correlates of inner anxieties, they draw attention to the inseparability of psychological and political concerns. As discussed in Chapter One, Kafka illustrates the conditions that facilitate the emergence of totalitarian regimes – showing, above all, that political power requires the complicity of those subjugated. Fascist ideology aims to persuade individuals that their wishes and those of the State are identical, and its principal method is to manipulate people into collusion with their oppressors. Kafka now becomes a highly appropriate model for anti-fascist allegory – precisely because he shows how his protagonists (and minor characters) are coaxed into surrendering to the will of those who coerce and intimidate them. Despite (occasionally, *because of*) their seeming indifference, Court and Castle secure the compliance of Kafka's protagonists. In particular, they exploit two features of Josef's and K.'s psychology: their capacity for self-deception, and their need to be acknowledged and accepted in their chosen roles. Although they claim to act autonomously, and momentarily resist their oppressors, both constantly seek the approval of officials. In assuming the legitimacy of what seem to be non-governmental institutions, they validate their authority. And it is hardly far-fetched to interpret the authority figures that Josef and K. seek to propitiate as counterparts of Kafka's judgemental fathers. Warner's mention of modern man being 'at the mercy of abstract forces' suggests that he grasped this quality in Kafka. He likewise demonstrates how ordinary people may be simultaneously attracted to and repelled by an authoritarian political ideology. Thus the Air Vice-Marshal takes advantage of Roy's unhappiness and persuades him that in joining the Air Force he is exercising his own free will. The AVM – who

possesses no authority in civil matters – is also permitted to assume a position of unchallenged power over the villagers. Their inertia causes them to drift towards collusion with a would-be dictator. Warner's protagonists differ from Kafka's in their eventful defiance of the authorities, and partial success in defeating them. He offers some degree of resolution – which Kafka denies his protagonists. Further, Kafka *enacts* the process of acquiescence in one's own subjugation in his style and narrative structures, but Warner merely *describes* it. I return to this issue below.

Other Sources

Warner's novels are indebted to an eclectic range of sources. Coombes draws attention to similarities between *TWGC* and Voltaire's *Candide*: which likewise contrasts diverse political arrangements and stresses the uselessness of windbag philosophers and the need for practical action. Cramp notes that Warner's accounts of the oppression of workers resemble that of Wells in *The Time Machine*, and finds parallels with Rider Haggard's adventure tales and silent film comedy.[233] *TWGC*, Cramp suggests, is 'more influenced by the Marx Brothers than…by Franz Kafka'.[234] He quotes Warner's observation that the 'sort of things which delighted me in Kafka I had already observed in Dickens and in Dostoyevsky', and concludes that comparisons between the two novelists are 'pointless', a plot summary of *TWGC* 'refuting [*sic*] the supposed connection'.[235] Cramp seems, mistakenly, to believe that demonstrating the influence of other writers allows him to dismiss that of Kafka; and accepts at face value Warner's disavowal of influence. His most egregious error, however, is that he ignores or misinterprets correspondences between *TWGC* and Kafka's novels. It would be

[233] The huge robotic policemen resemble H G Wells's Martians in *The War of the Worlds*.
[234] Cramp, *Prose Fiction*, p. 234.
[235] Warner, quoted in Neumeyer, 'Franz Kafka and England', p. 634. Cramp, *Prose Fiction*, p. 235.

'silly', Cramp suggests, to describe the rugby-match chapter as Kafka-influenced because it is merely 'a dream sequence'; not one of Kafka's 'nightmare scenes'. But although the episode has dreamlike elements, its chief purpose is to show how the town's authorities manipulate reality to retain their power.

There are also echoes of Bunyan and other English allegorists in Warner's novels. As Glyn Salton-Cox writes, 'In attempting to render *The Castle* intelligible to English readers, Muir appears to have scripted Warner's own reception of Kafka, familiarised through the influence of Bunyan'. Warner in turn 'adopted Muir's bracketing of a Puritan allegory with an Expressionist dystopia'.[236]

Reeve states that *The Aerodrome* has 'obvious superficial resemblances to Kafka' but the borrowings seem 'almost unconscious'.[237] These borrowings comprise a 'mysterious centre of authority on a hilltop dominating a village and the hero's relationship with a barmaid of uncertain allegiance'.[238] Reeve also repeats Warner's assertion that the novel originated in grumblings overheard in a Cotswolds pub about the noise of overflying aircraft.[239] Like Cramp, Reeve tends to assume that finding one specific source excludes the possibility of others. He also suggests that Warner could be counted a left critic of Surrealism, and that spatio-temporal distortions in *TWGC* illustrate how Surrealist methods may be used in a manner wholly counter to their original purpose. Rather than shock complacent people out of habitual thought patterns – and thus prepare the ground for political revolution – they may

[236] Glyn Salton-Cox, 'Syncretic Utopia, Transnational Provincialism: Rex Warner's *The Wild Goose Chase*' in Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (eds.) *Utopianism, Modernism, and Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 111-129, p. 122. Joseph Needham notes numerous parallels between *TWGC* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* (J Needham, *History is on Our Side, a Contribution to Political Religion and Scientific Faith* (London: Macmillan, 1947).
[237] Reeve, p. 76.
[238] Reeve, p. 76.
[239] Interview with Hugh Hebert, *The Guardian* (2 November 1974) quoted in Reeve, pp. 76-77.

habituate people to the absurdities and cruelties associated with totalitarianism.[240] Certainly the fascist government of *TWGC* employs illusion, mystification and obfuscation as means of control. (The Air Force, in contrast, relies on high-flown rhetoric combined with brute force.) Indeed, fascism often promotes incoherence, irrationality and uncertainty as conditions for seizing power. Reeves's arguments are unexceptionable but, again, we are not faced with an either/or choice when considering the respective claims of Kafka and Surrealism. Warner's handling of spatio-temporal anomalies might be attributable to both or either.

Warner's Pragmatism and Optimism

According to Joseph Strelka, 'the Anglo-American mentality is too pragmatic and realistic to create the closed-in, unreal fictional world of Kafka's parables'; and *The Aerodrome* provides an 'un-Kafkaesque, more-or-less happy ending.[241] While Maes-Jelinek concedes that Warner's depiction of 'modern man's sense of isolation, of his uncertainty and bewilderment in the face of a mysterious authority brings Kafka to mind', the writers have 'little in common'.[242] Kafka's Court and Castle remain unknowable in respect of their goals and motivations, and the identity of the highest authority – if such exists – is indeterminate. They are ultimately indifferent to the protagonists, doing little to obstruct them other than negatively. They are accordingly immune to criticism and attack. The identity of Warner's authorities in contrast, are known; and their malign intentions readily intelligible. The three Kings are driven by intellectual hubris; and the Air Vice-Marshal is motivated by disappointment in love to establish a community that eliminates emotional ties. They wish to bend others to their will, to dominate, manipulate and control. Unlike Kafka's authorities,

[240] Reeve, p. 33. Writing in 1937, A L Lloyd argued that Surrealism's interest in exploring the individual consciousness revealed marked bourgeois tendencies. Indeed, Surrealism may become a tool of, rather than challenge to Capitalism (A L Lloyd, 'Surrealism and Revolutions', *Left Review*, II, 16 (January, 1937) 895-898).
[241] Strelka, 'Kafkaesque Elements', pp. 437-438.
[242] Maes-Jelinek, *Criticism of Society*, p. 495.

they are confronted, censured, and capable of being defeated. Further, while Kafka's protagonists are largely isolated in their struggles – most of their purported helpers and advisers being ineffective or unreliable – Warner's are surrounded by like-minded people. He demonstrates that people can work together to oppose tyranny and defeat evil, and that individual angst is alleviated by comradeship and communal action. In short, while Kafka presents the struggle of lonely individuals against meaninglessness, Warner shows how a struggle against identifiable enemies may be alleviated through human solidarity. For Kafka, chaos and instability are existential threats, inherent to the human condition; for Warner, unhappiness is caused largely by man's folly and perverseness and is, in principle, curable.

The points raised above are sound, but offer no grounds simply to dismiss claims that Kafka influenced Warner. As demonstrated below, close parallels and the specificity of many items securely links the two writers. Critics generally fail to appreciate that Warner might have borrowed extensively from Kafka while diverging significantly in his worldview and his desire to convey a determinate message. My distinction between superficial and deep markers of Kafkan influence is intended precisely to avoid this false either/or dichotomy. As argued below, Warner is hardly uninterpretable; and also fails the 'instantiation' test of deep influence.

KAFKAN MOTIFS AND TROPES

Numerous motifs and tropes in Warner's novels are unmistakably derived from Kafka. Both writers portray questors seeking an ill-defined goal, and contrast the ordinary everyday world with an enigmatic domain that the protagonists attempt to penetrate. This domain is the site of power and authority; and also acquires an (admittedly) equivocal transcendental significance. George's quest for the Wild Goose has 'spiritual' overtones and might never be satisfied by

political success alone; and Roy is initially beguiled by the prospect of escaping the moral confusion of the workaday world.

Space and Time

Motifs involving distorted space and time are liberally represented in *TWGC*. For example, George apparently travels 30,000 miles in two days to reach Joe's farm; and Rudolph spent years wandering in the jungle during that same period. Two explanations are offered for such anomalies. Joe indicates that the Government controls space and time, distance depending on 'where you're going to do and whether you're going or coming. Perhaps there are more miles on a backward journey than of a journey forward' (*TWGC*, 83). Government scientists apparently instigate spatio-temporal distortions as a means of controlling the populace. (As noted above, Surrealist devices may help to subjugate people by normalising irrational behaviour.) Similarly, in the rugby-match episode 'some damned mechanism' makes the rubbery field stretch when the 'Pros' are about to score, causing the goal-posts to recede and ensuring that the team loses (209). On another occasion, however, Joe says that 'to compare or to estimate the time taken in accomplishing journeys it was…of the utmost importance to decide from the point of view of what object or person was making the reckoning…(145). Spatio-temporal deviation is now less a matter of science-fiction than of individual subjectivity. Perhaps, like many non-scientists, Warner assumes that Einsteinian relativity theory entails universal *relativism*. More significantly, however, his anomalies are peculiar but not *uncanny*. As discussed in Chapter One, uncanniness requires a realistic framework and restrained style, reassuring the reader of narratorial verisimilitude, before shifting gradually into fantasy. Kafka's 'everyday reality' and dreamworld merge seamlessly. Warner, in contrast, *tells* us that his characters have crossed a frontier into a realm where physical laws

no longer hold sway. The passage hardly undermines self-integrity; George being merely 'out of countenance' when he learns of the immense distance he has apparently travelled (79). In Rudolph's case, pompous self-regard probably triggered a collapse into solipsism, his absurd adventures taking place only in his imagination. More generally, Warner's spatio-temporal irregularities are largely extraneous to the narrative; spurious appendages that mimic Kafka but otherwise do little than impart a vague sense of menace. The explanations given for their presence seem *post hoc* justifications. Kafka's understated spatio-temporal deformations, in contrast, create a sense of stasis that reflects his protagonists' inertia. Trapped in the present, they both lack a past life and have little possibility of developing. We learn much about Warner's protagonists' earlier lives; and, although initially (like George) naïve and immature or (like Roy) arrogant and selfish, they have a capacity for change almost wholly absent in Kafka – and thus some hope of succeeding in their aims.

Warner incorporates numerous extra-diegetic references in *TWGC*. The brother hail from a typically English seaside town, and other characters speak the jovial, chummy language of the English public school and club. The captain of the Pros, for example, exhorts teammates with the words 'Chaps!...We're up against it all right' (*TWGC*, 204). Warner intends, presumably, to anchor his political fantasy in the real world: but the effect is risibly incongruous.

The Aerodrome, superficially the more realistic novel, contains no spatio-temporal anomalies. Nevertheless, related tropes occasionally crop up, such as characters whose outer appearance varies unpredictably. Roy discovers that every time he sees Bess 'she appeared different, so that I could never convince myself that I was sure of recognising her' (*TA*, 69). While Klamm's changing appearance in *The Castle* harmonises with the hypothesis that K. is hallucinating, there is no rationale for Warner's introduction of the trope.

To conclude: Warner's spatio-temporal deviations are not 'uncanny' in the sense proposed by Philip Weinstein. Being imposed (chiefly) by known forces, their causes are, in principle knowable. They do not hinder the subject's coming to know the outer world, nor his ability to orientate himself (and so construct an identity) within that world.

Doubles

Doubling tropes occur frequently in Warner's novels. In *TWGC* the identical laughing policemen (who tickle prisoners to death) are presumably Government-engineered clones.[243] Physical doubles appeal to totalitarians because they exemplify the tenet that the collective matters more than individuals, and make it impossible to assign responsibility. The motif has not been arbitrarily grafted onto Warner's tale, and is integral to his political message.

Kafka's protagonists meet numerous advisers and supposed helpers who prove weak or malign. Likewise, George encounters various people who offer support or advice that turns out to be useless or harmful. These figures are less variations on one type than representatives of distinct types: the lecher (Don Antonio), the ineffectual pacifist (Albert), the morally blind academic (Pothimere), and the hypocrite (Hamlet). As types they more closely resemble Christian's interlocutors in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* than Kafka's shadowy functional doubles. Nevertheless, as in Kafka, doubling structures and patterns the narrative. Rudolph, David and George were preceded in their quest for the Wild Goose by three other brothers, Don Antonio, Albert and Joe. The personalities of each fraternal pair correspond loosely; the youngest brother in each trio alone being trustworthy. Warner's primary motive, however, is to demonstrate the continuing influence of the past on the present. Many of Kafka's doubles are *ad hoc* constructions, introduced to unblock narratorial impasses; and the ensuing

[243] The motif was probably inspired by Charles Penrose's song 'The Laughing Policeman', recorded in 1922.

patterning seems likewise unplanned. Warner, in contrast, introduces doubles to create and complete *pre-established* patterns. He betrays his allegorical propensities by making the structure of *TWGC* conform to predetermined ideas. Nevertheless, while most figures are cardboard exemplifications of ideologies and psychological dysfunctionalities they are clearly differentiated; and, existing fully in the world outside the protagonist, are not his projections.

The Aerodrome contains several cases of doubling and complex interlocking relationships. Roy's position in the Village is mirrored by that of the Flight-Lieutenant in the Air Force. As Roy adopts the values of the Aerodrome, so the F/L adopts those of the Village, taking on the role of clergyman. Both love the same women, Bess, and they turn out to be half-brothers, sons of the AVM. Hence Roy and the F/L are part-functional doubles. The Rector and the AVM – Roy's assumed and real fathers – are psychological doubles in that both are consumed by passion; and the F/L kills both.

Bureaucratic and Legal Motifs

The quasi-feudal relationship between village and town in *TWGC* and between village and aerodrome in *The Aerodrome* resembles that between Kafka's villagers and the castle. The authorities of *TWGC* are simultaneously menacing and absurd, malicious and stupid. They are approached through labyrinthine corridors and hide in dark subterranean chambers with sliding walls and secret passages. They constantly observe citizens and employ quasi-legal procedures to control them. Bob, an apparently harmless itinerant musician, attaches himself to George but, like K.'s dim-witted and childish assistants in *The Castle*, proves treacherous. George worries that Bob has been 'telling stories, probably exaggerated' about him (*TWGC*, 201): an echo of Kafka's 'Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K…' (T, 7). After the rugby-match George is arrested, for no immediately discernible reason, and repeatedly asks his interrogator, the Rev. Hamlet – the counterpart of Kafka's Priest in *The*

Trial – to specify the indictment. When Hamlet insists that he make 'a full and prompt confession', George replies 'I haven't the least idea why I am being tried, if you call this a trial, and I have nothing to confess'. Hamlet responds 'What trial could be fairer than this?...Your own attitude has made it impossible for me to take any course but one'(*TWGC*, 213-214). Despite his protestations, however, George does understand why he is detained; his involvement with revolutionaries presenting a tangible threat to the fascist Government. Josef's 'crime', in contrast, is an ill-defined moral failing for which he is arraigned by the court of the Kantian conscience.

Kafka's protagonists constantly attempt to petition unseen 'higher' authorities. George's persecutors are neither inaccessible nor inscrutable, though they hinder his admittance to the Convent. George is eventually granted an audience with the 'headmaster' – but this man refuses to show his face, communicating only via typewritten notes slipped under a rubber curtain. Sandbank condemns this faintly amusing episode as an 'utterly mechanical' imitation of Kafka, an interpolation of little significance to the narrative.[244]

In *The Aerodrome* Roy penetrates to the heart of an organisation whose leader's identity is never in doubt. *TWGC*, however, borrows the notion of an absent 'final' authority from Kafka with barely any modification. George approaches the three 'Kings' in turn for answers to his questions, but soon grasps that 'each member of the governing class to whom he was introduced was more powerful than the last' (*TWGC*, 227). This is, of course, a restatement of Kafka's Priest's assertion that each doorkeeper to the rooms leading to the Law 'is more powerful than the other' (T, 235). The banal observation that political leaders tend to shun responsibility hardly justifies the borrowing, which entirely lacks Kafka's hint of the esoteric.

[244] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 125.

Warner indicates the near-omnipotence and omniscience of the authorities of *TWGC* by twice reworking Kafka's account of Josef's first cross-examination in *The Trial*. Josef makes his speech in a room whose 'fuggy atmosphere…prevented one from seeing the people at the other end' (T, 53), to an audience seemingly divided into two factions – one opposing, the other supporting his case. In fact all are agents of the Court. In *TWGC* George gives an extempore lecture on Shakespeare to a large crowd of students, many too distant to be visible, and who laugh continually as he speaks – an episode demonstrating the ineffectiveness of liberal literary culture in the face of the destructive irrationality of fascism. Likewise, the rugby-match is played in an atmosphere 'rank with perfume and the smell of tobacco' (*TWGC*, 202); and when the ground expands George cannot see the crowded stands. The outcome is predetermined, like that of Josef's interrogation.

Sandbank notes that Kafka's and Warner's novels share three specific features. First, power is associated with moral corruption, the authorities apparently condoning sexual misbehaviour, even violence. Castle and Court officials routinely take vulnerable young women as mistresses, and law books contain 'indecent' pictures. In *TWGC* policemen rape country girls, the Government distributes obscene photographs, and scientists carry out sadistic experiments. The Air Vice-Marshall of *The Aerodrome* permits airmen to abduct and rape young girls, and encourages casual, loveless affairs. Kafka's protagonists are also exploitative, often initiating sexual relationships in order to gain access to officials. Warner's protagonists, in contrast, understand that while the authorities may regulate sexual behaviour, they cannot control love. The subtitle of *The Aerodrome*, '*A Love Story*', indicates that embracing love amounts to demonstrating freedom.

Secondly, Kafka and Warner both locate the authorities in dilapidated physical surroundings. Josef's cross-examination takes place in a nondescript apartment block in an

impoverished suburb; and George finds the first 'King' in rooms entered via a subway in a filthy, run-down neighbourhood. Although situated on a hill, Kafka's castle is a 'wretched-looking' 'huddle' of small houses. Warner's description of the aerodrome is paradoxical. Like the castle, it stands on a hill, but comprises a low-lying configuration of squat, irregularly-shaped buildings, some located underground. The hangars are camouflaged so that they 'appeared merely as rather curious modifications of the natural contours of our hills' (*TA*, 18). Needless to say, runways and hangars must be sited on level ground: indicating that the aerodrome's location was determined by its symbolic import. In short, Warner resembles Kafka in siting power, not in grand edifices but in ramshackle, unimposing structures. While Kafka's juxtapositions render his authorities ineffable and indeterminate, Warner's purposes are ironic and satirical: behind the seductive façade and grandiose titles lie corruption, hypocrisy and deceit.

Thirdly, all four novels combine shabby environments with hints of 'spiritual' aspirations. The city of *TWGC* has four cylindrical towers with 'brilliantly illuminated' summits; and light streams from slits in the roof (*TWGC*, 153). The munitions storage depot attached to the aerodrome is 'indistinguishable from a country church' (*TA*, 18). While Kafka's intentions remain obscure, Warner is probably satirising the propensity of fascist demagogues to appeal to religious and quasi-mystical beliefs.

Other Similarities and Differences

Warner chooses names for their symbolic import; a practice perhaps borrowed from Kafka but equally possibly from English allegorists. 'George' suggests old-fashioned English values, and the communist farmer Joe may be named after Stalin. 'Roy' derives from Latin *rex*: playfully hinting that the hero of *The Aerodrome* is Warner's *alter ego*.

Warner resembles Kafka in juxtaposing the commonplace and the fantastical, and his characters accept extraordinary events impassively, even nonchalantly. The villagers of *TWGC* treat spatio-temporal anomalies as routine events, and no one seems surprised when the AVM shoots dead the Squire's sister in church. Warner narrates bizarre occurrences in low-key, laconic, language, and mentions mundane details – such as the Rector's observation of a 'crumb at the corner of [the] mouth' of the man he is about to murder (*TA*, 37). Nevertheless, while Kafka's commonplace details have a defamiliarising quality, Warner's merely vitiate his allegorical intentions. He fails to evoke the uncanny at any point, chiefly because anomalies are introduced abruptly, and his characters invariably explain the otherwise inexplicable. Kafka, in contrast, transitions all-but-imperceptibly from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

Kafka's largely mono-perspectival viewpoint, and his rendering of dreamlike, hallucinatory states, are also absent from Warner. The eclectic mix of narrative voices – ranging from public school 'chumminess' to cod discourses on English literature – are not the products of a single consciousness. The frequent shifts in narratorial perspective are signalled not only by changes in style but also by switches between first and third person and by typographical devices, such as chapter sub-headings. The dream status of certain episodes is likewise exaggeratedly stressed. For example, after the rugby-match, George wades through pink cushions thrown at him by the crowd until he is rendered unconscious.

The plot of *The Aerodrome* is driven by problematic father-son relationships. Roy's decision to enter the Air Force is triggered by the discovery that the Rector is only his adoptive father. He finds a surrogate figure in the Air Vice-Marshal: who, he later discovers, is actually his biological father. The Flight-Lieutenant kills both the Rector and the AVM, his real father. The AVM is disappointed in both sons, and both turn against him. This

convoluted tale of dysfunctional relationships approaches farce, and entirely lacks the subtlety of Kafka's account of parental conflict in *Metamorphosis*. Warner merely *tells* us that Roy is angry at being deceived, and any suggestions of a Freudian hinterland of repression and guilt have been excised.

Kafka's writing is characterised by double-thought, ''slipknots' and sudden reversals that instantiate ambiguity and uncertainty. Thus K. apparently misses the chance of achieving acceptance by the Castle authorities by falling asleep at a critical moment. Kafka affirms and immediately negates an opportunity for progress. A similar situation arises in *TWGC*. The clergyman-King almost convinces George that he is willing to make political concessions just as the latter starts to doze off in the stuffy overheated room. Bürgel's 'cheerful and childlike' eyes are echoed in the King's 'twinkling eyes' – but their 'glint of steel' intimates danger to George, and he escapes as guns emerge from the picture-frames (*TWGC*, 229).[245] The empty offer of assistance and the protagonist's sleepiness are borrowed from Kafka. Unlike Bürgel, however, the King is not making self-cancelling assertions – saying that what can never happen, may happen – but is merely playing for time. Since his chains of affirmations and denials could be continued indefinitely, Kafka leaves open the metaphysical possibility that K. would be acknowledged as Land Surveyor. Warner, however, forecloses on uncertainty with a thriller-style conclusion to the episode.

WARNER AND 'DEEP' MARKERS OF THE KAFKAN

Kafka's fiction is conspicuously resistant to interpretation – certainly in respect of the possibility of a coherent, consistent, *global* reading. His 'tamer' successors, according to Sandbank, cannot tolerate 'unknowing', rather seeking 'comfort' in commitment to

[245] Here Warner employs a staple ingredient of thriller fiction: the 'sign of imminent danger' trope.

meaning.[246] I have suggested that the fundamental meanings of Warner's novels are never in doubt; that they *are* globally interpretable. He does, nevertheless, introduce notes of ambiguity. In the prologue to *TWGC* an anonymous narrator reveals that he has reconstructed events recounted in the novel proper after a 'maniac' claiming to be George had returned to the seaside town where the quest began. By implying that the revolution has failed, Warner undermines the optimistic tenor of the novel's ending. Alternatively, the framing narrative might indicate that the main narrative is unreliable, or recounts a dream. For these and other reasons Warner's meaning is equivocal and, occasionally, confused. Nevertheless, his broad message – that human beings have a moral duty to resist totalitarianism – is unmistakeable. He raises doubts principally about the *practicability* of his proposed solution – that is, appealing to people of good will to take collective action – and the *attainability* of his goals. In contrast, although we can *infer* a political message in Kafka's work (concerning the conditions for the emergence of totalitarian thought) his radical epistemic uncertainty, evasiveness and double-thought combine to undermine that message. In doing so, of course, they also instantiate it.

In Warner's terminology, *TWGC* is primarily an *overt* allegory intended to promote socialist ideas. It also contains 'mystical' elements that suggest moves towards the *occult* form. The Wild Goose, for example, is associated with the figure of Christ in the first stanza of the epigraph. This runs 'Wild Goose I made you a symbol of our Saviour, / with your fierce indifference to bye-laws and quiet flying, / your unearthly song, your neck like thunder and lightning, / and your mysterious barbaric love. (*TWGC*, [14]).

[246] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 12. Sandbank writes, of Barth, Pynchon and Vonnegut, 'Their fictive worlds, each in its own different way, insist on an idea, are relatable to a definable concept of the world. In this they are tamer than their stronger precursor' (p. 136).

When each of the three brothers was born, the image of a webbed foot appeared on their mother's stomach. The stigma hints that the Wild Goose is their father. Whenever George subsequently hears or sees wild geese he also hears celestial music. Spending his first night with his lover, Joan, he is transported on hearing the geese's 'baying, clanging, honking', interspersed with 'a clear musical note of an overpowering sweetness' (*TWGC*, 100). Critics disagree on the motif's significance. Maes-Jelinek argues that the Wild Goose symbolises ideals involving 'liberty, equality and justice'.[247] It suggests, perhaps, that socialist ideals harmonise with the natural order of the universe and – as the capitalised 'Saviour' in the epigraph indicates – with Christianity. 'Wild goose chase' also signifies, of course, a quest for something unattainable, a futile waste of time. Perhaps we should infer that true socialism is ever beyond reach and that George's quest is doomed to failure. Alternatively, Warner may be pointing out that the struggle to attain and preserve liberty and justice is a never-ending process, one that must be carried on indefinitely into the future by succeeding generations. The picture is complicated by George seemingly advocating anarchism after his initial victory over the Town. In his final speech he describes his ideal anarcho-socialist society. What the 'old leaders' most respected – 'the frantic assertion of an ego, do nothings…literary critics, moral philosophers, ballroom dancing, pictures of sunsets, the police' – *his* people despise. They attach value rather 'to comradeship, and to profane love, to hard work, honesty, the sight of the sun, reverence for those who have helped us, animals, flesh and blood' (*TWGC*, 440). As Sandbank remarks, this 'puerile mixture of bohemian pose, supercilious (partly

[247] Maes-Jelinek, *Criticism of Society*, p. 478. Herbert Howarth interprets Warner's novel both as a quest for Christian enlightenment (with George representing Sir Galahad in quest of the Holy Grail); and a reworking of the myth of Leda and the swan (Herbert Howarth, 'Pieces of History', *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, II, 1 (Spring-Summer 1958) 54-64.

