

# JERRY, ED, FRANK, FRANZ (& FRIENDS) AND I WALK INTO A BARRIER...

» ryan andrew murphy

It was the day that MJ's death would be the top news story.

Murphy rode the Skytrain to SFU, to see *The Insurance Man: Kafka in the Penal Colony* at the SFU Gallery, and to hear Zaslove talk about it.

M arrived late. The hall outside the gallery was noisy. The wide glass door scraped loudly across the floor and crashed shut as M closed it behind him. What kind of creature is M? Does he contemplate grace?

Z interrupted himself to greet M, who heaved a sigh of apology for his wretchedly cacophonous entrance. In his impulse to shrink and disappear, M was reminded of a story he once read about Franz Kafka: Having walked in on a friend who was sleeping, K told him, in a whisper, to “please, consider me a dream.”

M believes that he read this in the book *Introducing Kafka* illustrated by Robert Crumb; but here, as in so many places, M's memory fails him (in truth, he read it in *Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Kafka* by William Hubben)

The thoughtfulness, the deep consideration of others evident in the life and works of K, is one of the aspects of K that appeals to M, politically. M

sees it as analogous to the tendencies that Steve Collis has traced in the work(s) of Phyllis Webb. M is reminded of this because it is part of the social web—one thread of the tangled affections—that binds M's life to Z's.

M shook his head at the failure of his conscientious gesture of closing the door.

But the echoes of the hallway dissolved, and Z resumed his sentence where M's intrusion had hyphenated it. Z led the group on a tour of the exhibition (How unlike the Officer leads the Explorer?—How very unlike the machine itself? —Z led the group, as an illumination in the shadow of the horror, not as an extension of it).

M snapped dozens of photos. In the months since, M has beheld those fragments and wondered: What happened that afternoon? While M remembers vividly (more so, with the assistance of digital photos) images of the environment that Z created, the sounds, including most of the words, have since been corrupted.

What remains is visual and tactile: M remembers Ed Broadbent sitting in the small chair by the equally small desk beside one of the walls dividing the space, and M remembers the feeling of shaking EB's hand after exchanging remarks about, Z and his art, teaching, and friendship. EB thanked M for starting the conversation.

M remembers years earlier, when he first encountered *In The Penal Colony*, as an adolescent reading the liner notes to Frank Zappa's “We're Only In It For The Money”. But M didn't read the story while listening to FZ. Despite FZ's instructions, M read it in the library. What does Z do? In classrooms, in galleries, on sidewalks, he creates a space of solidarity. By building a “machine” for (re-) immersing visitors in the horror, beauty, and absurdity of “another” place and time—and another (reflection of) reality within that—and by asserting some of its particularities (this chair, that wall), Z builds a utopic crossroads where parts of the “now” and the (global) “here”

that are usually kept remote (as current headlines about Canadian military complicity in the torture of Afghan prisoners push these events far away and into the past) can be witnessed, mourned, celebrated, or condemned. The “Condemned Man” can be heard. Can CM speak or only scream? We have to decide.

We are invited, like the Explorer, and we are treated like guests. Introductions are made. There is a bucket on the floor, filled with absorbent cotton, for the blood to flow into. Z is a good host, ghost.



*Jan Masaryk 1917. Diplomat, Politician.*  
Langhans Portrait Gallery.  
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