

# MY JOURNEY TO THE PENAL COLONY

(AFTER THE STORY BY FRANZ KAFKA)

» JERRY ZASLOVE

*There are also projections that cannot be explained, because the artist sometimes shows a faculty for projecting inner images in such a way that they become almost real or entirely so. You have to take care not to write the law simply and unimaginatively by itself but to put yourself in motion around the law.*

*Paul Klee, Diaries, 1918 – 1922.*

*The fact that the only world is a constructed world takes away hope and gives us certainty.*

*Franz Kafka, Zürau Aphorisms*

» **RESISTING KAFKA**

The installation “The Insurance Man: Kafka in The Penal Colony” is about a subject common to Kafka: authorship. The installation is not only about Kafka the literary figure, but also Kafka the artist and the zones of affinity within his inner life to materials of the everyday, the commonplace. “Kafka’s Room” becomes the installation. I become the imaginary narrator of the story. The viewer becomes both the author and the narrator. The narrator is inside the constructed room while the author is at once inside and outside. Similarly Franz Kafka the author of “In the Penal Colony” is both inside and outside the story. In the room and not in the room. This is not a programmatic installation that simply illustrates the text, rather it is about the text: the story and its genealogy. I take up a challenge to myself: to make a representation related to the Kafka myth that has followed us since its reception after World War II. The installation is an attempt to project how Kafka thinks with and through the objects around him. In this essay I write about my fascination with the story and what has influenced me in the making of this installation. This is the beginning of a study of the genealogy of the story and at the same time a way of presenting the story through colportage and archival collecting.

Colportage is an assemblage of remnants of the material world. In Kafka that necessarily passed world produces in us the feeling of the uncanny and the phantasmagoria because the scenes he constructs in his work function almost as still photographs derived from a cinematic presentation of the commonplace. This is not the grotesque but a genealogy of how the roots of the present stay alive in the traces and remnants of worlds that shadow the scenes. The past has not yet completely vanished. Put another way, the installation is an attempt to portray how Kafka forces the future upon us by showing the ruins of the past in the present. We feel the very last things from the past. This use of the past became an aesthetic problem for modernist artists struggling with the future that is projected to us from the past. Malevich, for example, traced the confluence of primitivism and constructivism by asking: “How can epoch making events be



*Meine Reise nach den Strafkolonien [My Journey to the Penal Colonies]* Dr. Robert Heindl, 1913. Photographs by Robert Heindl. New Caledonia, Andaman Islands, Ceuta, Sydney

transmitted through art?” He then asked: “How does the past leak through into the future of the art?”

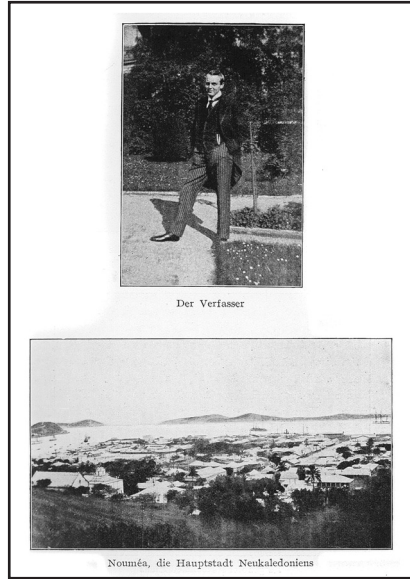
The method of the installation—colportage—exhibits an aesthetic framed by objects that are premonitions of something awful about to happen. Torture for Kafka—the mere thought of torture—tortures him. Colportage is used as a “category of illustrative seeing” in the manner of Walter Benjamin’s description of the behaviour of the flaneur as a collector of objects, who “composes his reverie as a text to accompany the images.” I wanted the installation to make the viewer into a flaneur in the spirit of Benjamin who describes the flaneur as a “colportagist”, one who lives, he writes, in a “phenomenon of space ... everything potentially taking place in this one single room is perceived simultaneously. The space seems to wink at the flaneur: “What do you think may have gone on here?” Of course, it has to be explained how this phenomenon is associated with colportage.<sup>1</sup> I the author/narrator attempt that explanation as it might apply to the installation itself and to a reading of “In the Penal Colony”. I become an ethnographer-author who collects materials related to the story, just as, Robert Heindl, the author of *Journey to the Penal Colonies*, became a flaneur in the prison colonies of the South Seas.

Heindl, a lawyer, traveled, in the service of the German government, to the South Seas to research and report about the incarcerated, the exiled, European and indigenous criminals, who were deported to these exotic islands that were being used as penitentiaries and labour colonies. Prisoners were not only from Europe, but from Asia and the Asian Sub-Continent, sentenced by their own people’s courts and the colonial administrators for a range of crimes. Heindl collected statistics about everything, including escapes, mortality, diet, work forces, finances, stories, laws and codes. He also took photographs. He wrote dispassionate, but enthusiastic accounts of what he saw. His discourse is troubled, inquisitive and eager, the scenes entertain him. He has sharp yet complacent eyes. Heindl is the imaginary visitor to the installation. Kafka created his Explorer-researcher in the image of those who have Heindl’s studied innocence toward violence and officialdom. Heindl, like the Explorer cuts a figure who is distanced from the brutalities he reports to Europe. His fascination with the progressive enterprise of prisons is infectious, but so are his descriptions of bamboo-branch beatings of prisoners and even guards who fail in their duties. Bourgeois comforts of Sunday walks in the “bush” with families accompanied by prisoners amuse him and persuade him that the ethos of the island is just like Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1999, 418-419.