Audenesque wit) and honest emotion testifies to Warner's and his generation's basic confusion'.[248]

Warner may have had other motives for introducing occult elements into his overt allegory. Perhaps he wanted to bestow an air of seeming profundity upon a frequently naïve, and occasionally ridiculous, tale. Sandbank, however, suggests that Warner is 'misusing' Kafka's absence of commitment to determinate meaning 'to give an aura of nondogmatism to the author's own definite belief'.[249] The elusiveness of the Wild Goose motif signifies aspirations towards 'homage to the true Kafka' but is in fact 'pseudohomage'.[250] In other words, a 'mystical' element has been grafted upon, rather than allowed to arise naturally from, the narrative. Likewise, Warner has introduced the ambiguities mentioned above – the unreliable narrator, George's deeply confused political beliefs – purposefully to undermine his own tendency to seek 'comfort'. Perhaps, in other words, he has attempted to simulate, to *manufacture* resistance to interpretation. Alternatively, we may disregard the relatively few instances of self-contradiction, and make the plausible assumption that the Wild Goose represents the spiritual goals of socialism. In either case – whether Warner's ambiguities are artificially imposed or his meanings plain – *TWGC* fails to resist interpretation.

The Aerodrome seems likewise to offer few interpretative difficulties. Its tone remains resolutely anti-fascist, Warner undoubtedly favouring the messiness of everyday life over the cold-blooded precision represented by the Air Force. Nevertheless, there are significant uncertainties and ambiguities. These arise, not from Kafkan epistemic errors or self-cancelling, but from the contradictions inherent to both individual psychologies and to political ideologies. Thus Roy recognises that 'If there had been guilt in the village, there had

[248] Sandbank, pp. 126-127.
[249] Sandbank, p. 127.
[250] Sandbank, p. 126 and p. 127.

also been guilt at the aerodrome, for the two worlds were not exclusive' (*TA*, 328), and that 'between these two enemies [the Rector and the AVM] there was something binding and eternally so' (335). Both people's personalities and divergent political ideologies contain the seeds of their opposites. Roy comes to understand that the fascist is within; that, in Sandbank's words, the aerodrome is 'immanent in man'.[251] Political ideology and individual psychology are inextricably linked; and fascism need not be imposed from without (as happens in *TWGC*) but arises when tendencies inherent to ordinary people are triggered.

Warner's more sophisticated approach in the later novel reflects changing external circumstances. When writing *TWGC*, he called himself a 'near communist'; but *The Aerodrome* was written during the build-up to the Second World War and after the signing of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact. Warner's equivocations were probably prompted by Soviet Russia's accommodation with Nazi Germany, but also by right-wing voices in Britain calling for appeasement or even active support of Hitler. Indeed, commentators are incorrect in viewing the struggle between Village and Aerodrome as straightforwardly one between liberalism and fascism. Like the speeches of German and Italian fascists of the 1930s, the AVM's praise of modern technology and invocations of 'reason' and 'necessity' obscure rhetorical appeals to decidedly non-rational emotions. Those same fascists also appealed to notions of a prelapsarian pastoral idyll and closeness to the soil of one's native land. In fact there is no hard-and-fast disjunction between the values of Village and Aerodrome. In the 1930s – as now – some manifestations of conservative ideology shaded imperceptibly into fascism.

Kafka enacts his principal themes via certain stylistic and narratorial devices. His oscillations between contradictory claims and constant deferrals of meaning, for example,

[251] Sandbank p. 128.

instantiate the process of self-deception that precedes complicity. Warner's style, in contrast, is positive, assertive, self-confident and declamatory; and he never engages in double-thinking. Far from *representing* how people surrender to the oppressor's will, he merely has Roy *tell* the reader why he was initially attracted to, and subsequently repelled by, the AVM's creed.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the claims of some critics, Warner's two novels display clear signs of Kafkan influence. In addition to borrowing numerous motifs and tropes, Warner resembles Kafka in exploring the interplay between psychology and political thought. Both show how people are attracted to, and half-consciously drawn into compliance with, authoritarian belief-systems. Nevertheless, there are significant differences. For Kafka, the world is unintelligible and, in frustrating and deflecting his protagonists from their goals, he denies the possibility of progress. Warner's world, although initially mysterious, is ultimately comprehensible, and his novels represent movement from uncertainty to (partial) understanding. Kafka repeatedly contradicts himself, and it is impossible to sustain internally consistent interpretations of his fictions as expressive of a particular worldview. Warner, however, offers fairly explicit messages, with a little tacked-on ambiguity. Just as Kafka's resistance to interpretation is embedded in his style and narratorial structures, so is his enactment of the politico-psychological theme. Content and form are indissoluble. Thus Kafka's spatial and temporal anomalies echo and augment his protagonists' tendency to passivity. Warner's, however, are imposed from without by known forces, and merely inconvenience his characters. While Warner is indubitably Kafkan, he is little more than superficially so.

CHAPTER THREE: KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *THE UNCONSOLED*

This chapter examines Kafkan elements in Kazuo Ishiguro's 1995 novel *The Unconsoled* (*TU*). Ishiguro is a highly self-conscious writer who carefully plans and constructs his novels, scattering clues to his intentions throughout. He explicitly acknowledged his influences on *TU*, stating that 'The two authors I ripped off in this case…were Kafka and Dostoevsky. There's a dream-like quality to Kafka, and Dostoevsky builds up to farce but with serious grand themes…I also read Samuel Beckett – mainly the prose'.[252]

I argue here that parallels between *TU* and Kafka's fictions include the depiction of a man slipping between normal and hallucinatory states, frequent instances of distorted space and time, doubling motifs, and similarities in the treatment of socio-political and cultural (and specifically musical) themes. Most importantly, does *TU* reveal *deep* markers of the Kafkan: namely, resistance to global interpretation, and instantiation and enactment of its themes?

As a starting-point, Brian Shaffer notes, correctly, that *TU* does not represent a 'break with the author's earlier fiction'; that the protagonist, like Ishiguro's previous narrators, inadvertently reveals past traumas while seeking to conceal them from himself and (ostensibly) from the reader.[253]

PLOT SUMMARY

The Unconsoled is narrated in the first person by Ryder, a supposedly famous pianist who arrives at a hotel in an unnamed European city intending to give a recital the following day. He believes that his appearance will be of incalculable importance in healing the city's

[252] Maya Jaggi, 'Kazuo Ishiguro with Maya Jaggi' in Brian W Shaffer and Cynthia F Wong (eds.), *Conversations with Kazuo Ishiguro* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008) 110-119, pp. 113-114.
[253] Brian Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) p. 91.

unspecified ‘wounds’. The heralded new beginning is associated with attempts to persuade the alcoholic recluse Brodsky to conduct the city orchestra. The hotel manager, Hoffman, and his wife also have cultural aspirations and worry about their son Stephan’s musical prowess.

Ryder apparently has a wife, Sophie, and son, Boris, living in the city, though he claims never to have visited it before. In the hotel lift Ryder encounters Gustav, a loquacious porter and (perhaps) his father-in-law. Later, in his room, Ryder experiences the first of many hallucinatory states triggered by childhood memories. His parents, we infer, were distant and unloving; and he craves approval to compensate for earlier unhappiness.

Hilde Stratmann, his assistant during his stay, has arranged a programme of events, but Ryder is deflected from the schedule by constantly being asked to carry out additional tasks by those he encounters. Gustav, for example, asks Ryder to mention the plight of hotel porters in his official speech. Ryder agrees to these requests, but is almost invariably prevented from keeping his promises. Most unforgivably, Ryder repeatedly undertakes, and forgets, to help Boris find a lost toy footballer. When the concert finally takes place, Ryder arrives too late to perform, the audience having already departed. He had fantasised his parents attending, ‘peering out of the carriage window, on their faces the first traces of excited anticipation’ (398): but they have never even heard Ryder play.[254] At the close, he makes a half-hearted attempt at reconciliation with Sophie but his apologies are rejected. Ryder sobs theatrically, a display of emotion generated by narcissistic self-pity rather than genuine remorse. He recovers his composure and starts his journey, enjoying a sumptuous buffet breakfast served on a tram as he contemplates his flight to Helsinki. Ryder remains estranged from his parents and his marriage has failed, but complacently persuades himself that what the reader perceives as a series of public and private disasters ‘had not, after all, gone so badly’ (534).

[254] Except where otherwise indicated, all page numbers references (given in parentheses) are to Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled* (London: Faber, 1995).

His bottomless capacity for self-deception ensures that he has learned precisely nothing. He remains *unconsoled*: as do other characters. Stephan disappoints his parents, Hoffman loses his wife's respect, and Brodsky's attempted reconciliation with Miss Collins, his ex-wife, comes to nothing.

The Narrator

Ryder initially seems unaware of his purpose in coming to the city, claims ignorance of his wife and son, and misidentifies strangers as acquaintances from his youth. Nevertheless, I argue, he is not straightforwardly amnesiac but suffers rather a mental disorder characterised by sporadic hallucinatory episodes and delusions. Despite uncertainty as to whether he reports events inaccurately, the confirmatory remarks of other characters allow us to draw two inferences. Ryder failed to meet his parents' expectations and hoped to win their respect, by pursuing a musical career. The price paid is neglect of his familial responsibilities. He bickers constantly with Sophie and ignores Boris's attempts to gain his attention; thereby recapitulating his own childhood experiences. The novel's repetitive structure, with promises made and broken, expectations raised and dashed, suggest that its dysfunctional relationships will be perpetuated indefinitely.

Ryder has many characteristics of the unreliable narrator, including circumlocutory speech and stumbling over contradictions and inconsistencies. Nevertheless, not everything he says can be untrue, and suggestions that the entire novel takes place 'in his head' run counter to Ishiguro's remarks about 'appropriation', discussed below. Rather, Ryder is an exaggerated instance of what we might call the postmodern fragmented self, a man not only estranged from his surroundings but one who narrates a story about himself so replete with self-deceit, evasions, misunderstandings and misperceptions that his self is merely an ephemeral thing, susceptible to every passing whim.

NARRATIVE FORM: HALLUCINATORY STATES

Most commentators describe *The Unconsoled* as 'dreamlike', but fail to unpack the implications of this claim. Barry Lewis, for example, writes 'Ryder is not dreaming within his life; he is living within a dream. Whose dream it is, is not clear.'[255] A H Fairbanks likewise argues that there is no reality external to Ryder's dream-narrative, and infers significant differences between Kafka and Ishiguro. Kafka, Fairbanks writes, introduces only 'a few motifs specific to dreams' and, in *The Trial*, Josef 'recognizes as anomalous the kind of absurdities that escape Ryder's notice'. Kafka is not describing a dreamworld but merely ascribing 'nightmarish aspects to the natural world'. Ishiguro, in contrast 'captures the texture of dream' by employing a first-person narrator' and 'every page' contains 'markedly oneiric events, perceptions, and behaviors'.[256]

These observations seem mistaken. As discussed in Chapter One, Kafka's novels are effectively first-person narratives told in the third-person. And while Josef is often unperturbed – by finding, for example, the Whipper and his victims in the lumber-room twenty-four hours after the initial discovery – Ryder is frequently surprised and exasperated. The claim that Ishiguro's dreamworld constitutes the only reality is vulnerable to objections mentioned earlier: namely, that in that world there would be no means of establishing that events described *are* anomalous. Moreover, as with Kafka's novels, the length and structural integrity of *TU* precludes it being a re-creation or report of an ordinary dream. I propose that *TU* does *not* represent a dream, but rather the narrator oscillating between relatively normal and altered states of consciousness. Literary representations of part-hallucinatory states are

[255] Barry Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) p. 124.
[256] A Harris Fairbanks, 'Ontology and Narrative Technique in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Studies in the Novel*, 45, 4 (Winter 2013) 603-619, p. 611.

unexceptional, but Ishiguro's adoption of other Kafkan techniques and motifs suggests that his primary model was Kafka.

The hypothesis that Ryder slips between normal and hallucinatory states explains many features of *TU*, including distorted perceptions, memory lapses and misidentifications of people and places. It also explains the novel's coherence. Despite repetitions and spatio-temporal anomalies the narrative structure is conventional, moving forward in a linear manner and preserving (broadly conceived) unity of theme, character and action. Such coherence requires Ryder's perceptions to be relatively normal part of the time. The hypothesis also harmonises with Ishiguro's insistence that subsidiary characters exist independently of Ryder.

As noted earlier, dreams and hallucinations (and other anomalous waking states) are not discrete phenomena but lie on a continuum, all being susceptible to Freudian readings. Crucially, Freudian explanations of Ryder's hallucinations make little sense unless assumed to originate in 'normal' reality. Ryder's initial failure to recognise Sophie and Boris, for example, is explicable as displacement of guilt arising from having abandoned them in the real world. And real-world events determine whether they are in fact Ryder's wife and son. Questions about their status lose their significance if there is no waking reality.

Textual analysis supports my proposal. Shortly after his arrival, Ryder lies in his hotel bedroom:

> I was just starting to doze off when something suddenly made me open my eyes again and stare up at the ceiling. I…looked around, the sense of recognition growing stronger by the second. The room I was now in, I realised, was the very room that had served as my bedroom during the two years my parents and I had lived at my aunt's house on the borders of England and Wales…[The ceiling] had been recently re-plastered and re-painted, its dimensions had been enlarged, the cornices had been removed, the decorations around the light fitting had been entirely altered. But it was unmistakably the same ceiling I had so often stared up at from my narrow creaking bed of those days… (16-17).

The room does not merely *resemble* his childhood bedroom but is, Ryder insists, *that very same room*: even though the original furniture is missing and the ceiling has been modified. Now, if he were asleep he would probably dream of his old bedroom exactly he remembered it, not remaining aware of highly specific differences between that and the hotel room. He is not dreaming about his bedroom but overlaying childhood memories with current perceptions of his surroundings. Ryder is experiencing a hallucinatory or a hypnagogic episode; a supposition strengthened by his being on the verge of sleep. Stylistically, Ishiguro transitions all-but-imperceptibly between ordinary and bizarre events: employing, like Kafka, the same matter-of-fact language throughout. By avoiding obvious signals, both writers impart an enigmatic, dreamlike quality to the entire narrative. Nevertheless, two motifs in *TU* are (weakly) correlated with hallucinatory episodes. Firstly, they usually coincide with the frequent mentions of Ryder's fatigue.[257] While Josef and K. are tired much of the time, their fatigue is not correlated with marked shifts in waking consciousness. Ryder is often prevented from sleeping by a ringing telephone, the caller usually being the cajoling and manipulative Hoffman. Kafka's authorities likewise often make their demands via telephone. Secondly, hallucinatory episodes frequently follow a move through a narrow opening in shabby or incongruous surroundings. For example, Ryder follows Sophie 'down a side-alley, whose entrance was little more than a crack in the wall. It descended steeply and appeared so narrow it did not seem possible to go down it without scraping an elbow along one or the other of the rough walls to either side' (14). The passage is reminiscent of Alice pursuing the White Rabbit down the rabbit-hole: especially since Ryder is subsequently invited to a tea-party by Geoffrey Saunders, an eccentric friend from his schooldays.[258] Again, seeking a door leading

[257] There are around 170 allusions to Ryder being 'tired' or 'sleepy' in the course of the novel.
[258] Jeannette Baxter, 'Into the Labyrinth: Kazuo Ishiguro's Surrealist Poetics in *The Unconsoled*' in Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis (eds.) *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 133-143.

to the hotel, Ryder chooses the most imposing, with 'pearl inlays within its deep panels and stone columns flanking each side': only to find that 'the very thing [he] had most feared occurred', that he has opened a broom-cupboard (278).[259]

TU contains numerous clues to the nature and aetiology of Ryder's hallucinations. Although triggered by sleep deprivation, they originate in mental disorder linked to an unhappy childhood. More specifically, Diane Thomas writes, Ryder's character traits are typical of persons with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).[260] He is arrogant and vain, possesses an inflated sense of self-importance, is preoccupied with status, and constantly craves admiration. He is cold and lacks empathy, unable to grasp the damage he causes to others. Ryder's narcissism verges on egomania. He tells Boris, for example, that his next trip may be 'the one that's very very important, not just for me but for everyone, everyone in the whole world' (217).

NPD is often accompanied by transient hallucinatory states and 'splitting', the subject's negative attributes and problems being projected onto other people in order to maintain the illusion of one's own perfection. Subjects also experience dissociative fugue states, short-lived episodes of amnesia.[261] NPD is frequently caused by being ignored or excessively criticised by one's parents. Ryder does not, as some critics claim, consistently deny the awfulness of his childhood.[262] He recalls his dread that an elderly neighbour would 'suddenly freeze in horror' at realising that his parents' display of familial unity was a mere façade

[259] Apart from the Freudian associations of Ryder's cupboard-entering habits, Ishiguro is probably making a joking reference to C S Lewis's wardrobe gateway to Narnia.
[260] Diane Webster Thomas, *Identity, Identification and Narcissistic Phantasy in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro*. PhD thesis (University of East London/Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, 2012). http://roar.uel.ac.uk/3451/1/2013_PhD_Webster_Thomas.pdf, accessed 1 June 2014.
[261] 'Fugue' also refers to a polyphonic contrapuntal musical composition in which a theme is repeated in different keys to form a complexly interwoven whole. *TU* presents fugues in both senses of the word.
[262] Shaffer, for example, writes that Ryder represses all memories of earlier neglect 'via a strategy of denial, fantasy, sublimation, and, later, music-making' (Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*, p. 105)

(264). The incident demonstrates that Ryder alternates between moments of self-awareness and periods when he reconfigures and fabricates his memories.

NPD also explains Ryder's ability to dissociate himself from critical remarks, and his forgetfulness. Visiting the Sattler Monument he reports the contemptuous remarks of his companions, a journalist and photographer ('Don't stop feeding his ego…Remember he's a touchy bastard' (167)) as though directed towards someone else. The mocking antics of these men recall K.'s unruly assistants. And Ryder initially fails to recognise people – most notably, Sophie: though as they talk her face becomes 'steadily more familiar' (33). He is also constantly surprised to find that someone has quickly moved far ahead of him, suggesting that he experiences blackouts.

Ishiguro affirms that *TU* is rooted in 'dream grammar'; and when planning the novel listed twenty-six potential 'Dream Techniques'.[263] Several are employed in the novel, including 'Distorted time frame', 'Unwarranted recognition of place' and 'Partial invisibility'. Ryder often experiences an intensely frustrating inability to carry out some action (akin to the dream sensation of wading through quicksand), and is unflustered by incongruous events – such as travelling many miles from the city only to find himself in the hotel. These are numerous instances of Freud's 'coincidences of wish and fulfilment'. Every arriving bus or tram takes Ryder wherever he wants to go, and Stratmann appears in the lift the moment her name is mentioned. *TU* also incorporates motifs signifying performance anxiety. Ryder arrives at a formal dinner-party wearing only a dressing-gown, and when he stands to speak realises that the gown 'was hanging open, displaying the entire naked front of [his] body' (143). His inability to rehearse for his recital recalls the 'unprepared examination' dream. And when

[263] Stephen Enniss, 'Taking note of the Kazuo Ishiguro archive' (June 15, 2016), https://sites.utexas.edu/ransomcentermagazine/2016/06/15/taking-note-of-the-kazuo-ishiguro-archive, accessed 1 March 2019.

asked to identify himself to acquaintances of Fiona Roberts, a childhood friend, Ryder's efforts to speak produce only 'a slightly strangled grunt' followed by a 'more prolonged, straining noise' (239). He is reduced to making animal-like noises, reminding us of Gregor's 'horrible twittering squeak' when he attempts to communicate in 'Metamorphosis' (M, 11).

The Compulsion to Repeat

Kafka's principal novels are structured around encounters, obstacles and delays. These embody Freudian 'repetition compulsion'; the subject's tendency to re-enact painful experiences. Re-enactment helps to control those experiences but, in delaying choice and action, it defers both failure and possible success – revealing the fear of losing the *absence* of what is supposedly desired. The ensuing psychological stasis is represented, in both Kafka and Ishiguro, by cyclical and recursive narrative structures. *TU* explicitly refers to repetition compulsion, for as a child Ryder forced himself to delay returning to his parents even when overcome by panic. These ritualistic 'training sessions' caused 'a strange mixture of fear and exhilaration', assuming a 'compulsive hold' over the boy (172). Recreating the fear of rejection by his parents, they helped manage his emotional reactions. They are later re-enacted in Ryder's refusal to acknowledge disappointments and dependency. Other characters cling to their failures. Brodsky is afflicted by an unspecified wound – more psychological than physical – that he 'tends' and 'caresses', preventing it from healing. (The motif of the non-healing wound also appears in 'A Country Doctor', but Brodsky's lacks the visceral qualities and morbidly erotic connotations of Kafka's patient's wound.) Brodsky refuses to try to understand its causes, seeking rather distraction in music: '"…heal the wound?...an impossibility…All I want, all I ask for now is a consolation"' (313). Again, Hoffman seems determined that the planned concert, and the opportunity to win his wife's admiration, will

come to nothing. During a self-pitying rant – carefully rehearsed beforehand, as Ryder observes – he describes himself as '*an ox, an ox, an ox*' while thumping his forehead (506). Ryder likewise seeks experiences that (in Natalie Reitano's words) 'serve as a substitute for a loss he preserves in never "properly" mourning it'.[264] He breaks down on realising that his parents will not see him perform, but consoles himself by prompting false memories in a stranger concerning a previous visit by old Mr. Ryder. When Sophie finally ends their relationship, Ryder immediately finds comfort in the splendid meal served on the tram. Such behaviour suggests that Ryder 'does not wish to regain the "origin" [of his unhappiness], but to sustain his distance from it'.[265]

Ishiguro uses techniques resembling Kafka's to explore his characters' attempts to relive and rewrite the past. He differs from his predecessor, however, in indicating the source of his protagonists' anxieties. Ryder has few direct memories of his past; but, in line with Ishiguro's 'Dim Torch' narrative method, we draw inferences about his parents' dysfunctional relationship from scattered hints and from Ryder's projection of past and present anxieties onto others.[266] We infer that Josef and K. have unhappy personal lives, partly because our readings of 'The Judgement' and 'Metamorphosis' cast a shadow over *The Trial* and *The Castle*. The *text* of those novels, however, yields only the conjecture that Kafkan repetition compulsion stems from generalised anxieties about living in an incomprehensible world. Further, for Ishiguro the compulsion is a purely psychological phenomenon and not, as in Kafka, also an analogue of deferral of meaning.

[264] Natalie Reitano, 'The Good Wound: Memory and Community in *The Unconsoled*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 49, 4 (2007) 361–386, p. 375.
[265] Reitano, 'Good Wound', p. 371.
[266] In an interview, Ishiguro contrasts the flashback method – 'like shining a flashlight into the darkness of your past' – with being in 'a completely dark room where someone moves along with a torch like this…' [He moves his hand along the length of the coffee table as if reading with a magnifying glass]' (Dylan Otto Krider, 'Rooted in a Small Space: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', *The Kenyon Review*, 20, 2 (1998) 146-154, p. 152.

SPACE AND TIME

Numerous instances of warped space and time in *TU* constitute a further conspicuous sign of Kafka's influence. In *The Wild Goose Chase* Rex Warner explains spatio-temporal anomalies as hallucinations induced as a controlling mechanism by an external agency, and affecting everyone. In *TU*, however, aberrant perceptions originate – as in Kafka's novels – in the individual protagonist's abnormal states, and (with minor exceptions) other characters notice nothing unusual. Specifically, hallucinations make time appear to dilate and (in consequence) distances to contract.[267] Indeed, Ryder's spatio-temporal perceptions abide by Einstein's special theory of relativity: the faster a body moves through space, the more time dilates, and *vice versa*. Hence Ryder traverses (as he believes) long distances in very short periods of time; typically discovering that he has returned unexpectedly to the city from remote rural locations. For example, Hoffman takes Ryder on a long car journey to a reception hosted by 'the Countess'. Later, Ryder recounts, 'as I looked past the clusters of standing and seated dinner guests, past the waiters and the tables, to where the vast room disappeared into darkness, it suddenly dawned on me that we were in the atrium of the hotel' (148). This instance may be explicable as Hoffmann having driven Ryder around in a circle, but others are not. Ryder takes a long tram-ride into the countryside, ending up in 'a small café – a white bungalow standing alone on the roadside' (192). He subsequently passes through a 'peculiarly tall and narrow' door into darkness, discovering that the café is now in the city centre (203). Ryder traverses real space whenever he leaves the city, but returns – usually to the hotel – merely by stepping through a door or corridor. Since the hotel – presided over by Hoffman, a counterpart of Ryder senior – is the novel's nerve centre, it seems that Ryder cannot escape

[267] Peter Naish, 'Hallucinations in Hypnosis' in Fiona Macpherson and Dimitris Platchias (eds.) *Hallucination: Philosophy and Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013) 121- 147, pp. 129-130.

his father's hold over him. At the close he boards a tram – which expands exponentially in size, accommodating a breakfast-buffet section – but this will probably take him, not to the airport but on a circular journey back to the hotel.

Attempting to reach the concert hall, whose domed roof is clearly visible, Ryder wanders through a labyrinth of narrow streets to find his way barred by 'a brick wall running…across the entire breadth of the street' (387). A folly built by a local eccentric, the wall's presence is explicable in realist terms, unlike the impossible-to-locate entrance to Kafka's Castle. Nevertheless, Ryder's attempts to reach the hall recall Zeno's second paradox, with indefinitely many steps taken towards an unattainable goal.

Temporal anomalies are also common in *TU*. The elevator ride described in the opening pages would occupy only a minute in real time; but permits Gustav to deliver a long speech, occupying four pages, on the tribulations experienced by hotel porters and on whether to hold luggage while ascending. Later, the exhausted Ryder returns to the hotel after a late-night film show and sleeps for no 'more than a few minutes' (117): but, awakening, finds the city centre blocked with traffic and crowds milling around shops and restaurants. He has seemingly stepped back in time. Nevertheless, although time behaves unpredictably *within* the period spanning Ryder's arrival on Tuesday afternoon and his departure on Friday morning, it retains (as in Kafka's novels) its overall direction of travel.

Spatial and temporal anomalies – shrinking distances, unexpected connections between buildings and apparent dilation of time – initially seem to help Ryder, giving him opportunities to rehearse his performance. Caused by aberrant perceptions, however, anomalies hinder and delay Ryder: as they do Kafka's protagonists.

Despite Kafkan echoes in Ishiguro's handling of space and time, there are differences. First, Ishiguro better understands the implications of Einstein's four-dimensional space-time

continuum and the interdependence of the categories. In the cases mentioned we find reliable covariance between temporal and spatial measurements; contracted space being *consistently* correlated with expanded time. Ryder's experiences while hallucinating adhere to Einsteinian principles. (Needless to say, aberrant perceptions and relativity theory are unrelated. Ryder is not taking shortcuts through wormholes in the space-time continuum while hallucinating.) Kafka, in contrast, does not consistently link spatial and temporal anomalies. Second, Ishiguro's spatio-temporal dislocations are associated with the perceived blurring of past and present – a phenomenon dependent on memory, however defective or selective. Memory plays little part in Kafka's principal novels, and *his* protagonists' aberrant experiences do not involve intermingling of past and present. Third, significant discontinuities appear throughout *TU*. Kafka's, in contrast, are relatively infrequent, comprising little more than the Whipper episode, omnipresent Law Courts, and the inaccessible Castle entrance.

David Coughlan argues that Ishiguro's spatio-temporal deviations in *TU* are intended to make *textual* space and time coincide with *actual* spatial and temporal distances described in the text. [268] His account assumes no debt to Kafka. Now, as discussed in Chapter One, Shklovsky distinguishes between *sjužet* (the arrangement of story elements in a text) and *fabula* (the order in which narrated events would happen in real life). For example, in order to make *sjužet* harmonise with *fabula* an author would normally either pause fictional (textual) time and report the long story related by Gustav during the elevator ride in flashback, or have him relate it in a context lacking indications of passing time. Ishiguro, however, disregards the constraints of the situation described: even reminding us during Gustav's speech that he is still in the elevator. Again, a writer would normally describe, however cursorily, a character's mode of travel between far-flung locations. The account might occupy only one sentence,

[268] David William Coughlan, *Written Somewhere: The Social Space of Text* (PhD thesis) (University of London, 2002) and 'The Drive to Read: Freud, Oedipus and Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Parallax*, 22, 1 (2016) 96-114.

putting two locations immediately adjacent in the text. Ishiguro, however, has Ryder walk through a corridor or doorway; as if the locations were *actually* adjacent. Story space is conflated with that of the world. Moreover, the short interlude of darkness parallels the reader's tendency to disregard explanations of how characters physically get from A to B when the journey itself is irrelevant to the narrative. Ishiguro is, Coughlan suggests, mocking realist conventions by making explicit the writer's manipulation of textual space to suit the demands of story-telling. Likewise, he disdains to offer realist justifications for the numerous coincidences that (apparently) smooth Ryder's path through the novel. Coughlan observes that Ryder's name is phonetically similar to 'writer' and visually similar to 'reader'. As writer, Ryder stage-manages events to assist his character; as reader, he enacts the (flesh-and-blood) reader's role.

Coughlan's arguments are persuasive, but the hypothesis that Ryder is, like Kafka's protagonists, part-hallucinating his experiences seems explanatorily more economical. It accounts not only for coincidences and Ryder's anomalous perceptions but for his construction of doubles. It harmonises both with our knowledge of his dysfunctional personality-type and with Freudian interpretations of certain episodes.

'Mind-Reading' and 'Clairvoyance'

Ishiguro employs two mechanisms involving impossible perspectives which (as Robert Lemon observes) allow him to communicate information to which, as first-person narrator, Ryder has no direct access.[269] This information is essential to narrative coherence but, otherwise interpolated, would disrupt narrative flow.

[269] Lemon, 'Comfort of Strangeness', p. 208.

First, Ryder is a ‘mind-reader’ who sometimes learns the private thoughts and memories of others while looking at them. We read, for example, ‘I caught sight of [Stephan’s] profile…and realised he was turning over in his mind a particular incident from several years ago’ (65-66). Second, Ryder has a ‘clairvoyant’ facility, and can eavesdrop on conversations taking place out of earshot and inspect things out of vision. Thus while sitting outside Miss Collins’s apartment he follows a conversation between her and Stephan taking place inside, and views interior scenes. We might interpret the ‘mind-reading’ as Ryder attributing his own thoughts to others; and ‘clairvoyance’ as his imagining scenes and conversations during hallucinatory episodes. The information imparted, however, is consistent with that conveyed elsewhere, and cannot be dismissed as conjecture based on prior knowledge or the product of fantasising.

Lemon suggests that what is lost in verisimilitude by employing these devices is gained in understanding. He may, however, underestimate Ishiguro’s debt to Kafka here. As discussed earlier, Kafka narrates in the third-person, though largely from the perspective of a single consciousness. Ishiguro’s first-person narrative mode entails a mono-perspectival viewpoint that should, strictly speaking, exclude ‘mind-reading’. No independent narrator exists to permit access to characters’ private thoughts. Hence Ishiguro’s innovatory narrative mode combines the viewpoints of first-person intradiegetic narrator, a *participant* in the story, with that of omniscient third-person heterodiegetic narrator; one who *stands above* the story and enters the consciousness of individual characters. (The ‘clairvoyant’ episodes, in contrast, are impossible to rationalise, with or without a heterodiegetic narrator.) Kafka likewise occasionally tells us what characters other than his protagonists are thinking. In *The Castle*, for example, Frieda cries out, ‘“Let K. sleep! Don’t disturb him” so entirely did K. occupy her thoughts’ (*C*, 120). The context precludes Frieda’s thoughts being merely attributed to her by

the protagonist-narrator; but because the third-person narratorial mode takes precedence over the mono-perspectival viewpoint, it *masks* the impossibility of K.'s knowing what passes through her mind.

Ishiguro wishes to avoid jarring the reader with outlandish claims but, lacking the ostensible third-person narrator, must use other means of persuading us to suspend disbelief in Ryder's mind-reading and clairvoyant abilities. He employs two devices, both (probably) borrowed from Kafka. First, Ishiguro shifts seamlessly between possible and impossible states-of-affairs by employing the same flat, impassive tone before, during and after the moment of transition. He does likewise at the point where normal experience shades into hallucinatory states and aberrant spatio-temporal perceptions. Second, transitions occur gradually. In the episode cited above, Ryder observes from his car Miss Collins opening her apartment door to Stephan: 'The door closed behind him, but by leaning right back in my seat I found I could still see the two of them clearly illuminated in the narrow pane to the side of the front door. Stephan was wiping his feet on the doormat, saying: 'I'm sorry to come like this at such short notice' (56). Here the successive gerunds 'leaning', 'wiping' and 'saying' imply a continuity in Ryder's observations that disguises the physical near-impossibility of his hearing the conversation. Subsequently, we read

> I watched [Miss Collins] lead Stephan through a small and tidy front parlour, through a second doorway and down a shadowy corridor decorated on either side with little framed water-colours. The corridor ended at Miss Collins's drawing room – a large L-shaped affair at the back of the building. The light here was low and cosy, and at first glance the room looked expensively elegant in an old-fashioned way. On closer inspection, however, I could see much of the furniture was extremely worn…(56-57)

The unlikelihood (even assuming undrawn curtains and brightly lit rooms) that Ryder can see the initial encounter gradually becomes the impossible as Stephan and Miss Collins move to

her drawing-room – which Ryder can still examine from close-at-hand. As before, the deadpan style encourages us to overlook incongruities: though Ishiguro breaks the spell abruptly, writing 'Miss Collins…seemed about to reply, but just at this point I heard Boris shift behind me in the back of the car' (61).

Memory

Kafka's protagonists seemingly emerge from a timeless void, remembering little, living largely in the present, and showing no overt sign of being haunted by past trauma. Ryder's anomalous perceptions are associated with memories of past events, as he attempts (and generally fails) to understand the origins of his current state. Conventionally retrieved memories – usually concerning his childhood – are unreliable; for Ryder employs displacement mechanisms, omissions and conflation of discrete events to render recollections more palatable. Ishiguro has affirmed that he was exploring 'parallels between memory and dream, the way you manipulate both according to your emotional needs at the time'.[270] In Matthew Beedham's words, distorted memories permit Ryder 'to tile over and wallpaper the painful moments of his past'.[271] For example, Ryder peers through the window of an empty apartment that 'exactly resembled' the parlour of a house in Manchester where he lived briefly. A neighbour testifies that the flat's former residents had argued, the husband behaving cruelly when drunk. The comments presumably refer to Ryder's parents, but *he* chooses to remember time spent in the house as representing 'the hope that a fresh, happier chapter was unfolding for us all' (214). Indeed, while Ryder is largely inert in the narrated present, he misremembers past behaviour as resolute and purposeful. Significantly, rather than straightforwardly

[270] Kazuo Ishiguro interviewed by Susannah Hunnewell, *The Paris Review*, Issue 184 (2008) www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5829/kazuo-ishiguro-the-art-of-fiction-no-196-kazuo-ishiguro, accessed 1 March 2019.
[271] Matthew Beedham, *The Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* (London: Macmillan, 2009), p. 116.

remembering, Ryder *perceives* the site of past events. He is, we assume, hallucinating the resemblance between the apartment and his Manchester home. Likewise (as discussed further below) he projects his memories onto others, recalling his life-story through their eyes. The process yields different versions of himself, allowing him to contemplate past failures at second-hand.

Ryder's conventional memories of the recent past emerge unpredictably; recalling Deleuze and Guattari's comparison of short-term memory with a rhizome.[272] It is, they write, not 'subject to a law of contiguity…it can act at a distance, come or return a long time after, but always under conditions of discontinuity, rupture, and multiplicity...[and it]...includes forgetting as a process'.[273] As discussed below, the hotel is spatially a rhizome, and its function – constantly renewing itself by accommodating an ever-changing clientele – is likewise an analogue of short-term memory. Since the self's integrity depends partly upon stable memories, the mutability and flux of Ryder's memories fractures irreparably his sense of identity. Indeed, during the expedition to the Sattler Monument Ryder effectively ceases to exist, his companions apparently forgetting his presence.

Extra-Diegetic Reality

Kafka's occasional references to extra-diegetic reality (principally, real-world locations) augment the sense of uncanniness. Ishiguro's mentions of existing countries and cities in *TU* do not, in contrast, evoke Adorno's 'shudder of recognition'. Ishiguro may, however, borrow from Kafka the technique of 'distorted ekphrasis': that is, inclusion of extra-textual cultural

[272] 'Short-term memory' may be defined as 'A memory system capable of holding a limited amount of information for brief periods, up to a maximum of 20 or 30 seconds…Its capacity is about seven items or chunks of information…' Further, 'Without short-term memory language would be incomprehensible…' (Colman, *Dictionary of Psychology*, p. 694).
[273] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum. 2004) p. 17.

artefacts modified such that their meaning changes. Ryder watches a version of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in which Clint Eastwood and Yul Brynner play the roles of conventional gun-toting men of action who readily defeat the rogue computer HAL.[274] Ishiguro has transformed Stanley Kubrick's enigmatic film into a traditional Hollywood movie – the reconfiguration being, according to Lemon, a nostalgic move less alienating than Kafka's substitution (in *America*) of a sword for the torch held by the Statue of Liberty. Ishiguro is also enjoying a postmodernist joke at the expense of inattentive readers and setting 'traps' for critics seeking authenticity.[275] The boldness of the putative mistake underlines Ishiguro's playful disregard for verisimilitude: which, as he doubtless anticipated, generated complaints about 'errors'.[276]

ISHIGURO'S DOUBLES

Chapter One discussed four varieties of double found in Kafka: physical lookalikes; 'evil twins'; people sharing salient psychological traits; and people with similar narratorial functions. lshiguro incorporates numerous doubles in *TU*, but most are of the 'psychological' variety. They are constructed by Ryder, versions of himself 'appropriated' from people encountered. Since they re-enact his past hurts, and hold similar anxieties about the future, they offer self-therapy and (more saliently) self-justification. From Ishiguro's perspective, doubles can also reveal recurring patterns in human behaviour.

As with Kafka, doubling generates patterned relationships between characters, and partly shapes narrative structure. Since Kafka narrates from a largely mono-perspectival viewpoint,

[274] The lead characters in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film are in fact played by Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood.
[275] Richard Robinson, 'Nowhere, in particular: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* and Central Europe', *Critical Quarterly*, 48, 4 (Winter 2006) 107–130, p. 108.
[276] For example, Ned Rorem complained that Ishiguro's account of *2001* involved an 'editorial oversight' (N Rorem, 'The Novel and Music: Notes on Kazuo Ishiguro', *Yale Review*, 84, 2 (1996), p. 157. Ishiguro subsequently decided that devising an alternative version of *2001* was 'a bad mistake': 'It's the one place in the book you can actually point to where there is a difference between the book and reality in real life' (Krider, 'Rooted in a Small Space', p. 148).

these relationships form a 'hub-and-spoke' configuration, the protagonist being at the hub of discrete links (spokes) between himself and subsidiary characters. The latter interact only weakly among themselves. Because many of Ishiguro's patterned relationships do not involve the protagonist, they form a complex 'decentralised' system that evidently required careful planning.

Ishiguro's combination of doubling and patterning has few obvious literary ancestors other than Kafka. (Other possibilities are Dostoevsky and Iris Murdoch's later novels: themselves part-modelled on Kafka.[277]) While writers commonly mirror one character's traits in another's, instances of *multiple* psychological/functional doubling within a single text are rare. Dickens, for example, draws minor characters whose virtues and vices reflect those of his protagonists, but only one or two of each type appears in each novel. Kafka, in contrast, introduces numerous instances of (for example) self-professed advisors and obstructive petty officials. He does so principally to resolve narrative impasses; any 'message' (about, say, the damaging consequences of unreflective conformity to roles) being conveyed only indirectly. Ishiguro's doubles, however, demonstrate unambivalently that such conformity leads to self-ignorance and self-deception, and hence the repetition of harmful behaviours. Thus Ryder's narcissism originated in his father's disregard of the child's emotional needs, and is recapitulated in his (Ryder's) treatment of Boris.

Appropriation

The closely related phenomena of projection and appropriation both result in fabricating new versions of oneself. Thus Ryder *projects* upon Brodsky his fears of how he might end up, but

[277] Peter J Conradi, 'Holy Fool and Magus: The Uses of Discipleship in *Under the Net* and *The Flight from the Enchanter*' in Justin Broackes (ed.) *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 119-134, p. 120.

also *appropriates* from the elderly musician, creating (mental) doubles of both himself and his (Ryder's) father. Projection is motivated by repressed emotions; appropriation by the desire for self-understanding.[278] Ishiguro writes

> …Ryder appropriates the people he encounters to work out parts of his life and his past…So this is a biography of a person, but instead of using memory and flashback, you have him wandering about in this dream world where he bumps into earlier, or later, versions of himself…They are to some extent other people, but he gives a reading of their life in such a way that they're memories of how his own childhood was, or projections of how he fears he might end up. I don't want to say literally that Stephan is Ryder when he was young, and Boris was Ryder as a kid, but I wanted to create a world where you get all these different points in his life…Our view of other people is often shaped by our need to work certain things out about ourselves. We tend to appropriate other people – more than we perhaps care to admit. We perhaps don't see them for what *they* are; they become useful tools.[279]

Elsewhere he confirms that Ryder meets 'echoes of his past, harbingers of his future and projections of his fears about what he might become.[280] In similar vein, Shaffer notes that Ryder 'projects his own story' onto persons who live 'a pathologically self-destructive personal life that significantly mirrors Ryder's own'. They form 'conduits for Ryder to remember and forget, judge and censor his own past'.[281] Each belongs to a triangular configuration of parents (or parental figures) and child (or surrogate): (i) Gustav, his daughter Sophie and her son Boris; (ii) Hoffman, Christine, and their son Stephan; (iii) Brodsky, Miss Collins and Bruno, a dog; (iv) Ryder's parents (absent from the novel) and Ryder; and (v) Ryder himself, Sophie and Boris. Each set of relationships mirrors the others, despite their dysfunctional nature having different causes and symptoms. Hoffman and Christine are dissatisfied with Stephan's perceived lack of musical prowess, while Ryder is apparently a

[278] Ishiguro and various commentators use the terms indiscriminately, as the following quotations demonstrate.
[279] Jaggi, 'Kazuo Ishiguro p. 114.
[280] Sybil Steinberg, 'Kazuo Ishiguro: A Book About Our World', *Publishers Weekly* (18 September 1995), 105-106, p.105.
[281] Shaffer, *Understanding Kazuo Ishiguro*, pp. 93-94.

successful pianist. Although impelled to seek his parents' approval, he takes little interest in Boris's future. Hence Ishiguro's parent-child relationships do not straightforwardly echo Kafka's portrayal of protagonists consumed by guilt at disappointing the father's expectations.

Ishiguro's doubling patterns are highly complex, with multiple two-way connections straddling different time-periods. The horizontal, synchronic tripartite relationships described above – with traits and roles repeated across currently existing persons – is overlain by vertical or diachronic patterns. One involves Ryder and people who instantiate aspects of his past or future selves. We see three stages in his life mirrored in others: the aspiring young musician in Stephan; the pompous middle-aged composer in Hoffman; and the drunken, lonely old fool that he fears becoming in Brodsky. Another diachronic pattern involves different generations of one family, with old Mr Ryder's neglect of his son continued in Ryder's neglect of Boris.

In appropriating Ryder tries to rid himself of painful thoughts and memories by redrafting them, as it were, in a new context. His narcissistic self-regard ensures that he appropriates only from those whose character traits and experience closely parallel his own. He consequently constructs versions of himself that repeat his mistakes. Appropriation does not necessarily aid self-awareness. The literary contrivance involved in creating doubles thus reflects a socio-psychological fact: that damaging patterns of behaviour tend to be repeated down through the generations.

Mirror motifs appear frequently in *TU*. Ryder sits in the hotel bar 'staring at the mirrored wall' where he and the room behind are reflected (24). Immediately Stephan – soon revealed as one of Ryder's doubles – approaches, presumably reflected in the mirror. Hoffman and

Brodsky obsessively examine themselves in mirrors: perhaps – as a Lacanian reading would suggest – seeking reassurance of their stabile self-identity.[282]

The notion of appropriation requires its objects to exist independently from the subject *in some form*: though this might be (for example) in a literary work. Ishiguro insists that Ryder appropriates from persons in the 'real world' of the novel; adapting but not inventing their characteristics. He uses subsidiary characters 'to tell you the story, about his own life'; but they are not solely mental constructs. Hoffman and Brodsky, for example, resemble Ryder in respect of their parental roles and musical aspirations but 'exist in their own right'.[283] Appropriation yields another species of double. Boris, the actual child in the novel, and Ryder's son, a constructed entity, are doubles of each other.

Three features of *TU* buttress Ishiguro's account of appropriation. Firstly, subsidiary characters interact amongst themselves, independently of Ryder's experience of them. He plays no part, for example, in Brodsky's early relationship with Miss Collins. Minor figures in Kafka's principal novels, in contrast, are generally single-trait figures with little backstory; barely interact; and vanish when no longer connected with the protagonist. Secondly, forgetfulness extends in both directions in the novel. Granted that Ryder is, in Reitano's words, 'beset by an amnesia he barely acknowledges', why would *constructed* characters suffer amnesiac episodes?[284] Why, for example, would an imagined wife fail to recognise Ryder as her husband, as does Sophie? Thirdly, only someone slipping between hallucinatory and normal states (and not in the permanent dream-state proposed by some commentators) could latch onto real people.

[282] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience' in J Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans Alan Sheridan. (London: Associated Book Publishers, 1997).
[283] Oliva, Peter, 'Chaos as Metaphor: An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro' in Shaffer and Wong, *Conversations*, 120-124, p. 123.
[284] Reitano, 'Good Wound', p. 361.

Differences between Kafka and Ishiguro

By echoing features of his past, Ryder's doubles obviate the need for flashbacks that would impede the narrative's forward momentum.[285] Kafka's doubles fulfil no such function, for everything happens in the present consciousness of his protagonists. It does not follow, as Gary Adelman supposes, that Kafka's doubles have no independent existence. Adelman correctly states that while Kafka puts 'emotional and mental events on the same plane of objectivity as external events', Ishiguro works with 'a double level of consciousness: that of the external world as seen by the subjective, or solipsistic dream narrator, and that of the narrator's core personality as portrayed…by the other characters'.[286] The hallucination hypothesis, however, assumes Kafka's doubles to be based upon real persons: in which case Kafka and Ishiguro are more alike than Adelman allows. Nevertheless, Kafka's minor characters barely exist outside the protagonist's consciousness. Since they lack a past, and the protagonist lacks memories, Kafka's doubling patterns are relatively straightforward. As indicated above, Ishiguro's become fiendishly complex.

Kafka's protagonists are versions of *the author himself*, originating in the self-induced hypnagogic states in which he habitually wrote. Ishiguro, however – a writer hyper-aware of his own thought processes – claims deliberately to create central characters unlike himself.[287] Since most of his doubles are versions of Ryder, they are psychological rather than functional doubles. Indeed, *TU* contains no characters corresponding to Kafka's helpers and advisors, and Ryder is consequently an even lonelier figure than Josef K.

[285] Wai-chew Sim, *Globalisation and Dislocation in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* (PhD thesis) (University of Warwick, 2002), p. 66.
[286] Gary Adelman, 'Doubles on the Rocks: Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*' *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 42, 2 (2001) 166-179, pp. 168-169.
[287] In an interview, Ishiguro affirms, 'I've always found it easier to be intimate and revealing with central characters who are not like me' (Bill Bryson, 'Between Two Worlds', *New York Times* (29 April 1990, Section 6, p. 39).

Finally, doubling in *TU* is strongly correlated with self-fragmentation of the kind manifested in mental illness. I argued in Chapter One that Kafka's protagonists' tendency to project character traits does not straightforwardly create doubles of *themselves* – though those projected upon may become doubles of *each other*. Consequently, perhaps, the protagonists show few obvious signs of psychiatric disorder. Ryder, in contrast, systematically seeks signs of himself in others, recreating them as his doubles. But because the constructed doubles are themselves 'failures', having made mistakes resembling his own, the disparity between his idealised self and the 'real', deeply flawed self is reflected back, magnified. Ryder's narcissistic self-esteem does not permit him to learn from the experience, and he retreats into delusion, hallucination and amnesia. Locked in a vicious circle, his mental condition is *exacerbated* by the act of appropriation. External pressures also contribute to his problems. The tedious work and bureaucracy that burden Kafka's protagonists are now augmented by anxieties associated with 'celebrity' and consumerist culture. In Terry Eagleton's somewhat hyperbolic language, consumerism has 'scattered our bodies to the winds as so many bits and pieces of reified technique, appetite, mechanical operation or reflex of desire'.[288] Contemporary culture is particularly prone to incite mimesis, and hence projection and doubling. Ryder wishes to emulate famous globe-trotting musicians; but in creating doubles of questionable talent reveals deep-seated anxieties about his own abilities.

[288] Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism', in Patricia Waugh, (ed.) *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 158.

STYLE, STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Ishiguro's Style and Narrative Structure

Kafka and Ishiguro both report surreal, bizarre and comically absurd events in a sober, reticent, formal style. Ishiguro's all-but-imperceptible transitions from everyday to anomalous situations (in effect, from normal to hallucinatory states) require, like Kafka's, undemonstrative language at every stage. In the episode cited above, Ryder discovers that a roadside café is connected with one many miles away. He is unfazed, affirming 'For indeed, I had at that moment remembered that this Café and the one in which I had left Boris were in fact parts of the same building' (203). The pompous phrasing ('For indeed', 'at that moment', 'in fact') distances Ryder from his emotions.

Ishiguro's characters speak, like Kafka's, in a circuitous, repetitive manner, constantly qualifying their remarks. For example, Miss Stratmann tells Ryder

> ...we've also respected your wish to meet with Mr Christoff himself. Given the circumstances, we perfectly appreciate your reasons for requesting such a meeting. Mr Christoff, for his part, is delighted, as you can well imagine. Naturally he has his own reasons for wanting to meet you. What I mean, of course, is that he and his friends will do their utmost to get you to see things their way. Naturally, it'll all be nonsense... (12)

The Kafkan propensity for virtually simultaneous assertions and denials is less pronounced, however; and Stratmann's final remark does not amount to a straightforward reversal or slipknot.

Richard Robinson observes that Kafka and Ishiguro both manifest 'a similar formal interdependence of blankly non-figurative voice and digressive structure'.[289] Both writers'

[289] Robinson, 'Nowhere', p. 126.

protagonists are hindered from achieving their goals by the long-winded detours of interlocutors. Thus Ryder is constantly waylaid by supplicants who meander through interminable speeches about trivial matters. In both cases, elaborate circumlocutions and fastidious qualifications echo and accentuate the repetitive structure of the narrative. Ryder is worn down as he listens to tiresome busybodies relating their life stories in mind-numbing detail. Many events and reported conversations are likewise entirely inconsequential to the plot. Because these elements retard narrative flow, the reader is wearied – especially since her expectations are repeatedly raised and dashed. Ishiguro is not merely narrating but *recreating* Ryder's experience. Language constantly twists back on itself, postponing resolution and closure, and echoing the mental (and sometimes physical) labyrinth through which characters stumble.

Ryder's stilted vocabulary, with its archaisms and clichés ('not a little' being a favourite expression); and his fondness for double negatives and subjunctive forms, all suggest detachment; reluctance to commit to what is asserted. Even when Ryder acknowledges emotional distress, he distances himself as narrator from himself as subject. He writes, for example, that on hearing of his parents' failure to attend the concert 'I collapsed into a nearby chair and realised I had started to sob' (512). His evasive, self-deceiving language becomes habitual, hindering his ability to understand himself. Echoing Wittgenstein, we might conclude that his constrained language sets the limits to his world.[290]

For both writers, a periphrastic style complements narrative forms based around delay, adjournment and deferral. Like Kafka's' novels, *TU* possesses a repetitive structure involving tasks undertaken and plans initiated only for their accomplishment to be thwarted or endlessly

[290] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans C K Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1922) section 5.6, p. 74.

deferred. Nevertheless, while Kafka's protagonists are obstructed principally by human agents, Ryder is hindered by diverse, seemingly random, obstacles. He takes on impossibly many commitments, is constantly distracted from the task in hand, encounters physical barriers, and experiences extreme tiredness. Moreover, there is no hint of a controlling intelligence – an anonymous, near-omnipotent and omniscient 'they' – among the city councillors, for example. Ryder is certainly manipulated by persons trying to win him to their side, but never threatened or denied access to anyone. While Kafka's protagonists are rarely directly intimidated, the Court and Castle authorities exude an air of menace just because their purposes remain unfathomable. Ryder's irritants, in contrast, have transparent aims.

Ishiguro's 'Cognitive Realism'

As noted above, Ryder might be considered both reader and writer of Ishiguro's narrative. *Qua* writer Ryder creates the world of *TU* incrementally; *qua* reader, he discovers things at the same time as we do. Indeed, Ishiguro resembles Kafka in unfolding the novel's milieu bit-by-bit rather than implying (like the realist writer) that it already exists, complete in itself. He scatters clues to the location throughout the novel, enabling us gradually to assimilate knowledge of the city. Likewise, Ryder slowly acquires information – much of it unreliable – about what is happening around him. For example, he goes to the Old Town to find someone identified only as Gustav's daughter. Initially he sees no one matching the description given, but (we read) 'turning, I saw a woman sitting with a young boy waving to me from a nearby table...I could not understand how I had failed to notice them earlier' (32). Soon the woman's face 'had come to seem steadily more familiar' (34); and eventually Ryder realises that she is his wife, Sophie. We should not conclude, of course, that he and the reader are in the same position, for 'normal' persons do not perceive as Ryder does. The reader's acquisition of

snippets of information as textual space expands and textual time advances cannot be equated with an account of the fragmentary and unreliable perceptions of a hallucinating amnesiac. Rather, Ishiguro offers a plausible portrayal of the symptomology of a profoundly disturbed man. Its cognitively realistic qualities are of a different order from those found in Kafka: principally because we *know* the causes of Ryder's mental state and *know* that he hallucinates almost constantly. Kafka's protagonists, in contrast, are relatively 'normal' much of the time; and *his* cognitive realism is more closely aligned with our everyday experience.

The Postmodern Uncanny

TU displays several features of the Freudian uncanny: including spatio-temporal discontinuities, unmappable terrains, and uncertainty as to whether events take place only in the protagonist's imagination. In Ryder's encounters with persons and places from the past, half-hidden memories are brought unexpectedly to the surface. The familiar gradually emerges from the unfamiliar, and *vice versa*. The novel also bears signs of the *postmodern* uncanny – characterised by what Anthony Vidler calls 'the self-conscious ironization of modernism by postmodernism.'[291] Here our awareness of defamiliarising techniques diminishes the *frisson* that accompanies the Freudian uncanny. Ishiguro's predilection for pastiche, and his self-conscious jokes – such as the alternative version of *2001* – tend to subvert the process of defamiliarisation. Further, *TU* defamiliarises chiefly via retarding techniques: and not (as Kafka also does) by conveying the inherent strangeness of *things*. I noted earlier that Kafka's 'photographic' way of seeing defamiliarises its objects, rendering them uncanny. In opening up unfamiliar perspectives, the photograph implies the provisional

[291] A Vidler, The *Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) p. 9. See also Roberta Rubenstein, 'Doubling, Intertextuality, and the Postmodern Uncanny: Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 9, 3 (1998) 245-262.

nature of our grasp of reality, and hence the possibility of worlds lying behind appearances. It defamiliarises, however, only if it shares the clarity of our everyday perceptions. Fictional writing likewise requires a sharp initial focus, such as we find in Kafka. Ishiguro's lack of specificity, in contrast, means that all remains nebulous in his world; that we form only hazy mental images of characters and places. As Amit Chaudhuri points out, 'the world hardly impinges on [Ishiguro's] dreamscape, except as generalised settings and landmarks – a lake, a motorway, a theatre'.[292] Ishiguro often provides *detail*: but this is not to be confused with *particularity*. For example, café customers eat 'hungrily with long wooden spoons' from 'steaming bowls of what looked to be mashed potato' (192); and the ritualistic Porter's Dance is described at length (396). The buffet-breakfast served on the tram includes 'scrambled eggs, fried eggs, a choice of cold meats and sausages, sautéed potatoes, mushrooms, cooked tomatoes...a large platter with rolled herrings and other fish preparations, two huge baskets filled with croissants and different sorts of rolls, a glass bowl of fresh fruit, numerous jugs of coffee and juices' (534). This may be an ironic response to the meal prepared by Gregor's sister: 'old, half-decayed vegetables; bones from last night's supper covered with a white sauce that had thickened; some raisins and almonds; a piece of cheese that Gregor would have called uneatable two days ago; a dry roll of bread…'(M, 29). Nevertheless, while Kafka invokes all our senses – visual, tactile, olfactory, gustatory and even auditory (we imagine the roll cracking when bitten into) – Ishiguro merely writes that 'everything one could wish for' is provided, and itemises various foodstuffs. He fails to evoke their distinct perceptual qualities, their concrete particularity, their *presence*.

Meeting one's double is one cause of the Freudian uncanny, but Ryder does not so much encounter doubles as create them through appropriation. These are, moreover, broadly

[292] Chaudhuri, 'Unlike Kafka', p. 31.

'psychological' versions of himself, family members and acquaintances; and do not include the uncanny near-duplicates and physical lookalikes prevalent in Kafka's fictions.

MUSICAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THEMES

I argued above that Kafka is a profoundly political – though not, perhaps, ideological – writer. Kafka's challenge to (global) interpretability resists appropriation and assimilation by the instrumental rationality underlying existing socio-economic arrangements. More specifically, the novels represent individuals made complicit in their own oppression by near-totalitarian authorities. Some commentators consider that *TU*, in contrast, bypasses political concerns. Echoing Lukács's critique of Kafka, Chaudhuri argues that Ishiguro's novel lacks the historical particularity required of vehicles of socio-political critique. Further (we might add) its devices and motifs seem unconnected with matters involving power and authority. For example, feelings of spatio-temporal dislocation in Kafka's novels are often correlated with the protagonists' encounters with officials, and suggest their sense of alienation and disempowerment. The origins of Ryder's distorted perceptions, in contrast, seem to involve a primarily individual pathology.

I suggest, nevertheless, that political and social themes are central to *TU*. In particular, Kafkan non-realist techniques of defamiliarisation and disorientation signify Ishiguro's wish to alert the reader to allegorical and symbolic elements in his novel. It approaches the condition of Adorno's 'autonomous' art, subverting realist conventions through experiments in form and challenging attempts to control its signification by assigning determinate meanings. Additionally, the debate between adherents of musical tradition and innovation in *TU* is a proxy for ideological conflict. *Contra* Chaudhuri, *TU* is not set in an apolitical atopia, for there are numerous indications of a geographical setting with distinctive political

associations. And while Ryder's hallucinatory episodes are ultimately attributable to NPD, they are often triggered by contact with authority figures.

The Role of Music

There are numerous parallels between Ishiguro's and Kafka's treatment (in the shorter fictions) of musical themes. Firstly, both writers prevent, delay or subvert musical performances in their narratives: offering, Robert Lemon suggests, a 'self-referential acknowledgement of the incommensurability of literature and music'.[293] The plot of *TU* is structured around Ryder's repeatedly thwarted attempts to rehearse his piano concert. By refusing to permit his performance, Ishiguro avoids an inevitably inadequate account of a medium that resists verbal description. Likewise, in Kafka's 'Investigations of a Dog' the seven canine 'musicians' remain 'almost determinedly silent' (M, 88). The narrator of 'Description of a Struggle' intends to play the piano; but 'two gentlemen seized the bench and, whistling a song and rocking [him] to and fro, carried [him] far away from the piano to the dining table'.[294] This, Lemon writes, is 'an ironic, slapstick literalization of the notion that music elevates and transports the listener'.[295] It is echoed in *TU*, for Hoffman sometimes '"sits [Brodsky] up in front of the piano like he's some manikin, and [he] stays there for hours gently swaying on the stool without touching a note"' (58-59). Brodsky is nearly prevented from conducting when a surgeon 'amputates' his wooden leg after a bicycle accident. The conductor subsequently strides onto to the concert platform using an ironing-board as a crutch: deferred performance again being accompanied by physical comedy. Ishiguro also

[293] Lemon, 'Comfort of Strangeness', p. 209. Stephen Benson makes similar points (S Benson, *Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).
[294] F Kafka, 'Description of a Struggle', in *The Penguin Complete Short Stories of Franz Kafka* (London: Allen Lane, 1983) p. 39.
[295] Lemon, 'Comfort of Strangeness', p. 209.

declines to describe the musical pieces mentioned. All are fictitious, precluding conventional responses to actual works.

Both writers expose the antithetical impulses aroused by music. In 'Metamorphosis' Gregor finds in his sister's violin-playing the 'unknown nourishment' he craves, now understanding that he is no 'mere animal'. Here Kafka presents the romantic vision of music as sublime, an intimation of the transcendent. Nevertheless, Gregor's musings rapidly lead to fantasising about kissing his sister's bare neck. In 'Investigations' the canine narrator finds that music 'robbed me of my wits, whirled me around in its circles…' (M, 89). In short, music arouses both ethereal and earthy passions: for which reason Schopenhauer argued that of all the arts, it best reflects the contradictory and multifaceted nature of the will to life.[296] We find a similar dichotomy in *TU*. Brodsky talks constantly of the consoling power of music; but his performance 'almost perversely [ignored] the outer structure of the music…to focus instead on the peculiar life-forms hiding just under the shell'. The effect is 'slightly sordid' (492). Again, seeking a music practice-room, Ryder enters what is evidently a toilet cubicle into which a piano has been jammed. Realising that someone is in the adjacent cubicle, Ryder freezes; later telling Hoffman 'I've never been able to practise unless I had complete, utter privacy' (341). In tacitly equating playing the piano with using the toilet, Ishiguro subverts conventional ideas about the spiritually uplifting power of music. The scatological humour probably owes more to Freud than to Kafka.

Kafka and Ishiguro are suspicious of over-intellectualising music. The narrator of 'Investigations' cannot understand the 'science' of music; and Ishiguro satirises academic music discourse by inventing a comically absurd critical vocabulary, such as 'pigmented

[296] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* v. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 285.

triad' (197), together with pretentious titles for pieces by fictitious composers: such as Mullery's 'Asbestos and Fibre' and Kazan's 'Glass Passions'.

Most significantly (because comparable instances in literary history are rare) Kafka and Ishiguro are alike interested in music's social role. In 'A Hunger Artist' and several other tales Kafka takes up that recurring theme in German literature, the assumed conflict between art and social life. When facing a (probably self-imposed and illusory) dilemma – a choice between pursuing his musical ambitions and honouring familial commitments – Ryder chose art. [297] He apparently believes himself set apart by his vocation, and released from societal obligations. There are numerous hints, however, that he is self-deluded and his abilities unexceptional. In Kafka's tale the eponymous Josephine the Singer – a mouse – likewise considers herself to possess unique musical talents: but merely squeaks. Nevertheless, Ryder and Josephine are praised effusively by their audiences, largely because, as 'artists', they are believed to enrich the life of the community, and speak on its behalf. Kafka's tale examines the restorative potential of music, its ability to heal divisions and foster a sense of communal identity. Ishiguro treats precisely the same issues. Not only may music console individuals but, Ryder is assured, his successful performance will help to cure the social and cultural malaise that afflicts the town.

Abandoning oneself to music carries risks. Ryder considers Brodsky's performance to have made audience-members 're-assess themselves and their community in some profound way' in a mood of 'mutual celebration' (586). We suspect, however, that the audience has been

[297] Ryder's choice may have been inspired by the case of 'Gauguin', in Bernard Williams's famous defence of moral luck. Like Ryder, the Gauguin of the thought-experiment must choose between family and his artistic vocation; and whether he makes the right moral choice is (according to Williams) a matter of luck. See Bernard Williams, 'Moral Luck' in Daniel Statman (ed.) *Moral Luck,* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993) 35-55.

drawn together only temporarily by their emotional reaction to the music, and that it is being manipulated for political ends.

Kafka's and Ishiguro's treatments of the social status of music differ slightly. Gregor's impoverished family must take in lodgers after his transformation, and cannot afford to send his sister to a conservatory. Nevertheless, their appreciation of music connotes aspirations to bourgeois respectability; a struggle to distinguish themselves from both the working-class and the vulgar *nouveau riche*.[298] Virtually every principal character in *TU*, in contrast, belongs to a musically-appreciative middle class.

Music and Ideology

One manifestation of the unspecified malaise suffered by the townsfolk involves conflicting attitudes towards musical tradition and innovation; attitudes that are surrogates for ideological differences. Both Brodsky and the composer Christoff have declined in status, their decline mirrored in the town's low collective self-esteem. Christoff's music is described as having 'a sense of structure', but 'functional' and 'cold' (502). We infer a rational and ordered, a *modernist* style. The performances of the alcoholic Brodsky, in contrast, are colourful, powerfully emotional, and favoured by traditionalists. He is evidently a Romantic; and represents, in the words of the town councillor Pedersen, 'true music', someone 'who *shared our values*' (113). The two men epitomise not only differing aesthetic values but differing political styles; the technocrat versus the demagogue. Brodsky has the visual hallmarks of the fascist leader. He adopts a 'strikingly commanding' pose, seeming 'to loom above [spectators] like a huge statue, his open hands poised in the air' (371). Conducting the town

[298] Chaudhuri, 'Unlike Kafka', p. 31.

orchestra, he has the musicians 'losing themselves in their performance', having 'accepted entirely his authority' (492).

Brodsky admires Max Sattler, a mysterious figurehead from the city's past. Although little is revealed about Sattler's politics, accounts of the 'mythical' status of 'a man with wild dreams' (374) imply fascist leanings.[299] His name echoes both 'Hitler' and 'Stalin'.[300] Sattler's Monument is 'a tall cylinder of white brickwork, windowless apart from a single vertical slit near the top…as though a single turret had been removed from a mediaeval castle and transplanted here on top of the hill' (182). The description recalls that of Kafka's single-turreted castle. In referencing both the neoclassical architectural style favoured by the Nazis and twentieth-century formalism, it instantiates the encounter of fascist ideology with modernist aesthetics. As Cynthia Quarrie points out, fascism both asserts the significance of a nation's (often quasi-mythic) origins, and hence tradition and continuity; and embraces modernist aspirations for a radical break with the past and progress towards a 'utopian' future.[301] The Sattler Monument, architecturally backward- and forward-looking, symbolises the consequent intellectual stalemate. Sattler, Quarrie suggests, 'haunts' the novel in the manner described by Derrida in *Spectres of Marx*.[302] Like a ghost, he is neither alive nor dead, but leaves traces on the present through would-be heirs. Neither Brodsky's Romanticism nor Christoff's austere style resolves matters; and in failing to perform Ryder, the hoped-for saviour, perpetuates the impasse. Stasis in the city's communal life is reflected in Ryder's

[299] It is incorrect to equate fascism with Romanticism and liberalism with Modernism. There are numerous instances of liberal Romantics and, as Mark Antliff notes, modernism has often accommodated itself to fascism: 'concepts associated with the modernist aesthetics – including regeneration, spiritualism, primitivism, and avant-gardism – were integrated into the anti-Enlightenment pantheon of fascist values, with the result that many artists found common ground with these new movements' (Mark Antliff, 'Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity', *The Art Bulletin*, 84, 1 (2002) 148–169, p. 149).
[300] Reitano, 'Good Wound', p. 374.
[301] Cynthia Quarrie, 'Impossible Inheritance: Filiation and Patrimony in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 55, 2 (2014) 138-151.
[302] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* [1994] (New York: Routledge, 2006).

stunted family relationships, the ambiguous status of Sophie and Boris suggesting that he has no descendants. Kafka's fictions, populated chiefly by childless bachelors, likewise reject the genealogical tropes of the traditional novel.

Several of Kafka's tales represent communities at a transitional stage, with long-established customs being supplanted by new practices. The protagonist of 'In the Penal Settlement' arrives in a colony whose legendary Old Commandant has been ousted – but though many disliked his cruel practices, they are reluctant to abandon them. The New Commandant expects the explorer to criticise the traditional method of execution, and thus help ensure its abolition. There are clear parallels with Ryder's situation; Brodsky and Christoff corresponding, respectively, to the Old and New Commandants.[303] Brodsky has lost favour with many townsfolk, but Christoff risks a similar fate. Like Kafka's explorer, Ryder is expected to mediate; to choose between the two musicians' aesthetic ideals. Although shocked by the Officer's gory death, the explorer refuses to aid the soon-to-be executed prisoner. Ryder likewise fails to take sides in the conflict between the musicians' supporters.

Kafka's 'Jackals and Arabs' also tells of a supposedly impartial outsider coming into a community riven by discord. Talking jackals welcome a traveller from the North; a saviour, the jackals believe, come 'to end this quarrel that divides the world'.[304] They try to inveigle him into cutting the Arabs' throats, but immediately forget him when given a dead camel to eat. The traveller learns that every European visitor is greeted initially with great enthusiasm, but ignored when he proves irrelevant. Ryder suffers a similar fate.

[303] Adelman, 'Doubles', p. 173.
[304] F Kafka, 'Jackals and Arabs', trans. Willa and Edwin Muir in F Kafka, *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 129-133, p. 131.

Ideology and Place

Ishiguro avoided historical or geographical verisimilitude in writing *TU*. Naming the city, he affirms, would have anchored the novel in the real world and rendered it susceptible to unwelcome readings. He sought rather 'to find some territory…between straight realism and…out-and-out fabulism'; to make 'a particular setting actually take off into the realm of metaphor'[305] Some critics complain that Ishiguro succeeds too well. For Cynthia Wong, *TU* is 'a bizarre and entangled tale whose parables are no longer those related to identifiable place, situation, and history'.[306] Chaudhuri agrees: *TU* lacks 'discernible cultural, social or historical determinants'. Further, 'What is unKafkaesque about Ishiguro's Kafkaesque novel is its refusal to allow its allegory to be engaged, in any lively way, with the social shape of our age.'[307] Kafka had written about individuals oppressed by an authoritarian bureaucracy specific to early twentieth-century Europe; *TU* is a 'strangely ahistorical' postmodernist experiment in form.

Nevertheless, a close reading of *TU* does not substantiate claims about Ishiguro's geographical vagueness; and numerous clues to the city's location suggest that this is more significant than he concedes. We learn indirectly where the city is *not*, certain comments making sense only if made elsewhere than in the country mentioned. A local company supplies customers 'as far afield' as France and England (379); Gustav's family holidayed in Switzerland; Stephan went to college in Germany; one street is known for Italian cafés; Gustav frequents the Hungarian café, whose regulars cannot speak Hungarian. The city

[305] Allan Vorda and Kim Herzinger, 'An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro', in Shaffer and Wong, *Conversations*, 66-88, p. 75. Ishiguro states that he sought to depict a fictional realm governed by 'new laws'. He insists that 'If Ryder…suddenly grew wings and flew off on page 300 that would seem as wrong as it would in, say, a Henry James novel' (Krider, 'Rooted in a Small Space', p. 152).
[306] Cynthia F Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2000) p. 67.
[307] Chaudhuri, 'Unlike Kafka', p. 31.

cannot be in any of the countries referenced, and Ishiguro is allowing its location to emerge by default, via 'a process of subtraction or hollowing-out'.[308] Moreover, the names of native citizens – Stratmann, Hoffmann, etc. – are Germanic; and Brodsky and others with Slavonic names arrived from elsewhere. All building and street names – Hotel Burgenhof, the Schoppenhaus and Volksgarten, the Glockenstrasse – are German. The city contains an Old Town area, high-sided streets, cobbled alleyways, trams, traffic-free squares, cafés topped by colourful awnings where customers are serenaded by gypsy violinists – all features commonly found in central European cities. These clues point inexorably to an Austrian location – perhaps Linz, scene of Hitler's youth and closely associated with music.[309] We can also specify a temporal setting: namely, between 1970 and 1995, as indicated by frequent mentions of air travel and Ryder's viewing the film *2001* (1968).

Ishiguro claims that *TU* depicts a 'landscape of imagination' and could have been set 'anywhere'. Nevertheless, the settings of his other novels were carefully chosen: the years following the Second World War in Japan; inter-war Britain, when home-grown fascism seemed likely to take root; and war-ravaged China in the 1930s.[310] In each case political turmoil is partly responsible for, and the outer correlative of, the protagonists' psychological anguish. Kafka's works were likewise written against a backdrop of political and social change: the First World War and its aftermath, and the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In Barry Lewis's words, both writers set their work in 'societies that sift like sand beneath waves'.[311] Ishiguro may have commenced writing about nowhere in particular, but

[308] Robinson, 'Nowhere', p. 108.
[309] Richard Robinson, *Narratives of the European Border: A History of Nowhere* (Springer, 2007) p. 158. Robinson points out that Vienna is much larger than the setting of *TU* – which lshiguro refers to indiscriminately as town and city.
[310] Krider, 'Rooted in a Small Space', p. 151. I refer, respectively, to *An Artist of the Floating World*, *The Remains of the Day* and *When we were Orphans*.
[311] Lewis, *Kazuo Ishiguro*, pp. 124-125.

nomenclature and cultural references rapidly acquire ideological connotations. His world is undeniably colourless and odourless, but Kafka's locations are also largely indeterminate. 'Metamorphosis' and *The Trial* provide snapshot-like images of early twentieth-century urban life, but the wider picture is absent. In short, Kafka's and Ishiguro's worlds are more similar than the critics cited allow, combining a superficially ahistorical *atopia* with a distinctly Central European ambiance.

The Case for a Political Reading

TU initially lacks explicit indicators of social and political oppression. Ryder faces no elaborate hierarchies of hostile officials; the machinery of bureaucracy is largely absent; and there is no hint of a shadowy higher authority standing behind the men most closely associated with Ryder's mishaps, Hoffman and Pedersen. Unlike Kafka's Klamm they are hardly unknown or inaccessible. Although surrounded by supplicants, Ryder is less obviously himself a supplicant. His fragile mental health is chiefly responsible for his failure to achieve his goals, but he also manipulated by Hoffman, who assumes the role of puppet-master. Ryder's most striking spatio-temporal misperceptions follow being woken from sleep and goaded into action by Hoffman. The hotel manager also insists that Ryder changes rooms, further disorientating him. His actions seem designed to draw Ryder into a project to rehabilitate Brodsky; and, perhaps, endorse Sattler's politics. Ryder is tricked into having his photograph taken standing by the Monument, the sycophantic journalist and photographer presumably intending to discredit his putative role as mediator. When Ryder's route is barred by a brick wall, he vents his anger to a postcard-seller in a pompous, grandstanding diatribe reminiscent of Josef's speech at his cross-examination. While Josef attributes malevolent motives to the Court, Ryder merely blames the civic authorities for their negligence and stupidity. They are ostensibly less sinister than Kafka's officials. Rather than issue veiled

threats or refuse access to certain locations, they cajole Ryder with obsequious flattery, exploit his vanity, and encourage his narcissistic delusions. They tell him, for example, that he is 'perhaps the very greatest [pianist] of the century' (11); and, by encouraging his belief that he can help everyone, ensure his comprehensive failure. The hyperbole of their praise suggests that they are Ryder's constructions: but constructed, like Kafka's authorities, such that they *inveigle* him into collusion. Ryder has, like Josef and K., devised an elaborate scheme of self-deception that involves conjuring persons who bend him to their will obliquely and circuitously. Like them, he becomes complicit in his own failure.

To conclude: claims that Ishiguro is disengaged from politics do not stand up to scrutiny. Cultural and social values are intimately connected in the lives of the town's inhabitants, and the conflict between adherents of musical tradition and innovation substitutes for ideological disagreement. Their sensitivity to issues involving collective memory and historical identity, and their oblique praise for Brodsky – a stand-in for Sattler – brings to mind contemporary neo-Nazis' circumspect attitude towards Hitler. Finally, as with Kafka's fictions, the protagonist does not live wholly within a dream; and political readings are not excluded by some events and conversations being in part his constructions.

OTHER PARALLELS

The Hotel

Nearly every page of *TU* insinuates parallels with Kafka. Ryder's arrival at the hotel echoes K.'s at the castle: all is 'gloomy' inside; and he is not expected, with 'no one – not even a clerk behind the reception desk – waiting to welcome [him]' (3). The hotel, like the castle, is a rambling building of indeterminate shape and size, a maze of dark corridors with cupboards opening into unexpected spaces. Whenever Ryder leaves the town, he nearly always finds

himself back in the hotel. Like Kafka's Court offices, the hotel seems ubiquitous and appears when least expected. The authorities' influence extends into unexpected locations, Ryder's first meeting with Pedersen taking place in a cinema.

The Court's omnipresence suggests that Josef can never escape his guilt, but it is initially unclear why the hotel should similarly dominate Ryder's life. Certainly Hoffman has some characteristics of a father-substitute, implying that Ryder cannot escape his unhappy childhood. Hotel-set fiction also draws attention to the transient nature of our lives, the modern cosmopolitan hotel providing an apt symbol of deferral, estrangement and unstable memory. Hotel guests stay for only short periods, often anonymously, before being replaced by others and – one international hotel being much like another – remember few particulars of their stay. The unmappable, rhizome-like, spatially confusing architecture of Ishiguro's hotel is accordingly an analogue of Ryder's forgetfulness. It also lacks conventional entrances; ways in or (in Deleuze and Guattari's terminology) signifiers to ground its meaning. It is an exemplar of unknowing.

Gesture

Hillel Broder argues that Ishiguro most closely reveals indebtedness to Kafka in his representation of a form of consciousness that does not involve ascribing a theory of mind. I suggested above that the intentions and behaviour of Kafka's protagonists remain largely unreadable. They are likewise unable to 'read' other characters' minds, and lack, moreover, insight into their own condition. Broder proposes that Ishiguro's Ryder is likewise handicapped: not only (or solely) because he lacks empathy, but because, as an amnesiac, he is unable to 'retain temporal context through memory'. His amnesia is typical of the dreaming (and hallucinating) mind. Because he must 'scan each moment as its own singularity, devoid

of context and history', he cannot adequately interpret other people's actions.[312] He lives in the moment, viewing others intently but without understanding their motives or the significance of their gestures.[313] *TU* being a first-person narrative, Ryder's incomprehension is enacted in his descriptions. For example, leaving a late-night cinema show he observes that 'people seemed to tuck their legs to one side or jump to a standing position with eagerness. A few people even rolled right back in their seats, feet stuck up in the air, squealing with delight as they did so' (102). The focus upon ridiculous movements and gestures, isolated from any explanation of their meaning or cause, has a defamiliarising effect. It 'highlights the reigning project of [Kafka's] work: a singular, decontextualized attentiveness'.[314]

Walter Benjamin considers Kafka's gestures a metaphor for absence, undecidability, or indefinite deferral of meaning. The gesticulations and posturing of his characters, like those of actors, *signify* but do not necessarily *mean*. Ishiguro's characters often communicate non-verbally: they are 'hunched over', hang their heads in shame or bury heads in arms. Boris 'shortened his neck so that his chin was squeezed into his collar bone' (284); and the weight of suitcases makes Gustav's 'knees sag and his shoulders quiver' (10). Most such gestures involve a character folding in upon himself and, as indications of shame or embarrassment, initially seem meaningful. Nevertheless, repetition, exaggeration and enactment in inappropriate contexts tip gestures over into artifice and theatricality. They cease to possess meaning: the more so because they rarely have repercussions. As Boris examines a handyman's manual given him by Ryder, 'the book gave a sharp crack and fell apart into two sections. Boris carried on turning the pages as though nothing had happened' (287). (These words echo one of Kafka's *Zürau Aphorisms*: 'And then he went back to his job, as though

[312] Broder, 'Attending to the Gesture', p. 235.
[313] Ryder resembles the observer in 'Martian' poetry, as practised by Craig Raine and promoted by Martin Amis in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
[314] Broder, 'Attending to the Gesture', p. 240.

nothing had happened.'[315]) Later, Ryder and Sophie are playing a board game when he 'became gradually conscious that Sophie had been rattling the dice for an inordinate period…She now seemed to be shaking it with a feeble slowness...and her weight had tipped forward oddly...' (288) She resembles an automaton slowly seizing up as it runs out of power. We might conclude that Ryder simply cannot interpret Sophie's behaviour, which may indicate emotional fatigue or depression. Alternatively, we are perhaps being tempted to seek something lying beyond, explaining, an incident that actually signifies nothing external to itself. Ishiguro leaves the matter open, but both possibilities seem indebted to Kafka. Nevertheless, while Kafka's empty gestures function metonymically, pointing towards undecidability and absence of meaning, Ishiguro's have no such wider implications. Indeed, as argued below, *TU* is broadly amenable to interpretation.

IS *THE UNCONSOLED* 'DEEPLY' KAFKAN?

Contemporary reviewers of *The Unconsoled* acknowledged numerous signs of Kafka's influence, but generally concurred that they were insignificant.[316] Alan Wall argued 'The presiding ancestor is Kafka but without Kafka's bite and menace'. The novel aspired to profundity, but its message is one of 'breathtaking vacuity': namely that 'Life is a permanent deferment of gratification, an endless postponement of climax'.[317] Amit Chaudhuri agreed, writing 'The echoes of Kafka are many, but eventually superficial'.[318] A common theme was that Kafkan motifs – spatio-temporal displacements, doubling and the like – were ingredients added to the mix, as it were, of a long and unsatisfying novel. Few commentators noticed that

[315] F Kafka, *The Zürau Aphorisms*, trans. Michael Hofmann. (New York: Schocken, 2006). No. 108.
[316] Most notoriously, James Wood complained that *TU* 'invented its own category of badness' (J Wood, 'Ishiguro in the Underworld', *The Guardian* (5 May 1995) p. 32).
[317] Alan Wall, 'A Long Look at Nothing Much', *The Spectator* (13 May 1995) p. 45.
[318] Chaudhuri, 'Unlike Kafka', p. 31.

Ishiguro resembles Kafka in not merely describing but *representing* the protagonist's mental state. He does not merely borrow Kafkan motifs but seeks to replicate the *effect on the reader* of his predecessor's fictions

Enactment

TU is Kafkan, I suggest, in the important sense that it adapts Kafka's stylistic and narrative techniques in order to enact its themes. Thus Ishiguro's emotionless, undemonstrative style remains unchanged as Ryder shifts between normal and anomalous states of consciousness; implying that all truth-claims are equally (un)reliable. As readers, we *experience* the sense of estrangement that follows from near-global (epistemic) uncertainty, from intuiting how limited is our understanding of ourselves and the world. Likewise, the looping, repetitive narratorial structure and constant digressions enact Ryder's continual sense of frustration and disappointment. As in Kafka, the incessant, aimless rambling of his interlocutors retards narrative flow, exhausting both Ryder and reader. We share his belief that if he can just complete such-and-such an intermediate task, he can accomplish the primary goal, of giving the piano recital. But whenever Ryder tries to rehearse, he is accosted by someone requesting help; whenever he tries to rest, the telephone rings. Expectations are repeatedly raised and immediately confounded.

Resistance to Interpretation

As discussed earlier, Adorno argues that simple assent to the judgement that the world is evil leads to complacency, consoling oneself that nothing can be done – and thus eventual accommodation with power. Writers who yield their meaning too readily may unwittingly assist in this process. Kafka, however, denies the reader 'any chance of consoling himself

with the judgement that the way of the world is bad'. Perhaps the denial of consolation implied by Ishiguro's title indicates his intention to resist interpretation by employing Kafkan techniques. Wai-chew Sim develops this thesis, referencing the reception of Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*. The novel, Sim suggests, was misinterpreted by many as a nostalgic eulogy for a lost English Arcadia; and co-opted by a heritage industry anxious to domesticate hints of allegory and metaphor. Ishiguro wished to distance himself from the literal-minded reception, and hence potential 'emasculation', of his earlier work.[319] He did so by pastiching elements of *Remains* in *TU*, reworking the theme of thwarted hopes and ambitions but employing specifically Kafkan tropes to accentuate the novel's allegorical and symbolic elements. He sought, in other words, to hinder attempts to control its social signification by imposing a determinate meaning.[320]

Nevertheless, *TU* resists interpretation less stubbornly than do Kafka's novels. Kafkan resistance is manifested less in disorientating and defamiliarising elements than in indefinite deferral of meaning and ensuing *metaphysical* uncertainty. Kafkan deferral originates partly in double thought, in endlessly qualified assertions that are effectively self-cancelling. This phenomenon is largely absent in *TU*. The novel's repetitive plot structure and absence of resolution results in deferral of *action*; but this alone need not signify deferral of meaning. More significantly, epistemic doubts are not accompanied by metaphysical questioning. For example, Ryder (and the reader) remain unsure about many factual matters, such as whether he is a former inhabitant of the city (as seems demonstrated by his relationship with Sophie)

[319] Wai-chew Sim, *Globalisation and Dislocation in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro* (PhD thesis) (University of Warwick, 2002) pp. 265-267. Sim mentions several incidents in *TU* that recapitulate those of *Remains*. Gustav's lengthy disquisitions on the duties of porters and luggage-handling techniques recall, for example, Steven's ponderous account of the duties of butlers.

[320] In the *Paris Review* interview with Susannah Hunnewell referenced above Ishiguro says that 'The language of dreams would also allow me to write a story that people would read as a metaphorical tale as opposed to a comment on a particular society'.

or a newcomer (as Pedersen and other townspeople affirm). Because, however, Ryder drifts almost randomly between normal and hallucinatory states, there are no certain means of establishing which claims are true, which false. Nevertheless, these epistemic indeterminacies are compatible with offering a reasonably comprehensive and consistent reading of the novel. Essentially, *TU* recounts the experiences of a psychologically damaged man slipping between 'real life', memories, daydreams and hallucinatory states, while an eclectic set of social, political and cultural conflicts plays out in the background. The hallucination hypothesis yields a fairly coherent naturalistic explanation of Ryder's spatial and temporal misperceptions; and the presence of doubles is additionally explicable in terms of his attempts to understand and justify himself. His mental condition is attributable to specific psychological and social pressures; these bringing about a sense of disconnectedness that both causes, and is exacerbated by, hallucinations. He is caught in a vicious spiral, and is unable to escape by his own efforts. The recursive, cyclical structure of Kafka's novels offered an appropriate way of modelling this phenomenon. Nevertheless, Ishiguro is chiefly concerned with the *aetiology* of Ryder's fragile, fragmented self; and hence with the epistemic, rather than the metaphysical issues involved in theorising the self. Likewise, Kafka's epistemic uncertainties – concerning why, for example, K. is refused admittance to the Castle – are irresolvable. Epistemic ignorance becomes metaphysical doubt; absence of knowledge, unknowing. Metaphysical questions in turn insinuate the possibility of answers appealing to transcendent matters. Certainly K. is not unreasonably interpreted as seeking 'spiritual' truths; and the uncanniness of *The Castle* occasionally approaches other-worldliness. And while we *suspect* that no God-like being stands behind Castle and Court, the possibility remains open. We are all-but-certain, in contrast, that no transcendent authority stands behind Ishiguro's petty mischief-makers. There is only the cussedness and intransigence of everyday existence;

the obdurate refusal of the world to do our bidding. Ryder shows no interest in seeking transcendent truths, and there are no hints of arcane mysteries lying behind surface appearances. *TU* accordingly fails to evoke the numinous, and its uncanny is of the postmodern rather than the Freudian variety. Ishiguro's descriptions lack the particularity that is a prerequisite of defamiliarisation, and he subverts potentially esoteric experiences through self-conscious irony. When Josef opens a previously overlooked door in his bank, he finds men being whipped; and nothing has changed twenty-four hours later. Ryder, however, opens doors that turn out to be broom-cupboards; and even when they open into impossible spaces, the determinedly flat tone and emotionally evasive phraseology stifle any hint of mystery.

Pico Iyer concludes a review of TU

> The real theme of this profoundly lonely and harrowing book is disconnection, and nearly all of its incidents are about misunderstandings and missed chances…[…]…the book gives us a vision of humanity so abject in its self-enclosure and its vanity that there seems to be no hope: everyone is waiting for a saviour whom all of them would be too blind to see even if he were in their midst.[321]

Ishiguro's vision is profoundly pessimistic: every success is accompanied by reversals and every relationship doomed by failure to communicate. Art provides little consolation, for achievement seems incompatible with normal life. Nevertheless, the possibility of resolution and reconciliation is not, perhaps, wholly absent. Certainly Ryder faces a false dilemma, or makes the wrong choices: but his problems are attributable to specific causes. Kafka, however, offers no opportunity of progress, insight or redemption: chiefly because his protagonists are locked in a world of their own making from which no escape is possible. [322] The source of their despair, moreover, remains unknown.

[321] Pico Iyer, 'The Butler Didn't Do It, Again', *The Times Literary Supplement* (28 April 1995) p. 22.
[322] Although Kafka apparently planned to allow K. to be accepted, just before he died, by the Castle authorities, nothing in the extant text of the novel suggests this conclusion.

To conclude: Ishiguro reveals a deeper engagement with Kafka than Warner, principally because formal features of *The Unconsoled* enact its subject-matter. Nevertheless, the novel's receptiveness to an interpretation that is reasonably coherent and internally consistent demonstrates that Ishiguro is not a thoroughgoing exemplar of Kafkan unknowing.

CHAPTER FOUR: W G SEBALD'S *VERTIGO* AND *AUSTERLITZ*

VERTIGO

Winfried Georg Sebald's *Schwindel. Gefühle* – a title that connotes both feelings of dizziness and being swindled – was translated into English by the author and Michael Hulse, and published as *Vertigo* in 1990.[323] It comprises four sections, each providing a framework for the appearance of Kafka's Hunter Gracchus – a man trapped in limbo between life and death – in different guises. *Vertigo* is a fictional work with numerous digressions into philosophy, literary and art criticism, and history. The second and fourth sections take the form of a personal memoir and travelogue recounted by the unnamed narrator, a nervous man afflicted by frequent hallucinations and debilitating panic attacks. Shared biographical details and the inclusion of the author's partly obscured passport photograph indicate that this is a fictionalised version of Sebald himself.[324] I refer to the narrator as 'Sebald'. The novel incorporates numerous monochrome images that refer, often obliquely, to the adjacent text: including photographs, reproductions of paintings, newspaper clippings, and such travel memorabilia as postcards, timetables, schedules, maps, and admission tickets.

Summary

The first section of *Vertigo*, 'Beyle, or Love is a Madness Most Discreet', is a third-person account of episodes in the life of Marie-Henri Beyle (Stendhal). Accompanying Napoleon's army in 1800, Beyle makes sketches in order 'to remember how things were' (V, 6). Years

[323] The separation of the two German words by a full stop suggests that they could be arranged to make either *Schwindelgefühle* ('feelings of dizziness') or (as Martin Klebes points out) *Gefühlsschwindel* ('deception of the emotions') (Martin Klebes, 'Infinite Journey: From Kafka to Sebald' in J J Long and Anne Whitehead (eds.) *W.G. Sebald: A Critical Companion* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004) 123–139, p. 133).
[324] The black vertical line down the photograph suggest that the passport is that given in error to another guest at the Limone hotel, and subsequently cancelled. Unless an elaborate forgery, the image indicates that Sebald himself made at least some of the journeys described.

later he discovers that his supposed memories of a beautiful sunset over Ivrea are actually memories of an engraving. The incident foreshadows 'Sebald's' problematic use of photographs: for, Beyle realises, visual images threaten to 'displace our memories completely' (V, 8). Kafka's Gracchus the Hunter makes his first appearance when Beyle and his mistress Mme Gherardi arrive in Riva. They witness 'two men in dark silver-buttoned tunics…carrying a bier ashore on which, under a large, frayed flower-patterned silk cloth lay what was evidently a human form' (V, 25). Kafka's story tells of a hunter of wolves who falls to his death in the Black Forest while pursuing a chamois.[325] He joyfully embraces death, slipping into a 'winding sheet like a girl into her marriage dress' (G, 161); and boards the ferry to the otherworld. The helmsman, however, takes a wrong turn and Gracchus is fated to sail the world forever, poised between life and death. Occasionally the boat silently makes harbour, and the body is carried ashore on a draped bier. A huge pigeon announces its imminent arrival to Salvatore, the Bürgermeister of Riva. Gracchus relates his story to Salvatore, lamenting that his ship 'is driven by the wind that blows in the undermost regions of death' (G, 162). Names are symbolically significant. 'Gracchus' is derived from Latin *graculus*, 'jackdaw', also the meaning of the Czech *kavka*, *Gemse* means not only 'chamois' but 'prostitute': suggesting that Gracchus's inability to die is punishment for sexual misdemeanours.[326] His returns in *Vertigo* form both an intertextual and an intratextual *leitmotif*, and underscore the novel's central theme: Gracchus, 'Sebald' and Dr K. ('Kafka') all seem condemned to wander in a half-alive state, vainly seeking repose in death. As Brad

[325] 'Der Jäger Gracchus' was written in 1917 and first published in *Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer* (Berlin, 1931). There exists an additional fragment extending the dialogue between Gracchus and the Bürgermeister.
[326] Frank Möbus, *Sünden-Fälle: die Geschlechtlichkeit in Erzählungen Franz Kafkas* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1994) p. 18.

Prager points out, the consensus among Kafka scholars is that the tale reflects Kafka's inability to decide between marriage to Felice and literature; between life and art.[327]

The second section, 'All 'estero', comprises a first-person account of 'Sebald's' travels in Italy as he attempts to recover from a 'particularly difficult period' in his life' (V, 33).[328] It includes an account of Casanova's escape from the Doge's Palace in Venice, adapted from Franz Grillparzer's *Italian Diary* (1819). Grillparzer muses upon the 'mysterious, immutable and harsh' ducal laws, which are governed by an 'Invisible Principle' that emerges only as the predetermined judgement is given. (54). When the Palace tribunal arrested a criminal, 'it was already convinced of his guilt' (56). Likewise, in Kafka's *Trial* the mere fact of being summoned amounts to proof of guilt; and the Priest insists that 'proceedings only gradually merge into the verdict' (T, 232). Sebald is not retrospectively imposing a Kafkan reading on Grillparzer's text; rather, Casanova's account seems to have inspired Kafka.[329]

Ominous events reminiscent of a murder mystery occur during 'Sebald's' urban wanderings. In Venice he believes himself watched by two young men, who later appear in the amphitheatre at Verona. They stand motionless 'like two watchmen…at their posts until the sunlight had all but faded' (V, 72); and bow to each other before vanishing. They echo the assistants who surreptitiously observe and play tricks upon K. in *The Castle*. The narrator frequently hallucinates: most notably, Dante in Vienna and Ludwig II of Bavaria in Venice. In

[327] Brad Prager, 'Sebald's Kafka', in Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (eds.), *W. G. Sebald: Trauma, Memory, History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006) 105-125, p. 115.
[328] The Italian title of the quasi-autobiographical sections is probably an ironic device intended to distance author from narrator.
[329] Kafka had read Casanova's *Histoire de ma fuite des prisons de la Republique de Venise qu'on appelle Les Plombs*, and in a letter of 28 July 1920 to Milena Jesenska asks whether she knows about Casanova's 'escape from the leads' (F Kafka, *Briefe an Milena: Ausgewählte Briefe an Kafkas große Liebe* (e-artnow, 2015). My translation.) Daniel Medin notes numerous similarities between a contemporary translation of Casanova's memoir and *The Trial*. Translated into English, Casanova's text commences: 'On the morning of 25 July 1755 I was awakened by the feared *Messer grande*, who burst into my room without warning and ordered me to rise, dress, hand over my papers at once, and – to follow him' (trans. Medin, *Three Sons*, p. 106.) Casanova and K. are both thirty years old; their demands to be told why they have been arrested are ignored; and both are so worn down by their experience that they effectively accept their 'guilt'.

Verona 'Sebald' experiences a panic attack after reading a newspaper account of terrorist attacks committed by the 'Organizzazione Ludwig', and hurriedly returns to England.

Some years later 'Sebald' repeats the journey, and experiences further seemingly fortuitous events linking him with Kafka. On the bus to Riva he encounters twin boys who each bear 'the most uncanny resemblance to pictures of Franz Kafka as an adolescent schoolboy' (V, 88). The discovery leaves the narrator with 'a vertiginous feeling', and he wishes to 'document this most improbable coincidence' with a photograph. The twins' parents, however, have never heard of Kafka, and take 'Sebald' for a paedophile. The boys only 'grin witlessly' or 'snigger' when spoken to: reminding us of K.'s assistants in *The Castle* (89).

In Milan the narrator is nearly 'mugged' by two men while wondering whether an advertisement for Hertz rentals proclaiming 'LA PROSSIMA COINCIDENZA' is meant for him. '*Coincidenza*' translates as 'connection' *and* 'coincidence', insinuating that his assailants are the men 'Sebald' encountered previously. Later, he finds himself by the 'Pizzeria Verona'; from which he had 'fled headlong' seven years earlier after reading about the terrorist attacks (V, 124). The now boarded-up restaurant – formerly owned by 'Carlo Cadavero' – triggers a memory of a vision of two men carrying a bier; and the appearance of an acquaintance, Salvatore Altamura is heralded by a flock of pigeons. Both incidents echo those associated, in Kafka's tale, with Gracchus's arrival.

The third section of *Vertigo*, 'Dr. K. Takes the Waters at Riva', relates a journey made by the eponymous protagonist to the Italian spa resort on Lake Garda, in Autumn 1913.[330] He stays for three weeks at Dr. von Hartungen's hydropathic clinic. Sebald nowhere affirms that Dr. K. is a fictional version of Franz Kafka, but the inclusion of transcriptions from Kafka's diaries and a letter to his fiancée, Felice Bauer, leave no room for doubt. The chapter is

[330] The German title, 'Dr. K.s Badereise nach Riva', alludes not only to Kafka's K. but to Jean Paul's novella *Dr. Katzenbergers Badereise* (1809).

primarily a reconstruction of Dr. K.'s thoughts, and suggests parallels between the narrator (presumably 'Sebald'), Dr. K., the writer Kafka, and Kafka's fictional characters – principally, Gracchus. All are melancholic exiles, wanderers and paralysed by indecisiveness; and some experience transgressive sexual desires.

The narrator conjectures that while in Verona Dr. K. saw the film *Der Student von Prag* (1913), which tells of the student Balduin's Faustian pact with Scapinelli.[331] Balduin sells his soul in the form of his mirror image; and subsequently shoots his *doppelgänger* when it emerges from the mirror. His reflection vanishes, and he dies from a wound to his heart. Balduin and his double are good and evil twins; the tale straightforwardly illustrating Freud's claim that the superego projects the id's undesirable traits onto another person. 'Sebald' concedes that there no evidence for Kafka's cinema visit but nevertheless speculates that the scenario would 'have struck Dr. K. as the description of a struggle in which … the principal character and his opponent are in the most intimate and self-destructive of relationships' (V, 150-152). 'Sebald' refers to Kafka's 'Description of a Struggle', where a male acquaintance stabs himself on learning of the protagonist's betrothal. In other words, the mirror-image *doppelgänger* – also, of course, in Freudian theory an uncanny harbinger of death – suggests a quasi-erotic attraction towards another, suppressed, version of oneself. Indeed, Dr. K. is often tormented by homosexual desires. He admits to Felice that he had 'veritably lusted' for a Jewish boy in Prague (167); and in the harbour area of Trieste – where, we surmise, 'rent boys' congregate – has a vision of an angel with 'great silk-white wings' that rapidly transforms into a 'garishly painted ship's figurehead' (146). The unconscious attempt to sublimate his desires is immediately subverted by a carving that metonymically represents

[331] *Der Student von Prag* is a German expressionist film directed by Stellan Rye with a screenplay by Hanns Heinz Ewers.

Gracchus's tale. Dr K. subsequently 'evolves a fragmentary theory of disembodied love' (158) – one that avoids heterosexual relations.

Gracchus makes his third appearance during Dr. K.'s sojourn in Riva; a description of a sanatorium patient's funeral segueing into a retelling of Kafka's tale:

> Over the years that followed, lengthy shadows fell upon those autumn days at Riva…and from these shadows there gradually emerged the silhouette of a barque with masts of an inconceivable height and sails dark and hanging in folds. Three whole years it takes until the vessel, as if it were being borne across the waters gently drifts into the little port of Riva. (V, 163-164)

A grainy, out-of-focus photograph accompanies the text.

The fourth part of *Vertigo*, 'Il Ritorno in Patria', recounts a visit paid by 'Sebald' to 'W', the Bavarian village of his birth.[332] He relates childhood memories interspersed with stories elicited from Lukas, the only surviving member of former neighbours. The chapter ends with the narrator's return to England.

The section incorporates numerous appropriations from Kafka's texts.[333] Arriving in the village, 'Sebald' stands 'for a long time on the stone bridge a short distance before the first houses of W., listening to the steady murmur of the river and looking into the blackness which now enveloped everything (V, 183). Arriving at the castle 'veiled in mist and darkness', K. likewise stands on a bridge 'gazing into the illusory emptiness above him' (C, 9). Some allusions are obvious: as a child, for example, 'Sebald' often visited Rosina Zobel, whose bedridden husband – like the patient tended by Kafka's country doctor – 'had a large wound in his hip which would not heal' (V, 197). Others are obscure and buried in dense surrounding detail. Gracchus returns, often in disguised forms. In the Krummenbach chapel the narrator

[332] 'W' presumably designates Wertach, a small town in southern Bavaria and the childhood home of W G Sebald.
[333] Medin, *Three Sons*, p. 80 ff.

imagines himself ‘in a boat on a voyage, crossing vast waters. The moist smell of lime became sea air; I could feel the spray on my forehead and the boards swaying beneath my feet’ (179). He later recalls having spied the reclusive hunter Hans Schlag having sexual relations with a barmaid, Romana. Her eyes ‘were turned sideways and as wide open as those of Dr Rambousek when his head had lain lifeless on the top of his desk’ (238): an obvious reference to the conflation of Eros and Thanatos, the innate drives towards love and death which (Freud believed) impel all human actions. Schlag is later found dead, probably murdered by Romana’s jealous boss. The boy saw ‘a woodcutters’ sledge...bearing upon it what was plainly the body of a man under a wine-coloured horse blanket’ (246-247). Schlag had managed hunting grounds in the Black Forest, bore a marine tattoo, and is punished for sexual misconduct: all details indicating his status as Gracchus reincarnated.

As a child, the narrator’s dreams had been haunted by the ‘grey *chasseur*’, a figure supposed to live in the forbidden attic above the Café Alpenrose. Entering the attic, the adult ‘Sebald’ finds ‘an old tailor’s dummy, dressed in pike-grey breeches and a pike-grey jacket’. This ‘apparition’ makes a ‘most uncanny impression’ on him, especially when the uniform crumbles to dust on being touched (V, 227). The experience is hardly cathartic, a laying-to-rest of childhood ghosts, for ‘Sebald’ continues to dream of the *chasseur* reaching out towards him. The episode has convoluted links with the Gracchus tale. A figure named Schlag, suspended between life and death, appears in Kafka’s fragment ‘In the Attic’. The ‘grey *chasseur*’ is a version of Kafka’s Schlag, and since Sebald’s Schlag is a version of Gracchus, the chasseur signifies the Hunter’s return. Only readers thoroughly familiar with Kafka’s *oeuvre* will make the connection. Here Sebald implicitly challenges Wimsatt and Beardsley’s claim that it is unnecessary to understand a writer’s allusions. Discussing *The Waste Land* , they argue that ‘Eliot’s allusions work…even when we do not know them, through their

suggestive power [...] It would not much matter if Eliot invented his sources...'[334] Sebald, however, demonstrates that grasping that such-and-such an incident or phrase is borrowed from Kafka significantly modifies our understanding of the text.

STYLE, STRUCTURE AND USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Style and Structure

Sebald's manner of writing is, like Kafka's, cool, precise, somewhat pedantic, impersonal and unemphatic. He eschews paragraphs, writing long and complex sentences with sparse punctuation. Citations from other writers are inconspicuous because adapted to Sebald's homogeneous style; and conversations are incorporated within the narrator's monologue. The absence of quotation marks often leaves it uncertain who is speaking.[335] Sebald also resembles Kafka in combining meticulous and concrete detail – which extends, in his case, to giving the names of virtually every street traversed and building entered – with an overall sense of nebulousness. We grasp no more of the topography of the cities 'Sebald' visits than of the setting of Josef's trial.

Sebald occasionally adopts Kafka's mode of free indirect speech: writing, for example, 'Dr. K. feels he has reached the end of the line and realizes that he should have begged the Director on his knees to let him stay in Prague' (V, 141-142). The third-person narrative ostensibly presents Dr. K.'s innermost thoughts unmediated by the narrator. Nevertheless, irrespective of whether an episode is recounted in the first or third person, the scanty punctuation ensures that we perceive everything from a mono-perspectival viewpoint. The

[334] Wimsatt and Beardsley, 'Intentional Fallacy', pp. 14-15.
[335] A Fuchs and J J Long, W.*G. Sebald and the Writing of History* (Wurzberg Verlag Konighausen & Neumann GmbH, 2007) p. 19.

blurring of boundaries between participants is particularly marked in *Austerlitz*, where it is often uncertain whether we hear the voice of author, narrator or protagonist.

Superficially, the structure of *Vertigo* differs from that of Kafka's novels. *The Trial* and *The Castle* have a looping, repetitive structure based around the protagonists' meetings with potential helpers and obstructive bureaucrats. Sebald's protagonists, in contrast, are constantly moving, and have varied encounters. Nevertheless, the seemingly linear and progressive structure of *Vertigo* is illusory; being subverted by repetitions and returns, by reiterated journeys and the reappearance of certain motifs. There are constant intimations of Gracchus's presence – marine imagery, flocks of pigeons, pallbearers and the like. The photographs possess an inert quality; and in demanding the reader's attention they also impede the narrative flow – as do frequent essay-like digressions. Apparent 'busyness' masks an underlying stasis as profound as Kafka's.

Photographs

Sebald's narrators betray a near-obsessive need to document their lives with photographs and other souvenirs of their experiences. When we look at a photograph album, the images function as both reminders of past events and evidence of participation. In a book, however, photographs tacitly assert the truth of what is narrated, and so destabilise a fictional text. This is because the medium seems resistant to falsification (Sebald's works predating the advent of digital photography), and we consider that photographs cannot straightforwardly *represent* events described in a fictional work. Moreover, because photographs generally convey more, and more specific, information than words, they do not merely illustrate but supplement – and may contradict – the text. Sebald does not provide captions, thus avoiding accusations of misrepresentation: though the proximity of text and images often amounts to tacit captioning.

Their ‘referential indeterminacy’ is probably deliberate; Sebald wishing to remind the reader that fastidiously compiled, precise documentation is no guarantee of authenticity.[336]

In ‘The Undiscover’d Country’ Sebald writes that ‘the smooth surface of Kafka’s work has remained an enigma in spite of what his interpreters have managed to dredge from its depth’.[337] He echoes Roland Barthes’s description of photographs as ‘flat, platitudinous’.[338] Both Kafka’s superficially transparent prose and (most) photographs apparently offer unmediated access to their meaning; but in fact indefinitely defer, and ultimately resist, interpretation. Sebald’s photographs also enact Kafkan deferral of meaning insofar as, standing in conflicting counterpoint to the written word, they resemble Kafka’s virtually concurrent affirmations and denials. The veracity of a verbal assertion is immediately called into question by the accompanying image – and *vice versa*.

Susan Sontag argues that photographs are ‘not so much an instrument of memory as an invention of it or a replacement’.[339] The photograph mediates between subject and event, diminishing or even supplanting ‘authentic’ memories. More specifically, Judit Pieldner writes that Sebald’s use of photographs ‘models the working mechanism of memory’. In both cases ‘the act of evocation can never be completed; there is always a rupture, a sense of deferral that hinders the accessibility of the past’.[340] Like the mental images associated with memories, photographs restrict access to experiential, ‘felt’ phenomena, entailing ‘the infinite

[336] J J Long, ‘History, Narrative, and Photography in W.G. Sebald’s *Die Ausgewanderten*’, *The Modern Language Review*, 98, 1 (2003) p. 118.
[337] W G Sebald, ‘The Undiscover’d Country: The Death Motif in Kafka’s *Castle*’, *Journal of European Studies*, 2 (1972) 22–34, p. 22.
[338] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) p. 106.
[339] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 165. Barthes makes a similar point, writing that the photograph ‘actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory’ (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 91).
[340] Judit Pieldner, ‘Narrative Discourse, Memory and the Experience of Travel in W. G. Sebald’s Vertigo’, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*, 8, 1 (2016) 67–78, p. 69.

regress of the ultimate signified'.[341] Kafka himself is reported as saying, 'We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes'.[342]

Photographs not only intervene between subject and past experience, but are fragments of lives, ripped from their context. A photograph is (as Benjamin writes of souvenirs) 'a secularised relic' from 'the corpse' of the 'atrophied experience'.[343] Paradoxically, moreover, photographs sometimes imply what is *missing*. In Derrida's terminology, they bear traces of absent signifiers; they are 'haunted' by a lack, an incompleteness: and again, a 'full' meaning is unavailable. Two examples from *Vertigo* are pertinent here. Firstly, Sebald includes two photographs relevant to Dr. K.'s visit to Desenzano in his capacity as Deputy Secretary of the Prague Workers' Insurance Company (V, 153-154). Dr K. did not turn up for the planned reception, and the photographs show only the waiting townsfolk. If we know the context, Dr K.'s absence becomes (as it were) a tangible *presence*; like that of Sartre's friend Pierre from the café.[344] The images suggest K.'s negligence or indolence, but otherwise their meaning is wholly indeterminate. Secondly, standing outside the 'Pizzeria Verona' the narrator recollects an earlier vision, here described as 'two men in black silver-buttoned tunics, who were carrying out from a rear courtyard a bier on which lay, under a floral-patterned drape, what was plainly the body of a human being' (125). This supposedly personal memory is expressed in a near word-for-word transcription from Kafka's Gracchus tale. The narrator having forgotten his camera, a German tourist agrees to photograph the Pizzeria; but subsequently refuses to photograph a 'flock of pigeons' that 'settled on the balcony rail and the roof of the building' (127). As noted above, the arrival of pigeons foreshadows that of the Hunter's

[341] Pieldner, 'Narrative Discourse', p. 74.
[342] Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. Goronwy Rees (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 117.
[343] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), p. 177. My translation.
[344] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 10.

barque. Thus 'Sebald's' recollection of a vision (or, perhaps, of Kafka's tale) coincides with the arrival of pigeons in the 'real' world. He wanted a photograph to document this apparently meaningful event, but can provide one only of the Pizzeria's façade. Hence the only connection between his (supposed) memory and the printed photograph is given by something missing from that photograph – the pigeons.[345] 'Sebald' is attempting to authenticate a coincidence through an absence.

To conclude: the problematic status of photographs in *Vertigo* and their openness to indefinitely many readings means that they provide a peculiarly apt analogue of Kafka's resistance to interpretation. They apparently yield incontrovertible evidence of some past event, and to fix the meaning of accompanying text. In fact they both indefinitely defer any 'final' meaning, in a Derridean infinite regress; and destabilise that of the text. As integral elements of Sebald's novels, his photographs ensure that he, like Kafka, *hovers* above his subject-matter.

MOTIFS ASSOCIATED WITH THE RETURN

'Sebald's' travels both involve returns to cities visited earlier (and to his own native land) and recapitulate the travels of literary predecessors. The four sections of *Vertigo* alternate between his physical journeys and the reconstructed travels of Beyle and Kafka; but all incorporate extensive quotations from these and other predecessors.[346] Hence 'Sebald' physically retraces Kafka's steps while initiating intertextual returns: principally, of course, in the frequent allusions to Gracchus. As the novel progresses intimations of the Hunter's presence become both familiar (by virtue of their ubiquity) while occasionally verging on the all-but-

[345] Cf. Klebes, 'Infinite Journey', pp. 129–131.
[346] John, Zilcosky, 'Sebald's Uncanny Travels: The Impossibility of Getting Lost', in J J Long and Anne Whitehead (eds.) *W.G. Sebald: A Critical Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 102-122, p. 106.

imperceptible. They accordingly enact the novel's most persistent motif, while also becoming increasingly uncanny. Returns are also enacted in bizarre coincidences and encounters with doubles.

Correspondences in dates demonstrate that the narrator's journeys are metaphorical *returns*. He reads Grillparzer's journal, for example, on 31 October, the date of Casanova's escape from the Doge's Palace. Episodes from Kafka's life and fictions reappear throughout, often reminding 'Sebald' of unpleasant incidents from the past. Psychologically, his journeys are essentially circular, like those of Kafka's protagonists; and result in no progress in self-understanding. They differ in that 'Sebald' *physically* traverses long distances; while, say, K.'s mental entrapment is echoed in his limited movements around the Castle.

Sebald's novels make extensive and explicit self-conscious reference to Freudian ideas. As discussed above, Freud considers the re-emergence of repressed emotions to be manifested in repetitive-compulsive behaviour. A subject, he writes 'is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of...*remembering* it as something belonging to the past...'[347] Sebald's narrator seems impelled to retrace the steps of literary predecessors and, eventually, return to his childhood home. Perhaps he has repressed feelings of guilt arising from war-time crimes carried out by relations, or from having 'abandoned' his homeland. Certainly his reflections remain on the surface, as it were. He frequently *asserts* that he experienced terrifying emotions during his childhood, but the dispassionate, uniform tone indicates that he retains few *felt*, subjective memories. Similarly, rather than attempting to *reimagine* the experiences of his predecessors, he enumerates items of biographical and contextual information: thereby exhibiting what Jonathan Long calls 'archival consciousness'.[348] Although the reader might experience *intellectual* vertigo – occasioned by

[347] Freud, *Beyond*, p. 12.
[348] Long, *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*, p. 93.

Sebald's labyrinthine syntax, his complex pattern of allusions and nested narratorial structures – she might not share the narrator's emotional dizziness.

Death and the Wanderer in City and Countryside

Vertigo presents two versions of the restless wanderer. The narrator of 'All 'estero' is a modern traveller, journeying between cities by plane, train and bus as he vainly attempts to mitigate some unidentified psychological trouble. He resembles a twentieth-century urban *flâneur*, travelling under assumed names while experiencing random sights and encounters. The section is reminiscent of Ishiguro's *Unconsoled* in its evocation of the postmodern, uncanny. While Ryder apparently meets persons from his past, 'Sebald' hallucinates encounters with literary and historical figures. Both, however, traverse enigmatic topographies punctuated by airports, shopping malls, modern hotels and railway stations. Marc Augé calls such impersonal places of transit 'non-places', ones that 'cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity'.[349] Because each hotel, station or mall is almost interchangeable, it is simultaneously familiar and different; *uncanny*. The absence of individuating features attenuates the individual's sense of himself as a unique person in a particular location; reducing him to the status only of traveller or consumer. Kafka's cityscapes obviously lack modern transport hubs and similar locations, but in their ahistoricity and lack of singularity anticipate Ishiguro's and Sebald's non-places. Their rootless, fragmented protagonists stumble from one experience to another, their disconnection from their surroundings exacerbated by their fragile mental state.

'Sebald' deliberately seeks out non-places, hoping that disorientating himself might relieve his depression. He walks at random through Vienna, deliberately 'without aim or purpose':

[349] (Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super-modernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso. 1995) p. 78

but later discovers, on consulting a map, that his wanderings were restricted to a 'precisely defined sickle- or crescent-shaped area' (V, 33). He cannot cross certain 'invisible lines' or even take public transport to escape his self-imposed confines (34). John Zilcosky points out that the narrator's failed attempts to disorient himself provide an instance of 'persistence of the familiar, this *unheimlich in*ability to lose one's way'.[350] While reminiscent of K.'s inability to reach the Castle, such incidents were probably inspired by Freud's account of how he wandered into a 'red-light' area in a provincial Italian town and found himself back in the same street whenever he attempted to leave. Likewise Dr. K. finds himself, apparently by chance, in the 'rent-boy' area of Trieste.[351] The attempt to lose oneself not only has sexual implications but signifies, perhaps, the workings of Freud's death drive. The wandering subject attempts to disregard thoughts of mortality; but circling around the same small area is an unconscious reminder of the undeviating path to universal extinction. Similarly, we may lose our bearings in the digressions and complex narrative structures of *Vertigo*, but recurrent death-related motifs continually prompt awareness of our mortality.

In 'Il ritorno in patria', 'Sebald' revisits his native Germany; again trying to dispel unspecified anxieties. His home village, however, holds as many secrets as, and is no less enigmatic than, anything encountered in foreign realms. The postmodern uncanny has given way to the traditional variety. 'Sebald' is now, like Kafka's K., the archetypal solitary wanderer, complete with customary accessories of knapsack and walking-stick.[352] (K. initially

[350] John Zilcosky, 'Lost and Found: Disorientation, Nostalgia, and Holocaust Melodrama in Sebald's *Austerlitz*', *MLN*, 121, 3 (2006), 679-698, p. 863.
[351] Dr K.'s wanderings are also reminiscent of Thomas Mann's Aschenbach, in *Death in Venice*. The protagonist loses his bearings following Tadzio through Venice's maze-like alleyways, eventually finding himself in the same square he had sat in weeks earlier when planning to flee the city. Here he buys the tainted strawberries that lead to his death. Sebald seems to suggest that Northern Europeans like Aschenbach and Dr. K. are tempted by Southern loucheness.
[352] The narrator's accessories remind us of the *Wandervögel* movement, started in the 1890s as a celebration of nature, traditional crafts and folk-song. Its seemingly wholesome rejection of industrialisation and urbanisation had, by the 1930s, become tarnished by association with Nazism, with *Heimat*-related discourse tacitly rejecting everything that was other and foreign.

sleeps 'calmly on a bag of straw with a minute rucksack for pillow and a knotty stick within reach' (C, 11).) While Sebald's urban wanderer makes seemingly aimless journeys to distract himself from thoughts of death, the rural wanderer's return to his hometown suggests a yearning for death. Indeed references to Gracchus – the wanderer suspended eternally between life and death – now proliferate; and usually signify the fusion of Eros and Thanatos. As discussed below, Sebald's melancholic emphasis on death-related motifs may owe less to Kafka than to his own contentious *reading* of Kafka. Wearing his academic hat, Sebald had interpreted *The Castle* in proto-existentialist terms; viewing K. as grappling with Heidegger's 'being-toward death' – the uniquely human understanding of death as that towards which our whole being is directed.[353] We *are,* Heidegger argues, only because we *know* that we will die: unlike the animal, that merely perishes. The Castle – 'the imaginary centre of the landscape of Death' – symbolises K.'s yearning: but since he can make only circuitous journeys around the building's periphery, death (and thus true understanding of *being*) is denied him.[354]

Doubles

Two explicit instances of doubles in *Vertigo* were discussed above: physical lookalikes (the twin boys who resemble Kafka), and good and evil twins (Balduin and his *doppelgänger*). More commonly, though, characters echo fictional or historical figures. The paths linking them vary in complexity and proximity. Dr K. is, like the Gracchus of the *original* tale, a double of the real Kafka. 'Sebald's' Gracchus is a double of Kafka's Gracchus; and, as the creation of the 'Sebald' who conceived Dr K., a double of both. 'Sebald' is a double of Sebald; Balduin of Kafka's unnamed protagonist of 'Description of a Struggle'; Casanova of

[353] Martin Heidegger, 'Bremen Lectures: Insight into That Which Is' in Günter Figal (ed.) *The Heidegger Reader*, trans. Jerome Veith (Indiana University Press, 2009), 253-283, p. 264.
[354] Sebald, 'Undiscover'd Country', p. 23. Austerlitz likewise views a world filled with spectres, railway stations as entrances to the underworld, and so on.

Josef K., and so on. I noted in Chapter One that Kafka's doubles are chiefly functional and psychological: Josef's interchangeable advisors in *The Trial*, for example, being by-products of incidents reiterated in slightly different form. Sebald's doubles, in contrast, are *echoes*, not near-duplicates, of the original subject; their principal purpose being to suggest the interwovenness of past and present. Their familiarity emerges at second-hand, mediated through the text, and – with the exception of different versions of Gracchus – they are rarely uncanny.

Chance and Coincidence

Vertigo incorporates numerous coincidences that tacitly suggest meaningful connections between apparently unrelated events. For example, the narrator mentions a fresco in Santa Maria della Visitazione in Venice, completed by Tiepolo shortly after Casanova's arrest. He later meets Salvatore Altamura, who is reading Leonardo Sciascia's *1912+1*, a novel telling of a killing carried out by woman named Tiepolo. Dr. K.'s dining companion at the sanatorium insists that 'all is determined by the most complex interdependencies' (V, 157); and Sebald himself muses whether 'similarities, overlaps and coincidences' are 'the schemes and symptoms of an order underlying the chaos of human relationships…?'[355]

Chance correlations proliferate in Kafka's fictions, but differ from Sebald's in respect of their aetiology and effects. They often involve the protagonist unexpectedly finding himself just where he needs to be, and are explicable in terms of Freud's 'coincidences of wish and fulfilment' during dreams or hallucinatory episodes. They neither suggest the interconnectedness of events nor hint at transcendent significance.

[355] W G Sebald, 'Le Promeneur Solitaire', *The New Yorker* (February 6, 2014), www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/le-promeneur-solitaire-w-g-sebald-on-robert-walser, accessed 1 May 2017.

Intra- and Intertextual Returns

Sebald is one of the most overtly and complexly intertextual authors of the twentieth century, reworking and re-presenting the biographical and fictional writings of numerous predecessors. He borrows freely, mediates one writer through another, and refers back and forth intratextually. For example, 'Sebald's' memory of a vision of a bier carried ashore at Riva is triggered by standing beside the Pizzeria Verona, the location of the original vision: but the words he now uses echo the description that *first* appeared in the account of Beyle and Mme Gherardi observing the bier. As Ann Pearson remarks, Sebald whimsically has Gracchus make 'landfall a century earlier in another writer's life'.[356] The significance of the incident emerges only when the reader leafs back to the first occurrence of the image. Moreover, 'Sebald' shifts from narrating to participating in the 'Gracchus' tale. Lying in his hotel in Venice, he feels his 'limbs…growing progressively colder and stiffer' as if 'already been interred or laid out for burial'; and imagines himself crossing the lagoon to 'the island of the departed' (V, 65). 'Sebald' identifies with the Hunter, and hence with Dr. K. – all solitary, nomadic figures. Incidents from his – and perhaps the author's – childhood are blended with Kafka's fragment 'In the Attic'. The child 'Sebald' had fantasised about the mysterious 'grey *chasseur*': conceived (he now claims) as '…a tall stranger with a high round cap of astrakhan fur set low on his forehead, dressed in a brown greatcoat fastened with broad straps reminiscent of a horse's harness. Lying in his lap he had a short curved sabre with a sheath that gleamed faintly. His feet were encased in spurred jackboots'. (V, 228) But this description corresponds, almost verbatim, to the description of Hans Schlag in Kafka's 'Attic' fragment. 'Sebald' recalls, not childhood visions of the *chasseur* but a fictional work: and of

[356] Ann Pearson, '"Remembrance…Is Nothing Other than a Quotation": The Intertextual Fictions of W. G. Sebald', *Comparative Literature,* 60, 3 (2008) 261-278, p. 266.

course the recollection itself is a fiction – Sebald the author having quoted directly from Kafka's fragment. We do not know whether the childhood episode occurred, even within the text. Distinctions between actual lives, fictionalised lives and literature collapse. Kafka's conundrum is thereby, in a fashion, resolved: life and literature merging in a fiendishly intricate web of intertextual relationships.

Some allusions are highly obscure or subtle, and easily missed by all but the most attentive readers.[357] For example, the narrator of 'All 'estero' observes that Pisanello's fresco in the *Chiesa Sant'Anastasia*, Verona, incorporates a 'ship with billowing sails' and a 'gallows with the hanged men dangling from it'. This 'paradoxically imparts something lifelike to the scene' (V, 75). The marine references, coupled with mention of 'lifelike' corpses, suggest a manifestation of Gracchus. Visiting the church (as did Kafka) Dr. K. senses the Hunter's presence and hallucinates everything 'splitting and multiplying' around him (149).[358] Here, as elsewhere, the reader experiences eerie sensations at the mention of seemingly innocuous items – pigeons, sailing-boats, and other recurrent motifs that signify the Hunter's imminent arrival. The uncanny irrupts, in other words, in homely and unremarkable circumstances. Gracchus's last appearance, as the 'grey *chasseur*', is doubly uncanny, for the resemblance between the tailor's dummy and the human figure also generates uncertainty as to whether it is animate.

Why does Sebald make so many (usually unacknowledged) allusions to other writers? Perhaps he is playfully subverting accepted notions of authorship and originality, or demonstrating that the concerns of human beings vary little time and space. Pearson notes that intra- and intertextual literary allusions disrupt realist conventions – in particular those

[357] Cf. Medin, *Three Sons*, p. 108.
[358] Postcard to Felice Bauer dated 20 September 1913, in F Kafka, *Briefe an Felice Bauer: und andere Korrespondenzen aus der Verlobungszeit*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch (S. Fischer Verlag, 2015) p. 322.

specifying narratorial continuity and verisimilitude – and draw attention to the constructed nature of the text. They often oblige us to retrace our steps, searching for clues in passages already read: thereby dislocating the linear process of reading, and deferring the grasped significance of certain motifs and events. The reader's sense of what Barthes calls the *déjà-lu* ('already-read') accordingly enacts the protagonist's sense of *déjà vu*.[359]

Russell Kilbourn offers a less plausible motive for Sebald's borrowings. He notes that, for Sebald, 'chance occurrences, coincidences…when viewed from the proper perspective, can be seen to relate together in fantastically complex but discernibly meaningful configurations'.[360] And 'intertextuality is the principal vehicle for the "representation" of…interconnectively determined meaning'.[361] In other words, Sebald's demonstration of the interconnectedness of all *texts* enacts his belief in the interconnectedness of all *events*; and thus, indirectly, his denial that meaningless chance rules human affairs. Kilbourn's claims are problematic, however; for intertextual allusions manifest the writer *intentionally* employing specific texts as source material. The narrator's actions in 'All 'estero' are determined by Sebald's decision to base the section on Kafka's records of his Italian travels between 1913 and 1917, not by quasi-supernatural forces. And *intertextual* connectivity – which involves juxtapositions selected, and meanings imposed, by the author – hardly demonstrates *extratextual* meaningfulness. Most significantly, in making interconnections manifest, Sebald demonstrates their *meaninglessness*. Thus nothing of significance follows from the narrator encountering someone resembling Ludwig II just before reading about the terrorist 'Organizzazione Ludwig'. Suggesting that the coincidence may carry momentous import if 'viewed from the

[359] Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 19.
[360] Russell J A Kilbourn, 'Kafka, Nabokov…Sebald: Intertextuality and Narratives of Redemption in *Schwindel. Gefühle* and *The Emigrants*', in Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh (eds), W. *G. Sebald: Trauma, Memory, History* (Berlin: de Gryuter, 2006), 33-63, p. 43.
[361] Kilbourn, 'Kafka, Nabokov', p. 44.

proper perspective' is question-begging sophistry. Moreover, the author occasionally subverts claims to meaningful patterns behind coincidences. Meeting Kafka's double would, 'Sebald' implies, confirm his putatively 'psychic' affinities with the writer – but the thought is disrupted on realising that the boy first glimpsed has a twin brother. If a seemingly unique individual turns out to have a multiplicity of doubles, the encounter loses its significance.[362]

Why, in *Vertigo*, does Sebald draw principally upon *Kafka's* texts? He undoubtedly finds echoes of his own gloomy preoccupations and sense of dislocation in his predecessor, whose protagonists – like Sebald's – wander restlessly in a world in which they are manifestly ill at ease. More significantly, Kafka provides a model for the impossibility of achieving any but a superficial knowledge and understanding of the world. In his essay on *The Castle*, Sebald suggests that K. has 'messianic traits': but the repetitive, backward-looping narrative structure indicates that the resolution implied by a messiah's arrival is unachievable.[363] In Kilbourn's words, Kafka offers only an 'ironically messianic eschatology: a negative or anti-eschatology; not about the "end" but rather its deferral or impossibility'.[364] Gracchus is likewise a bogus messiah, the pigeon's announcement to the Bürgermeister of his arrival being 'a parody of annunciation iconography'.[365]

MEDIN'S CRITIQUE OF SEBALD

Daniel Medin's account of Kafka's influence on *Vertigo* involves enumerating textual parallels and appraising the 'legitimacy' of Sebald's borrowings.[366] His model of influence is

[362] Cf. Markus Zisselsberger, *Fragments of One's Own Existence: The Reader W.G. Sebald* (PhD Thesis) (Binghamton University/State University of New York, 2008) p. 246.
[363] Sebald, 'Undiscover'd Country', p. 29.
[364] Kilbourn, 'Kafka, Nabokov', p. 37.
[365] Kilbourn, 'Kafka, Nabokov', p. 42.
[366] Medin, *Three Sons*. Peter Schmucker also provides a comprehensive account of Sebald's borrowings from Kafka, listing eleven motifs common to both writers: 'The wanderer; Intermediate realm between life and death; Suspension of time; Undead, vampires, ghosts, Doppelgängers; Connections between death and eroticism; Melancholy; The profane angel; Messianism; The futility and failure of Messianism; Denial of the possibility of

Bloom's account of misreading. There exist, Medin writes, 'two opposing methods of appropriation: those bent, Bloom-like, on usurpation through imitative violence and those that pursue misreadings with greater reverence…'[367] Sebald belongs to the first category: 'working aggressively to redefine…Kafka's fiction and biography through misrepresentation'.[368]

Medin argues that in his academic writings Sebald fundamentally misinterprets Kafka. His account of *The Castle* 'swerves defiantly' from the source, an almost exclusive focus on the 'death motif' seriously distorting Kafka's intentions.[369] In his own novels, Sebald fuses the historical writer Kafka, his adopted persona ('Sebald'), his fictional characters, his versions of Kafka's characters, and his fictionalised version of Kafka, 'Dr. K.'. These multi-layered doublings and projections blur distinctions between writers and works: at the cost, Medin argues, of 'textual or historical truth'. They yield a 'Franz Kafka' who, in his melancholy paralysis and moribund fixation with death, comes much closer to resembling 'W.G. Sebald,' protagonist and first-person narrator of [the fictions]'.[370]

'Sebald' mentions, in one letter to Felice, 'But what love could have been sufficient to spare the child the terrors of love, which for Dr. K stood foremost among all the terrors of the earth?' (V, 167). There is no typographical distinction between quoted text and 'Sebald's' own comments. Again, he suggests that 'the meaning of Gracchus the huntsman's ceaseless journey lies in a penitence for a longing for love, such as invariably besets Dr K.' (165). The implication is that Dr K.'s anxieties about committing to marriage derive from homosexual inclinations, and that Gracchus's suspension between life and death represents self-

Utopia, also of the revolutionary; The end of 'grand narratives' (Peter Schmucker, *Grenzübertretungen: Intertextualität im Werk von W. G. Sebald* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012) p. 107). My translation.
[367] Medin, *Three Sons*, p. 11.
[368] Medin, *Three Sons*, p. 12.
[369] Medin, *Three Sons*, p. 81.
[370] Medin, *Three Sons*, p. 12.

punishment for moral transgression. There is little reason to attribute such thoughts to Kafka, Medin argues. Sebald's conflation of the two figures results in a 'purposefully and methodically selective' portrayal of the writer.[371]

I agree that Sebald's habit of seamlessly blending unattributed passages from Kafka's writings with *his* text is regrettable. Nevertheless, his reading of Kafka's work as permeated by death-related imagery is not implausible: the error being, perhaps, to consider it an adequate global interpretation.[372] Moreover, if a fictionalised version of Sebald creates a fictionalised version of Kafka, the result is, surely, fiction: though the close parallels between Dr. K and Kafka might still raise ethical issues. Indeed, 'Sebald' repeatedly emphasises the speculative nature of his narrative: writing, for example, 'How Dr. K. passed his days in Venice in reality, we do not know' (V, 148). The phrase 'in reality' implies that the account is fictional. The German title ('swindle') also warns the reader not to assume historical 'truth'.

Medin elsewhere complains that a 'strong successor', such as Sebald, may 'destroy the prior meaning [of an originary text] entirely'.[373] In other words, Medin's accusation that Sebald misreads Kafka tacitly ascribes a settled meaning to Kafka's work. This assumption follows from Medin's failure to challenge Bloom's confusing premises, which assert that all readings are misreadings while simultaneously implying the existence of (broadly) correct readings. Earlier, moreover, Medin has acknowledged Kafka's tendency to 'hover' and consequent resistance to interpretation. Kafka's elusiveness accordingly invites and warrants

[371] Medin, *Three Sons*, p. 124.
[372] As a partial interpretation, Sebald's is acceptable. He writes, for example, 'The clearest evidence that the administrative apparatus of the Castle is occupied with the endless cataloguing of the dead comes from the claim that despite of all confusion and contradictions nobody can slip through the official net' (Sebald, 'Undiscover'd Country', p. 33).
[373] Daniel L Medin, *Three Sons: Franz Kafka and the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee, Philip Roth, and W. G. Sebald* (PhD thesis) (St. Louis, MO: Washington University, 2005) p. 181.

transformations. Sebald is not claiming to make definitive statements about Kafka the man, nor about how to interpret the work, but merely drawing inspiration from both.

AUSTERLITZ

Sebald's last prose text, *Austerlitz* (2001) was translated by Anthea Bell, again in close co-operation with the author.[374] It more resembles a traditional novel than *Vertigo*. Despite lengthy digressions and piecemeal revelations, it possesses a broadly linear, forward-moving structure, one based on a quest for 'truth' about the past. Since *Austerlitz* is unambiguously a fictional work, we read its numerous photographs differently from those of *Vertigo*. Having purportedly been taken by the fictional protagonist, they seem unproblematically illustrative. Nevertheless, since many represent real-world places, their presence is disorientating. It contributes, Long suggests, to a 'profound ontological confusion' at the heart of the novel.[375]

Summary

The protagonist relates his life history to the unidentified narrator over a thirty-year period between 1967 and 1997, in varying locations, frequently following chance encounters.[376] We learn that Jacques Austerlitz, a London-based architectural historian, grew up in the 1940s as Dafydd Elias, in rural Wales, in the care of a dour preacher and his sickly wife. He attends Stower Grange school and spends summer holidays with his friend Gerald Fitzpatrick at

[374] Anthea Bell, 'W.G. Sebald: A Translator's View', https://fivedials.com/fiction/a-translators-view, accessed 1 July 2018.
[375] J J Long, *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 150.
[376] Sebald states that 'Behind Austerlitz hide two or three, or perhaps three-and-a-half, real persons…[including] an apparently English woman who…had come to this country with her twin sister and been brought up in a Welsh Calvinist household. One of the twins died and the surviving twin never really knew that her origins were in a Munich orphanage' (Maya Jaggi, 'The Last Word', *The Guardian* (21 December 2001), www.theguardian.com/education/2001/dec/21/artsandhumanities.highereducation, accessed 1 January 2019).

Andromeda Lodge, near the seaside town of Barmouth. The headmaster eventually discloses the boy's birth name. Shocked and bemused, Austerlitz attempts to fill the void in his past by accumulating factual knowledge about matters external to him. He becomes a specialist on nineteenth-century architecture, his knowledge serving as '...a substitute or compensatory memory' (A, 198). Although intensely curious about his true identity, he employs 'self-censorship' to resist investigating his origins. The 'constant suppression of the memories surfacing' harms his mental health, and he suffers hallucinations and, eventually, a nervous breakdown (198). A radio discussion about the *Kindertransport* programme of 1938-1939 triggers memories of travelling by train through Europe and crossing by ferry to England. Austerlitz now decides to return to Prague, the city of his birth. Using the State Archives he finds his former home, and meets Vera Ryšanová, his childhood nanny. He learns that his father, Maximilian, had gone to Paris just before the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, intending his wife Agáta Austerlitzová and Jacques to join him there. Agáta delays and, unable to obtain a travel permit for herself, arranges for the boy to join the *Kindertransport*. She is eventually deported to Theresienstadt ('Terezín' in Czech), a ghetto and camp nominally governed by a Jewish 'Cultural Council' and overseen by the SS (*Schutzstaffel*). Theresienstadt was presented as a 'model Jewish settlement' to visiting Red Cross officials and in a Nazi propaganda film; but over 30,000 prisoners died there, chiefly of disease and malnutrition.[377] After visiting Theresienstadt, Austerlitz travels to Paris, attempting to discover his father's fate. His researches in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* are inconclusive, but at the close of the novel he confirms that he will continue the search.

There is one (indirect) reference to Kafka in the novel. Vera reminds Austerlitz that he visited Marienbad in 1938 with his parents; and many years later he revisits the spa with

[377] Kurt Gerron, *Theresienstadt. Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet* (1944).

Marie de Verneuil. He suffers acute distress, partly because repressed memories of the family holiday return, partly because he feels impelled to detach himself emotionally from Marie. The episode undoubtedly echoes Kafka's unhappy visit to Marienbad with Felice Bauer in July 1916.[378]

Austerlitz treats numerous weighty issues, including the role of memory in reconstructing the past; literary ethics and the Holocaust; the problem of historical amnesia; and the part played by chance in human life. Three topics demand sustained examination: Sebald's treatment of time and space; motifs involving surveillance and the archive; and the deliberate espousal of uncertainty through various 'hovering' techniques. All reveal varying degrees of indebtedness to Kafka. Other Kafkan motifs are less prominent. The only mention of doubles, for example, occurs when the protagonist recollects 'the image of a twin brother who had been with [him] on that long journey' (the *Kindertransport*) (A, 316). There are also few intertextual returns. In one rare instance, Austerlitz wonders if his father 'had gone south on foot across the Pyrenees, and perished somewhere along the way' (359): a probable reference to Walter Benjamin's attempted escape from France over the Pyrenees in 1940, and suicide after being apprehended by Spanish police.

SEBALD'S TREATMENT OF TIME IN *AUSTERLITZ*

Stasis, Superimposition and Rupture

As argued in Chapter One, Kafka's spatio-temporal distortions – distances expanding or shrinking, and time speeding up or slowing down – are interpretable as his protagonists experiencing hallucinatory episodes. Moreover, such incidents are described in matter-of-fact

[378] On 6 July 1916 Kafka wrote 'Unhappy night. Impossible to live with F. Intolerable living with anyone' (F. Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1914-1923*, trans. Martin Greenberg (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949) p. 157) On 29 January 1922, however, he recalled 'fourteen days of happiness in Marienbad' (*Diaries*, p. 216)

language that augments their uncanniness. We never learn what might lie behind them, chiefly because Kafka's protagonists live almost wholly in the present. Austerlitz, like the narrator of *Vertigo,* hallucinates, misremembers, experiences *déjà vu* and bizarre coincidences, and views events repeated across time and space in the lives of different characters. In Christopher Gregory-Guider's words, each place 'opens onto a ghostly version of its past existence, allowing a kind of traffic between the present and the past, the living and the dead'.[379] Nevertheless, the sense of disorientation experienced by Sebald's protagonists has, unlike Kafka's, specifically attributable causes in past trauma. They are seeking meaningful patterns in repetitions and echoes; attempting to find continuity in a ruptured and chaotic world.

We can distinguish three kinds of non-linear time in *Austerlitz*: stasis, superimposition and temporal rupture. First, the notion that all times (as measured by clock and calendar) co-exist in an eternal present entails *stasis*; a notion sometimes linked with connected McTaggart's argument for the 'unreality' of time.[380] While Kafka represents stasis chiefly through repetitive narratorial structures, Mark McCulloh identifies several elements in *Austerlitz* conducive to a sense of stasis.[381] As in *Vertigo,* the forward movement of the narrative is frequently retarded by seamless transitions into essay-type digressions; and photographs oblige the reader to contemplate their reference, purpose or significance. Maze-like structures are ubiquitous. At Liverpool Street Station, Austerlitz suddenly remembers himself as a child being collected by the Welsh minister, and hallucinates a vision in which his interlocking memories resemble 'labyrinthine vaults' (A, 193). Time is metaphorically conceived, less as a

[379] Christopher Gregory-Guider, '"The 'Sixth Emigrant": Traveling Places in the Works of W.G. Sebald', *Contemporary Literature*, 46, 3 (2005) 422-449, p. 427 and p. 428.
[380] J M E McTaggart 'The Unreality of Time', *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 17 (1908), 456-473. The claim that all times exist simultaneously cannot account for change; and McTaggart is probably best interpreted as saying that language does not represents the nature of time adequately.
[381] Mark R McCulloh, 'The Stylistics of Stasis: Paradoxical Effects in W. G. Sebald', *Style*, 38, 1 (2004) 38-49.

flowing river than in spatial, often architectural terms; movement through time being superseded by movement through space. Fortress-like and star-shaped buildings constantly appear, the Theresienstadt camp both recapitulating similar structures in past times, and being recapitulated in modern buildings. Here stasis suggests the unlikelihood, perhaps impossibility, of moral progress.

Secondly, different times may be *superimposed*; layered one above another. The notion is related to Bergson's concept of *duration*, the lived sense of time that may involve different segments of the past coexisting in our minds. Superimposition is the dominant mode of temporal modification in *Austerlitz*, and reflects the stratified storage and retrieval of memories. Because layers may shift, superimposition (unlike stasis) allows for change and past events influencing the present – the novel's most pervasive theme. The protagonist speculates on the possibility of different times coexisting. Visiting the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, Austerlitz denies having owned a timepiece of any kind, memorably describing a clock as

> …something ridiculous, a thoroughly mendacious object…I have always resisted the power of time…in the hope…that time will not pass away, has not passed away, that I can turn back and go behind it, and there I shall find everything as it once was, or more precisely I shall find that all moments of time have co-existed simultaneously, in which case none of what history tells us would be true, past events have not yet occurred but are waiting to do so at the moment when we think of them... (A, 143-144)

Austerlitz finds temporal boundaries dissolved in certain locations, resulting in different times co-existing. Crucially, the novel represents the disjointed process of recollection less by recreating the protagonist's subjective inner life as he remembers his past than by superimposing *outward correlates* of his experiences. These comprise places visited, photographs, mementoes, written records and the like. Indeed, his memories are largely 'archival', encased in objects external to him. In other words, the layering of memories,

experienced as the superimposition of different times and places, is less a matter of representing the protagonist's inner memories than of presenting the scrapbook of material items that trigger his memories.

Stasis and superimposition both involve layered spatio-temporal perceptions; caused (in the case of Sebald's protagonists) by diverse personal memories and passages recollected from other writers jostling haphazardly against each other. As Jonathan Long writes, Sebald does not present unrelated moments in time, 'radically discontinuous realities', but rather 'a thoroughly historicised account of modern subjectivity', with spaces 'deeply marked by the traces of history.'[382] In contrast, the temporal distortions experienced by Kafka's protagonists, involve (thirdly) the disruption of linear time by sudden *discontinuities*; and are attributable to discrete hallucinatory episodes. Kafka's dislocations differ from Sebald's in being informed *overtly* by neither memory or history. More accurately, perhaps, we are ignorant of the extratextual biographical or contextual causes of anomalous mental episodes experienced by his protagonists.

Story Time, Discourse Time and Autobiographical Time

Some further distinctions are helpful. Firstly, building upon Shklovsky's notions of *fabula* and *sjužet*, Genette distinguishes between *story time*, which indicates the chronological sequence in which narrated events would happen in real life; and *discourse time*, which concerns the sequence in which events are presented in the narrative.[383] The latter may shuffle chronologies to produce analepsis and prolepsis (flashbacks and flashforwards) and other anachronies; 'discordances between the two orderings of story and narrative'.[384] Jens

[382] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 173.
[383] Gérard Genette, 'Discours du récit', *Figures*, III (1972), 77-182.
[384] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jan E Lewin (Oxford and New York: Cornell University Press, 1980) p. 16.

Brockmeier argues, secondly, that in what he calls *autobiographical time*, chronology and direction of 'flow' cease to matter greatly. Our grasp of our identity depends, not on establishing the sequential order of remembered past events, but on understanding their *significance*.[385] According to Brockmeier, Sebald's principal aim is to convey Austerlitz's experience of autobiographical time. Genette's non-sequential discourse time does not capture this idea, for flashback and flashforward presuppose a fixed frame of reference that determines which events occur in past or future time.[386] Autobiographical time, in other words, no longer presupposes a framework of sequential story time; one that assumes a natural, 'objective' temporal order.

Thirdly, building on Günter Müller's distinction between *erzählte Zeit* ('narrated time', the time span covered by the story) and *Erzählzeit* ('narrating time', the time taken to tell the story) we can add *time of narration*, the point in the narrative at which a particular story is told.[387] This latter notion is particularly relevant to *Austerlitz*. Sebald blends different temporal orders in narrated time, including re-creations of the protagonist's fragmentary memories, thoughts about what he is currently experiencing and historical reflections; but these not only occur at different points in calendar time, but are related at different points in the narrative. The complex interactions produce further temporal layers that become all-but-impossible to disentangle. When, for example, Austerlitz visits Theresienstadt he first encounters the dilapidated outer remains of an eighteenth-century fortress. Entering the nearly empty town, he is struck by the gates 'obstructing access to a darkness never yet penetrated' (A, 268). Moving to the future in a flashforward, Austerlitz recounts a dream that followed

[385] Jens Brockmeier, *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative, and the Autobiographical Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[386] Brockmeier, p. 298.
[387] Günter Müller, 'Erzählzeit und erzählte Zeit' in E Müller and H Egner (eds.), *Günther Müller: Morphologische Poetik* (Darmstadt: WinG, 1968) 269–286.

the visit. The reader, however, learns about this dream only when Austerlitz recounts the experience to the narrator, who in turn reports his own imperfect memories of the conversation. Austerlitz's memories are informed, moreover, by reflections on the earlier history of Theresienstadt and H G Adler's detailed account of its appropriation by the Nazis.[388] And his experience of atemporal simultaneity is echoed in random gatherings of material traces of the past, such as displayed in the 'Antikos Bazar': 'What was the meaning [he ponders] of the festive white lace tablecloth hanging over the back of the ottoman, and the armchair with its worn brocade cover? What secret lay behind the three brass mortars of different sizes, which had about them the suggestion of an oracular utterance, or the cut-glass bowls, ceramic vases, and earthenware jugs, the tin advertising sign...' (A, 275).

Photographs and the Unknowability of the Past

The uncertain epistemic status of photographs in *Austerlitz* further reinforces the novel's non-linear, non-chronological rendering of time. As Mary Griffin Wilson argues, Sebald's 'Bergsonian' temporal structures involve a 'fundamental deception' by introducing a 'present' that has never been past.[389] Thus Sebald carefully positions a photograph of a rucksack alongside a description of the protagonist's rucksack, bought 'in an army surplus store in the Charing Cross Road.' (A, 55).[390] The referents of text and image cannot be the same, for the rucksack's owner is a fictional character but the photograph represents something that once existed in the real world. Nevertheless, because some photographs – such as that of the Palace of Justice in Brussels – *do* straightforwardly correspond to textual references, Sebald 'lulls'

[388] H G Adler, *Theresienstadt. 1941-1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft, Geschichte Soziologie Psychologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1955).
[389] Mary Griffin Wilson, 'Sheets of Past: Reading the Image in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*', *Contemporary Literature*, 54, 1, (2013) 49-76, p.54.
[390] In the German text the image appears directly after the words 'dieser Rucksack'.

the reader into the 'momentary assumption' that both photographs authentically document the protagonist's life.[391] As Long writes, Sebald is playing a game of 'ontological hide-and-seek...which both invites and thwarts [our] attempts to separate fact from fiction'.[392]

One photograph purports to depict Austerlitz himself, as a fair-haired child wearing an extravagant white page-boy costume (A, 258).[393] The protagonist muses that he 'felt the piercing, inquiring gaze of the page boy…who was waiting in the grey light of dawn on the empty field for me to accept the challenge and avert the misfortune lying ahead of him' (260). Sebald refers here to Barthes's observation that some photographs convey their subject's blissful ignorance immediately prior to some catastrophic event.[394] Austerlitz has no memories of the occasion shown, but imagines treating his former self as existing contemporaneously, and warning him of what lies before him. By including what is *in this context* evidently a bogus image – for it cannot *represent* the fictional character Austerlitz – Sebald disrupts our routine assumption that a photograph of a child thus dressed must represent a past moment 'frozen in time'. And the anonymity of the actual subject invites speculation that a still-living child modelled specially for the photograph. Again, Vera identifies Agáta in a photograph of an anonymous actress, discovered by chance in theatrical archives. Austerlitz's subsequent 'memories' of his mother are almost certainly located in images of a stranger. As discussed further below, Sebald's purpose in these cases is to draw attention to the ultimate unknowability of the past.

[391] Wilson, 'Sheets', p. 55.
[392] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 118.
[393] The image also appears on the cover of the British paperback edition of *Austerlitz*.
[394] Barthes writes 'I shudder... *over a catastrophe which has already occurred* '(Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Flamingo. 1984) p. 96.

Proustian and Archival Memory

Buried memories occasionally emerge spontaneously into consciousness in *Austerlitz,* sparked Proustian-style via the association of some event with a sensory experience. Returning to the Šporkova in Prague, the protagonist, feeling uneven paving-stones beneath his feet, declares that 'memories were revealing themselves to me not by means of any mental effort but through my senses, so long numbed...' (A, 212). Unlike Proust's narrator, however, Austerlitz seems not to contain his past within him, repressed memories awaiting reawakening; and his memories are rarely *felt*. Austerlitz makes cognitive, not emotional, connections between objects and places, and events of his past life. Buildings, photographs and the like are less catalysts for Proustian memories than *externalised representations* of those memories. Nevertheless, instances of *mémoire involontaire* arrive infrequently, and Austerlitz must rely almost exclusively on archival sources of information about his childhood.

Sebald and Kafka Compared

Manifestations of non-sequential, non-linear time in *Austerlitz* differ from Kafka's temporal dislocations in their motivations, causes and effects. Typically, the protagonist's experience of autobiographical time involves the superimposition of different times. Two metaphors convey the effect produced. Austerlitz oscillates between shimmering temporal layers, yielding what Brian McHale calls 'ontological flicker'.[395] And temporal segments are *nested* one within the other, such that reading resembles opening indefinitely many Chinese boxes. Kafka, in contrast, suddenly telescopes or expands time and distance, creating abrupt discontinuities. These probably originate, as discussed earlier, in temporary hallucinatory episodes disrupting

[395] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1987) p. 134.

spatio-temporal perceptions. Sebald's protagonist also hallucinates frequently, but experiences not sudden spatio-temporal shifts but past times and places superimposed upon the present. Fractured personal memories, together with fragments from other peoples' lives, come to the surface. Because superimposition severs connections with clock and calendar time as surely as Kafka's abrupt discontinuities, it has a similar disorientating effect.

Sebald's complex restructuring of time is motivated by a wish to show continuities between past and present and to suggest, pessimistically, that little fundamentally changes; that moral progress is probably a chimera. He also emphasises the ultimate unknowability of the past. The intermingling of past and present indicates that remembering and knowing are imperfect and unreliable *processes*, not completable actions. In particular, the Holocaust is not an event frozen in the past, and its repercussions echo into the present.

SURVEILLANCE AND THE ARCHIVE

The archive in its various manifestations lies, in Long's words, 'at the very heart of Sebald's narrative project…[one]…profoundly concerned with the material and infrastructural basis of knowledge systems…'[396] Virtually all of Sebald's themes – architecture, bureaucracy, surveillance and control, fragmentation of the self, photography, the natural environment – touch upon archival issues. Much of *Austerlitz* recounts the protagonist's attempts to reconstruct his past through visits to records offices and libraries. In addition to a huge collection of academic material, he has assembled a personal archive of diaries, travel memorabilia and the like. The novel itself is (like *Vertigo*) a repository of vast quantities of factual information. As Christina Kraenzle, writes, Sebald juxtaposes 'quotations and commentary, facts and fictions, images and multiple languages […] without great distinction'

[396] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 11.

so that 'Sebald the author vanishes beneath his fabulous miscellany only to reappear as Sebald the collector'.[397] Inconsequential items are stored alongside accounts of momentous events; and because much information is untrustworthy, the novel *instantiates* one of Sebald's principal themes – the fragility and unreliability of archival knowledge.

Chapter One discussed how archive-related motifs pervade Kafka's novels, and their connection with surveillance and the 'soft' coercive powers of bureaucracy. Sebald examines similar issues in *Austerlitz,* though his purposes and methods sometimes differ from Kafka's. Archival themes are less pronounced in *Vertigo,* whose narrator reconstructs his childhood chiefly through conversations with surviving acquaintances. Nevertheless, he, like Austerlitz, is preoccupied with preserving material traces of his travels, and with visiting collection-based institutions. Both have a diminished sense of self. 'Sebald's' self chiefly comprises a dense web of allusions to earlier writers, philosophers and historians, and Austerlitz has externalised his memories.

The archival systems described by Sebald seem initially well-ordered compared to the 'shambolic amateurishness of Kafka's filing cupboard'.[398] The Prague state archives allow Austerlitz to trace his childhood home, for example. Even so, the archivist's office resembles that of Kafka's Castle Superintendent, being 'full of stacks of paper tied up with string, not a few of them discoloured by sunlight and brittle at the edges, crammed in roll-front cupboards, deposited on shelves that sagged under their weight, piled high on a rickety little trolley...' (A, 207). And archives are highly susceptible to loss and damage. Since Austerlitz's guardian had 'obliterated every indication' of the boy's origins his teacher, André Hilary, consults social services, the Foreign office and the *Kindertransport* Aid Committee (A, 105). In every case

[397] Christina Kraenzle, 'Picturing Place: Travel, Photography, and Imaginative Geography in W.G. Sebald's *Rings of Saturn*' in L Patt (ed.) *Searching for Sebald: Photography after W.G. Sebald* (Los Angeles: Institute of Critical Inquiry and ICI Press, 2007) 126–145, p. 127.
[398] Long, *W. G. Sebald*, p. 10.

records have been lost – in some cases following evacuations carried out to escape *Luftwaffe* air-raids.

Record-keeping facilitates authorities' attempt to control people's identities and their movements. In *Vertigo* the narrator is required to fill in numerous forms when registering in Italian hotels. At Limone the hotel-owner's wife carefully stows away his passport but, ironically, it is mistakenly handed to another departing guest. A comedy of errors ensues, several people vainly trying to locate the passport and complex bureaucratic procedures put in train to produce alternative documentation. How, 'Sebald' asks, 'was I to be provided with provisional papers proving my identity, in the absence of my passport…?' (V, 100). Not only have supposedly near-foolproof archival mechanisms failed, but the narrator is, paradoxically, 'free to move only insofar as his movements are controlled by the archival apparatus of the state'.[399]

The Bibliothèque Nationale

Austerlitz's visit to the new *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris, in a vain attempt to discover his father's fate, presents a sustained examination of the coercive methods used to control archival knowledge. In a labyrinthine building of 'inhuman monumentality' he encounters insensitive bureaucracy and administrative turmoil similar to that faced by Kafka's protagonists.[400] The entry system is '...an utter absurdity, something that must have been devised…to instil a sense of insecurity and humiliation in the poor readers'. One door is chained, and he must submit to searches 'by semi-uniformed security men' (A, 389). Moreover, visitors travel between levels on moving walkways, suggesting a factory-type system that reduces its users to objects. The prospective reader is instructed to '...put your

[399] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 77.
[400] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 10.

request at an information point...take a number...wait, often for half an hour or more, until another member of staff calls you into a separate cubicle...and here you must say again what it is you have come for and receive the relevant instructions'. Visitors are made to feel that their business is 'of an extremely dubious nature…to be dealt with away from the public gaze' (390). The library alienates its users such that it becomes 'a place of banishment' (391), and appears 'to consist entirely of obstructions' (393). In short, rather than explicit prohibition, architectural and spatial techniques (the guarded entrance, sparse and uncomfortable seats in the waiting area, the claustrophobic cubicles) are employed to deter and restrict access to the archive.[401] Similarly, Kafka's protagonists are rarely denied access to information directly but must wait in labyrinthine corridors listening to the interminable ramblings of obstructive officials.

Austerlitz speculates that 'the size and degree of complexity' of archival projects mean that 'the all-embracing and absolute perfection of the concept…ultimately must coincide with its chronic dysfunction and constitutional instability' (A, 392-393). In seeking the apparently 'rational' goal of completeness, it becomes too large and unwieldy for human beings to comprehend. Paradoxically, the archive ends up generating precisely the chaos that it seeks to eliminate.

The new *Bibliothèque* was built on the site of the Nazi Austerlitz-Tolbiac storage depot for the collection, cataloguing and 'redistribution' of goods confiscated from Parisian Jews. This constituted, in Long's words, 'a vast archival enterprise [that] foregrounds the close connection between archives and power'.[402] Apparently 'Over five hundred art historians, antique dealers, restorers, joiners, clock-makers, furriers and couturiers…were employed day after day, in fourteen-hour shifts, to put the goods coming into the depot in proper order and

[401] Cf. Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 83.
[402] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 9.

sort them by value and kind' (A, 402). This material was shipped to Germany, but confiscated financial assets were retained in Paris and later appropriated by the French state. They consequently helped to fund, some 50 years later, the building of the *Bibliothèque*. Sebald pointedly draws parallels between the new library and Nazi archives by shifting seamlessly to an account of record-keeping at Theresienstadt. Looking through an architectural journal in a reading-room at the *Bibliothèque*, Austerlitz finds a photograph of a room 'filled with open shelves up to the ceiling where the files on the prisoners in the little fortress of Terezín are kept today' (A, 395).[403] A double-page reproduction of this photograph follows, only seven pages after one of the *Bibliothèque* and unseparated by other illustrative material. As Sebald probably suspected, some readers will assume the Terezín photograph to be one taken in the *Bibliothèque*. It suggests the ideal for which the Nazi archivist strove; the disorderliness of human life reduced to alphabetically-ordered files – one for each prisoner – arranged neatly upon shelves in a silent room. The near-juxtaposition of the images collapses the geographical space and temporal distance between Theresienstadt in the 1940s and Paris today, suggesting the continuing harmful potential of archival institutions and, more specifically, similarities between a past totalitarian and a present-day liberal government. After the Second World War the French state sought to conceal its theft of Jewish assets: a conspiracy echoed in the difficulty of gaining access to the *Bibliothèque*. That institution enacts, in Long's words, 'a willed historical amnesia' that 'sustains itself through the ongoing exercise of disciplinary power'.[404] Nevertheless, the past reasserts itself. The library collection is a ghostly echo of the Terezín files and the Austerlitz-Tolbiac depot; and birds frequently fly into the mirror-like windows, falling 'lifeless to the ground' (A, 392). The new building, like the depot, is a place of death. Incidentally, just as the *Bibliothèque* cannot wholly disguise its physical and

[403] The actual files have been removed to the Theresienstadt archive and those in the photograph are empty.
[404] Long, *W.G. Sebald*, p. 83.

financial origins, people do not fundamentally change themselves in taking on a new identity. The traumatised Jacques became the unhappy Dafydd Elias and the tortured adult Austerlitz.

The Archive, Surveillance and Architecture

As discussed earlier, the mere existence of an archive echoes the reasoning behind panoptical structures, for both subjugate individuals to their demands by generating habits of self-monitoring. Further, in *Austerlitz* archives are often housed in buildings resembling a panopticon. The Karmelitská building in Prague, which houses the Czech State Archives, was built in 'a style resembling the prison architecture of the bourgeois epoch' with cell-like rooms surrounding a central courtyard (A, 204). Rhizoid, star-shaped fortresses also appear frequently. They resemble panopticons in having central observation points, but rather than being self-enclosed they extend into the surrounding countryside, and are low-lying and relatively flat. As defensive structures they recall Kafka's burrow and castle. The narrator describes the Belgian fort Breendonk, a sprawling structure built to protect Antwerp, as resembling 'something hunched and misshapen: the broad back of a monster…risen from the Flemish soil like a whale from the deep' (A); with the 'anatomical blueprint of some alien and crab-like creature' (27). Biomorphic figures of speech are appropriate, for the self-perpetuating growth of the archives housed in such buildings resembles that of living organisms. Watching *Toute la mémoire du monde*, a film about the old *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Austerlitz muses that 'the scholars, together with the whole apparatus of the library, formed an immensely complex and constantly evolving creature which had to be fed with myriads of words in order to bring forth myriads of words in its own turn' (364). He employs buildings as psychological metaphors; dreaming, for example, that he 'was at the innermost heart of a star-shaped fortress, a dungeon entirely cut off from the outside world'

(196). His own mind is a fortress; protecting him against unwelcome memories but also imprisoning him. The star shape becomes a leitmotif; a constant reminder of the archival power yielded by the authorities. Even the mosaic floor of the hallway of Austerlitz's childhood home incorporates octofoil flower patterns: and Sebald includes a photograph in case the reader misses the verbal allusion (213). Other structures conform to rectangular grid patterns. The narrator imagines railway lines on engineer's plans of Liverpool Street Station as 'muscles and sinews in an anatomical atlas' (186): echoing both the archive's organic qualities and its aspirations toward structured orderliness.

Theresienstadt and Kafka's Castle

As noted earlier, Zygmunt Bauman argues that the Nazi overseers of ghettoes and concentration camps enthusiastically embraced the archival impulse, not only using genealogical records to identify Jews (and criminal records to identity other 'undesirables'), but devising abstract categories and hierarchies that became 'real' by virtue of being accepted as such.[405] Camp inmates reluctantly acknowledged the hold such systems had over their lives; acceptance of the often arbitrary categories to which they were assigned being not only essential to short-term survival but a means of authenticating their very existence. The inmates' acceptance entailed internalisation of Nazi 'disciplinary power', and hence collusion in their own coercion and oppression.

[405] Wolfgang Ernst, 'Archival Action: The Archive as ROM and Its Political Instrumentalization under National Socialism', *History of the Human Sciences*, 12, 2 (1999), 13-34. The process is similar to that by which (as John Searle demonstrates) such institutions as *marriage* and *money* are socially constructed. See John R Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Penguin, 1996).

According to Martin Modlinger, Sebald's account of the bureaucracy of Theresienstadt is a mirror image of Kafka's in *The Castle*.[406] Adler, Sebald's chief source, described his sociological study *Theresienstadt 1941–1945* as 'a Kafka novel with inverted signs' – inverted because its 'protagonists' were unwilling inhabitants of the fortress rather than supplicants seeking entrance.[407] Now, as many have suggested, the extreme inhumanity and moral corruption of Nazi ideology is almost beyond our grasp. Mere descriptions of its horrors are inadequate, and 'explanations' border on disrespect for those who suffered. Kafka's work, Adler suggests, offers a different perspective; an insight into the conditions that accompanied and facilitated the emergence of totalitarian regimes. These initially involved, less deliberate cruelty than turning persons into objects; items to be classified, sorted and eventually discarded. The determination of the highest echelons to avoid direct involvement in their crimes resulted in absurd avoidance behaviour, the employment of circumlocutory language; and, most significantly, encouraging the oppressed to become complicit with their oppressors. The ultimate authorities at Theresienstadt (the SS) were, like those of Kafka's castle, opaque and incomprehensible; impervious to the reach of our cognitive and emotional understanding. They were adept at concealing their methods; seeming irrationality masking indirect power which inveigled inhabitants into collusion. To this end the Nazi overseers encouraged the emergence of complex but incompetent and corrupt hierarchical structures among the Jewish inhabitants. A bureaucracy directed by numerous 'self-governing' committees developed. The SS did not need to issue direct orders, let alone demonstrate their full power; and little would have changed, Adler implies, if they had withdrawn completely

[406] Martin Modlinger, 'The Kafkaesque in H.G. Adler's and W.G. Sebald's Literary Historiographies' in Helen Finch and Lynn L. Wolff (eds.) *Witnessing, Memory, Poetics: H. G. Adler and W. G. Sebald* (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2014) 201-232.
[407] Adler described his book as 'ein Kafka-Roman mit umgekehrten Vorzeichen' in a letter to Wolfgang Burghart of October 17, 1947; quoted in Franz Hocheneder, *H. G. Adler (1910–1988): Privatgelehrter und Freier Schriftsteller* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009) p. 179.

from the camp. The villagers and minor officials of Kafka's novel have similarly internalised the Castle authorities' implicit demands, and carry them out unprompted. Moreover (as discussed further below), assuming that gaining access is a metaphor for gaining full *understanding*, Kafka's denying K. access to the castle – and Sebald's denying Austerlitz access to the fortress at Theresienstadt – becomes a moral imperative.

Memory, the Self and the Archival Subject

The protagonists of Kafka's fictions disclose few memories, though their behaviour is presumably influenced by unidentified past events. References to personal and communal memory in *Austerlitz,* in contrast, are all-pervasive. Nevertheless, for the protagonist memory is less a matter of present recollection of past events than awareness of some quality embedded in external material things. He is, in Long's words, 'an extreme example of a subject constituted entirely by the archive'.[408] Austerlitz obsessively and indiscriminately records his observations and takes photographs: piecing together, *cataloguing,* putative constituents of his identity. Rather than acting as repository or catalyst, archival material substitutes for the absence of subjective memories. Being externalised, memory becomes spatialised; and remembering comes to resemble the mnemonic procedure of associating items with rooms in a house. Austerlitz's personal archive is, in Derrida's words, a '*prosthesis of the inside*', replacing authentic, inner memories.[409] And he favours research in official archives, however problematic, over attempting to retrieve his own buried memories – though, as mentioned, disjointed involuntary memories occasionally surface. Austerlitz draws attention to their unreliability by (like Ishiguro's Ryder) qualifying remarks with circumlocutory phrases; such as 'I cannot say exactly'. Archival sources, however, are also

[408] Long, *W. G. Sebald*, p. 20.
[409] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 19.

untrustworthy and incomplete: as the dubious provenance of the photograph of his mother demonstrates.

Austerlitz's professional life as an architectural historian also involves amassing information. He intends to publish a comprehensive study of civic and military architecture – prisons, asylums, fortresses and railway stations – organised according to 'family likenesses' in their structural principles (A, 44). Like the archivist, Austerlitz will never complete his labours, for every item consulted yields new references, in an infinite regress taking him ever further from his goal. Like the archive, his project is poised between the recorded past and an infinitely delayed future in which it is complete. In the present he has little to show for his labours other than box files packed higgledy-piggledy into a tiny office, a 'stockroom of books and papers with hardly any space left for himself, let alone his students, among the stacks piled high on the floor and the overloaded shelves' (43).

Kafka's protagonists also accumulate information obsessively, and the absence or loss of records may have profound consequences for their situation. Otherwise they are less obviously 'archival' characters than Sebald's, for they do not hoard objects in which memories are embedded. Nevertheless, both writers' protagonists live in the present, deliberating largely transient, trivial matters. They lack significant long-term *experiential* memories; and, as a consequence, a robust sense of interiority. As discussed earlier, many philosophers consider the self to be constructed largely through memory. Someone who has forgotten much of his past, and archives extant memories in external objects, will have an attenuated awareness of himself as an integrated individual**.** Archival procedures become a mnemonic surrogate for remembering, fragmenting the relationship between disparate episodes of one's life and a felt sense of the whole. Occasionally Austerlitz is barely present

as a subject, rather bordering on a disembodied manifestation of *angst* - disembodiment being an appropriate response to mental torment.

The Archive and Historiography

Broadening the discussion to embrace the notion of historical truth suggests connections between Sebald's archival motifs and Kafkan scepticism and hovering. The traditional archive – a relatively rigid two-dimensional ordering system – exemplifies the belief that a definitive account of a particular historical episode is available. Its implicit claim to objectivity nourishes the empiricist view – associated principally with the nineteenth-century German historian Leopold van Ranke – that primary sources (official documents, diaries, eye-witness accounts) reveal the unmediated 'truth' about past events.[410] This view suits governments that wish to fashion what Jean-François Lyotard calls a 'grand narrative' about a nation's history and 'destiny'.[411] *Austerlitz* explicitly challenges the reliability and objectivity of conventional representations of historical incidents. Discussing the 1805 Battle of Austerlitz, André Hilary emphasises that

> …all anyone could do was to sum up the unknown factors in the ridiculous phrase, 'The fortunes of battle swayed this way and that', or some similarly feeble and useless cliché…We try to reproduce the reality, but the harder we try, the more we find the pictures that make up the stock-in-trade of the spectacle of history forcing themselves upon us…(A, 101).

We have 'pre-formed images already imprinted on our brains, images at which we keep staring while the truth lies elsewhere' (101). The constructed account risks being packaged to

[410] According to Fritz Stern, Von Ranke was 'the father as well as the master of modern historical scholarship' (F Stern, *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* (Vintage Books, 1973, p. 54).
[411] Jean-Francois Lyotard, The *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) p. xxiv.

suit readers' preconceptions and the narrative favoured by the establishment. When incorporated into the archive (construed to incorporate 'standard' texts) this account tends to get conflated with the event itself – which then acquires a settled, ascertainable meaning. A 'data-driven' approach to history fares little better. The narrator of *Vertigo* recalls, as a schoolchild, copying out a chronological list of 'terrible events' in his town's history. These events are itemised in a tedious list of dates and statistics that obscures both their significance to the historian and their meaning to those affected.

Sebald challenges traditional historiography on several fronts. He is neither empiricist nor Hegelian, and rejects both the drive to reduce lived experience to facts and figures *and* the 'grand narrative' view of history, with its (often concomitant) beliefs in 'progress' or historical determinism. He writes

> …history does not function as the historians of the nineteenth century told us, that is, not according to a logic dictated by great individuals…History has more to do with completely different phenomena, with something like drifting, with natural historical patterns, with chaotic things that for a certain time coincide and then later go their separate ways…it would be important, for literature as well as for historiography, to work out these complicated chaotic patterns. That is not possible in systematic ways.[412]

Since we have no access to 'pure' historical facts, Sebald's fictional 'microhistory' might better convey the experiential quality of past events. It might also resonate more widely than 'authentic' historical accounts, which are necessarily localised in scope. The coincidences, repetitions and temporal superimpositions discussed above attempt to convey the 'complicated chaotic patterns' of history; patterns indiscernible using 'systematic' methods. Most importantly, *Austerlitz* deconstructs historians' claim to objectivity by revealing the unreliability and partiality of their sources. Photographs, in particular, change their meaning

[412] Interview with Volker Hage (2000) cited in Wolff, *W.G. Sebald's Hybrid Poetics*, p. 53.

with the context in which they are viewed. And, as Richard Crownshaw points out, in 'making the boundaries between his words and those of Austerlitz indistinct, the narrator foregrounds the inevitability of the narrative reconstruction of someone else's life…'[413] Austerlitz's biography is fictional but, even if based on a real person's life, would be no more a settled entity than any other event: for the reader has seen it constructed during meetings with the narrator, and subsequently reconstructed by both fictional narrator and author.

Kafka and Sebald Compared

Sebald reveals the paradoxes and potential for evil inherent in modernity's reliance on archives. The drive towards rationalisation and efficiency often results in a paralysing excess of information, in epistemic confusion and physical chaos – for which reason archiving procedures may effectively conceal past misdeeds in even benign democracies. Archivists pretend to objectivity and rationality, but records are often unreliable, biased or incomplete; and vulnerable to loss, damage and physical decay.[414] Nevertheless, even when operating inefficiently the archive asserts Foucauldian disciplinary power. Power is also mediated through the choice of items to be archived and through (inevitably partial) classification systems and retrieval methods. The danger here is that archiving is prone to pigeonholing and ignoring category overlaps. It generates arbitrary labels – such as 'Aryan' and 'non-Aryan' – and, by suggesting the inferiority of the non-standard form, promotes 'othering'. Archives become ends in themselves, dehumanising their subjects through reductive methodologies, and too often enable officials to avoid responsibility by blaming failures on 'the system'. Most significantly, the accumulation and preservation of material substitutes for engaging

[413] Richard Crownshaw, 'Reconsidering Postmemory: Photography, the Archive, and Post-Shoah Memory in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 37, 4 (2004) 215-236, p. 216.
[414] These problems are not necessarily diminished in digital systems, for encrypted data readily becomes corrupted or inaccessible.

with what it represents. We risk overlooking the suffering represented by (for example) each file in the records room at Theresienstadt; or believing (like Austerlitz) that once relevant facts have been gathered and systematically ordered, understanding automatically follows. And one's sense of identity may be attenuated not only by the absence or withholding of records, but by the opposite tendency; by the accumulation of archival material substituting for authentic, inner memory. Austerlitz exemplifies both dangers.

Many of these issues are foreshadowed in Kafka's novels. In particular, both writers demonstrate how the archive is connected with political control and coercion; and helps to establish the conditions for the emergence of totalitarianism. Nevertheless, there are significant differences. While Kafka's archives are invariably chaotic, Sebald's occasionally operate efficiently. The Czech state archives, for example, put Austerlitz on the path of reconstructing his (outer) identity. And records made to exert power, including those which identified Jews, could also be used for beneficial purposes – such as reuniting dispersed families or convicting war criminals.

While Josef may be continually observed, his self-monitoring tendencies derive principally from knowing that the authorities keep extensive records on him. Although the narrator of *Vertigo* occasionally believes himself followed, this notion probably stems from paranoia and a tendency to hallucinate. Neither he nor Austerlitz are systematically monitored; rather, Sebald mentions historical cases of architectural features and archival records operating in tandem as surveillance devices. He *describes* rather than represents one of the conditions under which totalitarianism emerges.

Even when not seeking specific information, Austerlitz often wanders around institutions devoted to collecting; including museums, art galleries, natural history collections and zoos. These have no counterpart in Kafka. Ostensibly such collections have been compiled for

purposes of preservation and gaining knowledge; but in practice have often involved cruelty and theft. Whether symbols of national pride or demonstrations of the wealth of private individuals, they resemble traditional archives in exerting authority.

Kafka finds absurdist comedy in archive-related motifs: the whispered dictation given by Castle officials and the pantomime antics associated with the distribution of files at the Herrenhof Inn providing two examples. There is little humour in Sebald: save, perhaps, in the lost passport episode in *Vertigo*.

The most significant difference between the writers is that while Kafka seems unconcerned with history, Sebald uses archival motifs to demonstrate the ultimate unknowability of the past – in respect of both its experiential qualities and the truth of historical 'facts'. These failures are manifested on both a societal and an individual level. Sebald constantly undermines the archive's implicit claims to comprehensiveness and epistemological certainty, and shows how the 'contracting out' of memories to archives denies or downgrades their subjective import. The archival impulse promotes, in other words, fragmentation of both historical knowledge and self-knowledge.

SEBALD'S HOVERING AND UNCERTAINTY

As we have seen, Sebald's photographs constitute a visual analogue of Kafka's alternation between contradictory statements. They introduce uncertainty by virtue of being occasionally discrepant with the text. More significantly, they both represent real things and tacitly claim to reference events mentioned in the text – a claim which we *know* to be impossible in a work of fiction. They simultaneously hover between assertion and denial of their own authenticity. Moreover, like Kafka, Sebald constantly qualifies statements, resulting in complex sentence structures; and casts doubt on the veracity of claims by employing the subjunctive mood for

reported speech. In James Wood's words, he 'invests his narrations with a scrupulous uncertainty'.[415]

Kafka's resistance to interpretation involves *metaphysical* uncertainty; questions about meaning, the unknowability of the divine, and the like. Now, Sebald occasionally suggests a 'hidden order' behind coincidences and repetitions. The return of Hunter Gracchus, for example, not only echoes events elsewhere in *Vertigo* but seems to bear some arcane significance, to hint at the imminent revelation of esoteric truths. Sebald also raises metaphysical questions about time and causality. Nevertheless, his uncertainties are primarily epistemic. His principal objective is to demonstrate the impossibility of truly understanding past events, and the unreliability of memory. Hence the indeterminate provenance of textual citations and photographs, and the fictionalisation of even ascertainable historical facts. In *Austerlitz*, Sebald attempts to synthesise the supposedly objective accounts of historians with the subjective perceptions of individuals; traditional historiography with the lived experience of witnesses. He seeks to overcome the 'archival impulse' that reduces human suffering to facts and figures, *without* retreating into the purely subjective. And, as Modlinger writes

> ...a reading of Theresienstadt as manifestation of Kafka's *Schloß* provides insight into Sebald's ethics of literary historiography. As a place of suffering and death, it cannot – and should not – be fully accessible to the living. Where literature approaches history, especially the history of the Holocaust, it needs to keep its proper distance. For Sebald, literary historiography can never claim to be able to present the factual or emotional truth of suffering; it can only describe the path of necessary failure toward such an understanding. Theresienstadt as place of the dead remains forever closed to the living.[416]

[415] James Wood, 'A Death Artist Writes', *The Guardian* (30 May 1998) Saturday Review, p. 8.
[416] Modlinger, 'The Kafkaesque', p. 219.

Sebald elsewhere affirms that 'to write of concentration camps is virtually impossible'.[417] His 'scrupulous uncertainty' respects victims of Nazism by acknowledging the impossibility of reaching a cognitive understanding of their suffering, and that attempting to achieve such verges on *impertinence*. The archival impulse, as we have seen, involves labelling, categorising, filing; and, too often, forgetting. Hovering, though, is a profoundly anti-archival literary device because it not only accepts but commends and promotes uncertainty. It denies the interpretability of past atrocities and their reducibility to archival items. Admittedly, appeals to uncertainty have become the weapons of Holocaust and climate-change deniers: but Sebald is not denying the truth of factual claims, only that we might fully grasp their significance. What he calls his 'complicated syntactical labyrinthine structures' help achieve a balance between empathy and objectivity. These structures result from 'Everything that the narrator relates [being] mediated through…other stages, which…exonerates the narrator, because he never pretends that he knows more than is actually possible.[418] In other words, Sebald's occasionally convoluted style not only acknowledges uncertainty but distances himself from his narrator, and his narrator from Austerlitz.

Museum and archives risk trivialising past horrors through displays celebrating the 'triumph of the human spirit' or some such banality. Ron Rosenbaum warns of the 'sentimentalization that threatens to smother [the Holocaust] in meretricious uplift'; of the danger of transforming commemorative events into inspiring 'lessons' for future generations and grief into 'life-affirming opportunities' for forgiveness and redemption.[419] Marianne

[417] Cited in Lynn L. Wolff, *W.G. Sebald's Hybrid Poetics: Literature as Historiography* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014) p. 185. Sebald echoes Adorno's claim that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society' in T W Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 17-34, p. 34).
[418] James Wood, 'An Interview with W. G. Sebald', *Brick. A Literary Journal*, 59 (Spring 1998) p. 28 https://brickmag.com/an-interview-with-w-g-sebald/ accessed 1 May 2019. Sebald admits that his style is a 'tribute' to Thomas Bernhard's 'periscopic writing' – Bernhard himself having been profoundly influenced by Kafka. See Gerald A Fetz, 'Kafka and Bernhard: Reflections on Affinity and Influence', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 21, 3/4 (1988), 217-241.
[419] Ron Rosenbaum, 'Faustian Bargain', *The Tablet* (10 October 2011)

Hirsch, however, views Sebald's writings as reparative, writing that his practices 'assemble collections that function as corrections and additions, rather than as counters, to the historical archive, attempting to undo the ruptures caused by war and genocide'.[420] I consider Hirsch mistaken. Sebald's characters remain traumatised, finding no inspiration in their mental suffering; and events are repeated across time – suggesting that mankind is doomed to repeat past mistakes, never learning the 'lessons' of history.[421] More generally, Sebald's temporal layering, coincidences and repetitions are anti-archival devices, undermining the neat sequential ordering implicit to both the traditional archive and the 'grand narrative' approach to history. Both phenomena depend upon well-defined categories and chronologies, and so hinder understanding of the complex patterns of social, political, and economic behaviour in the real world. And, like Kafka, Sebald ensures that motifs and formal devices – here, temporal and archival themes, and 'hovering' techniques – work closely in concert.

To conclude: Sebald seeks principally to demonstrate the ambivalent status of historical claims, to question received interpretations of past events, and to draw attention to the untrustworthiness and partiality of both subjective memories and supposedly objective records. He considers that established literary techniques will not adequately realise his ends. Kafka's demonstration of the unreliability of archival knowledge, together with his purposive uncertainty and self-deconstruction, provided Sebald with an appropriate model. Unlike Kafka, however, Sebald does not imply *universal*, comprehensive scepticism regarding claims to knowledge. He does occasionally invite metaphysical speculation by implying the interconnectedness of everything, and hence the meaningfulness of coincidences. In some

http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/80150/faustian-bargain?all=1, accessed 1 July 2017.
[420] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press) p. 228.
[421] Elsewhere Sebald compares the repetition of events to 'a gramophone repeatedly playing the same sequence of notes', a circumstance caused by an 'irreparable defect in its programme' (Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (London: Random House, 2013) p. 188.

writers such phenomena would suggest the existence of a transcendental realm behind the 'veil of appearances'. But the inconsequential nature of Sebald's coincidences, and the absence of a substantive explanatory framework, deny them transcendent significance. (In contrast, quasi-religious significance is intimated in Kafka's 'scaffolding' of Castle and Law Court, and the inaccessibility of his authorities.) In short, the limited scope of Sebald's epistemic hovering, and his tenuous metaphysics, do not yield global resistance to interpretation.

CONCLUSION

Sebald's complex interweaving of different perspectives – past and present, fictional and historical, literary and philosophical, conveyed via text and images – generates (in Andreas Huyssen's words) an 'echo chamber of voices [that] conjures up all the vicissitudes and fragilities of forgetting and remembering in ways not attainable by historiography'.[422] *Vertigo* reworks fragments of Kafka's biography and Gracchus tale; and *Austerlitz* illustrates, like Kafka, the dangers posed by the 'archival impulse'. Sebald's novels are less resistant to interpretation than Kafka's, primarily because his uncertainties involve doubt about empirical matters rather than metaphysical puzzles. While Kafka's protagonists have virtually no memories or history, Sebald's are unquestionably the product of their past lives. And while both writers portray isolated individuals, Sebald is also concerned with communal experience, especially with the interplay between personal and shared memory of trauma. Like Kafka, Sebald 'hovers' over his subject-matter, enacting uncertainty through deferral and refusal of narrative closure: but this uncertainty, to reiterate the point, is epistemic and limited in scope rather than metaphysical and all-embracing. Like Kafka, Sebald enacts his themes through

[422] Andreas Huyssen, 'Gray Zones of Remembrance' in David E Wellbery and others, *A New History of German Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) 970-975, p. 973.

stylistic and narratorial devices: but does so only indirectly. Thus he describes, rather than represents, emotions; *telling* us of his protagonists' bizarre sensations but failing to convey their inner sense of mental disintegration. The *reader*, on the other hand, experiences uncanny *déjà vu* sensations when certain motifs and images recur; and often feels slightly dizzy and disorientated. In short, Sebald has the reader enact, in imagination, the experiences he ascribes to his protagonists. This, combined with the demands made by his complex intertextuality, suggests that he expects the reader actively to participate in the *creation* of his fictions.

CONCLUSION

Most theorists of intertextuality – including Foucault, Kristeva and Barthes – seem to have little interest in demonstrating the tangible presence of influence. Even Bloom rarely documents specific instances, rather 'hearing' the voice of predecessors in later writers – that of Marlowe in Shakespeare, for example.[423] Foucault writes that 'The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut…it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network'.[424] The network of allusions is all, and the practice of tracing actual sources constitutes merely 'harmless enough [amusement] for historians who refuse to grow up'.[425] Foucault is correct in saying that every act of reading and writing is 'contaminated' by acquaintance with other texts; all of which belong to a dense three-dimensional web of relationships extending in multiple directions. Here, however, I have adopted the more traditional model of influence; considering texts as links in a temporal chain and seeking to identify specific signs of the putative originary author in the text under discussion. The chief justification for doing so is that analysis of an author's successors helps us to isolate what is most distinctive about his or her own writings. What his successors borrow from Kafka may shed light on what they *fail* to borrow.

I have attempted to answer several closely linked questions: precisely *what* did three post-Kafka writers take from their ancestor? *How* and *why* did they adapt Kafkan motifs, tropes and techniques to their own purposes? And do their works reveal what I have called the 'deeper' markers of the Kafkan? Many features of Kafka's fictions – the mono-perspectival viewpoint of the hallucinating subject, dislocated time and space, doubled characters, motifs

[423] Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, p. xliv.
[424] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* , trans. A M Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) p. 23.
[425] Foucault, *Archaeology*, p. 144.

involving bureaucracy, surveillance and the like – are readily imitable, and fall into the category of what I have called 'superficial' markers. All three writers discussed here display many of these markers, but vary in the use they make of them. For example, Warner's spatio-temporal anomalies are manifestations of the power of his sinister authorities to manipulate reality; Ishiguro's reveal his protagonist's mental disintegration, and Sebald's, the interwovenness of past and present. All three introduce doubles principally to show how patterns of human conduct change little over time; though Ishiguro additionally wishes to show Ryder vainly attempting to understand himself by 'appropriating' from those he encounters.

I proposed three 'deep' markers of the Kafkan: resistance to attempts to provide an over-arching (global) interpretation, the enactment of principal themes, and the coherence and integration of diverse thematic and formal elements. Enactment (whether of epistemic doubt or resistance to interpretation itself) involves subject matter, style and structure working closely in partnership. Thus the formal, dispassionate language of double-thought – of promise, deferral and denial – is employed in contexts where one person is subordinate to or dependent on another. It is the correlate of a repetitive, backward-looping narratorial structure based around adjournment and deferral; and enacts the protagonist's evasiveness and self-deception, pre-requisites of complicity in his own oppression.

Kafka's successors have varying motives for part-modelling their work on his fictions. Warner examines the interactions between psychology and politics, showing, like Kafka, how people half-consciously submit themselves to authority. Adopting a variety of viewpoints and narrative tones precludes him, however, from enacting this or other themes; and his Kafkan tropes seem largely formulaic appendages. lshiguro goes further, not merely retelling or describing his concerns but adapting Kafkan techniques to *instantiate* those concerns. In

particular, the recursive, cyclical structure of Kafka's novels offered an appropriate way to model Ryder's entrapment in self-imposed mental torment. And Kafka's demonstration of the unreliability of archival knowledge, together with his purposive uncertainty, provided Sebald with an appropriate prototype. As in Kafka, diverse narratorial and thematic elements work together; Sebald's coincidences, repetitions and temporal superimpositions insinuating the 'chaotic patterns' he discerns in history.

I would argue, nevertheless, that none of these writers approach what Shimon Sandbank calls Kafka's 'irreducible presentation of the incomprehensible'.[426] Sandbank argues that Kafka's successors use Kafkan tropes and techniques to convey *pre-established ideas*. All 'are concerned in one way or another with questions of truth or theme and its transmissibility through narrative'. 'Tamer' than their predecessor, they 'cannot, or will not, bear too much unknowing, the withdrawal from all theme, the renunciation of all reason. They end with some comfort, however paradoxical…'[427] While Kafka intimates a doctrine whose precepts are unknowable, his successors attach Kafka-like motifs to already extant ideas. Sandbank's conclusions still seem broadly correct, and the overarching aims of the writers discussed are not difficult to capture within a sentence or so. Warner's *Wild Goose Chase* is governed by explicitly ideological aims; Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* is a sustained exploration of a mind damaged by past trauma and present-day self-deceptiveness; and Sebald demonstrates the unreliability of memory and archival knowledge. Each writer replicates to some degree Kafka's localised epistemic uncertainties. *His* stubborn resistance to (global) interpretation, however, stems from profound *metaphysical* doubt; from all-embracing scepticism about our capacity both to understand and to find meaning in the world. Warner offers the 'comfort' that choosing the correct political path may partially resolve our

[426] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 151.
[427] Sandbank, *After Kafka*, p. 12.

problems; and Ishiguro, by making explicit the causes of Ryder's mental collapse, cannot exclude the possibility that in principle it is curable. Sebald's coincidences and returns hint at arcane metaphysical mysteries, in turn suggesting that human life has some hidden purpose – even though we remain ignorant of what this might be. Only Kafka offers no glimmer of comfort; for we suspect that his protagonists *could* have no purpose whatsoever in their lives. Only he is *in every respect* 'deeply' Kafkan.

Finally, some of the critics mentioned in this dissertation – principally Sandbank and Medin, – tend to decry or disapprove of those who have borrowed from Kafka. Taking their cue from the magisterial pronouncements of Harold Bloom, they insist that successors are generally 'weaker than', or 'misread' their progenitor. A paradox arises here: if, as the critics tacitly demand, Kafka's heirs were 'successfully' to replicate his uninterpretability, they would then be *interpretable* as having done so. As things stand, Kafka's very resistance to interpretation yields a series of templates which his successors can reconfigure in order to explore their own ideas. Further, as Ann Pearson observes, 'any text echoes or re-inscribes a multitude of others', and so intertextuality is an 'inescapable condition' of literature. [428] Since no writer can help being influenced, why should he or she be disparaged for overt borrowings; especially since little attempt is made to disguise their source? None of the writers discussed claim to emulate Kafka; to express what is often summarised in some such trite phrase as 'the individual's sense of alienation in an uncomprehending universe'. Their aims are less exalted, and their borrowings entirely legitimate.

[428] Pearson, p. 262.

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