Heindl collected a massive amount of data about “white and dark criminals, murderers, street crooks, pirates, prison wardens, police, confidence men, hangmen and black trackers” imprisoned by the British, French and Indian police on various islands. He characterizes his adventure as a “gypsy journey” in a discourse that Kafka’s story takes seriously, but also subtly mocks. He returns with trunks filled with exotica. He describes these goods as second hand, mere trash, the junk of culture, materials collected from the deported, exiles and expatriates, men and women, who live (in his words) on dead and remote islands. He reports on diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis, nutrition and length of sentence as well as the factories and foremost, the bodies of the worker-prisoners and their families. He describes in stereotypical fashion the “delicate Japanese and robust Papuans”, “bow legged Australian Bushmen”, young maidens and overseers, all seen



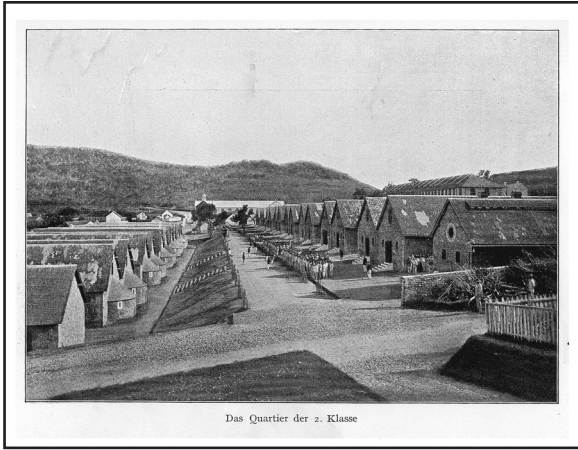
through the eyes of one who anticipates violence everywhere yet always appears refreshed and in control. His photographs represent a placid, utopian communal ethos, depicting his fantasy of a civil society directly related to the Officer’s law-abiding vision of punishment in Kafka’s story. At the end of his ethnographic mission Heindl reflects on his journey as “fantastic, a horrible procession ... [of images] which would be worthy of the drawings of a Callot or Rops.”<sup>2</sup> He is not a writer of travel books but is an ethnographer—a colporteur—of the fantastic, whose objective truth-telling will show Europeans how progressive their society can be.

However Kafka does not depict the fantastic or the surreal. He feels the surreal. He depicts Heindl’s narrative in the manner that Peter Weiss described Kafka by comparing him to Breughel. Weiss describes Kafka’s art as building on “the definitive gap in power and privilege that was expressed in Kafka’s book [The Castle]”. This definitive gap is the basis of the chronotope of transience, assemblage and colportage that lies at the heart of this installation that I hoped would unsettle predictable images of Kafka.<sup>3</sup> A comparable approach might be T. J. Clark’s *The Sight*

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies*, page 17 Above: The Author of *My Journey to the Penal Colonies*, Robert Heindl, Below: Noumea, The Capital New Caledonia.

2 Heindl, Robert, *Meine Reise nach den Strafkolonien*, Berlin, Wien, Ullstein, 1913

3 Clark T. J., *The Sight of Death, an Experiment in Art Writing*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006.



*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Prisoner Quarters, 2nd Class, page 49.*

image—of both the story and the machine in the penal colony. The object of the installation is Kafka, but Kafka is there only in the image of his language. There is no picture of him or explanation of the story. By “chronotope” I mean the room itself is a space-time configuration of a mental space. The installation, then, is a futurist installation, to be understood as extracting elements from a dead object—the machine in the penal colony—and bringing to life the violence in the story through the viewer becoming familiar with the objects and images that Kafka would know were legacies of violence. The machine in the story can be seen as a futurist construction not unlike Malevich’s or Vertov’s series of objects—angry toward the past, yet compelled to represent it, mechanistic in the present that is redolent of war, violence and revolution—all pointing and driven toward the future. The anonymity of the materials in the installation allows the viewer to become a colporteur who notes the reports, documents, words, and materials that exist side by side with ruins. The colporteur treasures ruins, the antiquated, traces of the past and intimations of the future. I treat Kafka as a colportagist of the commonplace in which violence, materiality and transience live side by side. The viewer becomes Robert Heindl.

Michael Haneke, who created the great film based on Kafka’s *The Castle*, puts the problem of depicting violence this way:

*How do I give the spectator the possibility of becoming aware of this loss of reality and their own participation in it in order to emancipate oneself from being the victim of the media by being its possible partner? The question is not: what can I show? But, what chance do I give the spectator*

4 Clark T. J., *The Absolute Bourgeois, Artists and Politics in France, 1848-1851*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973.

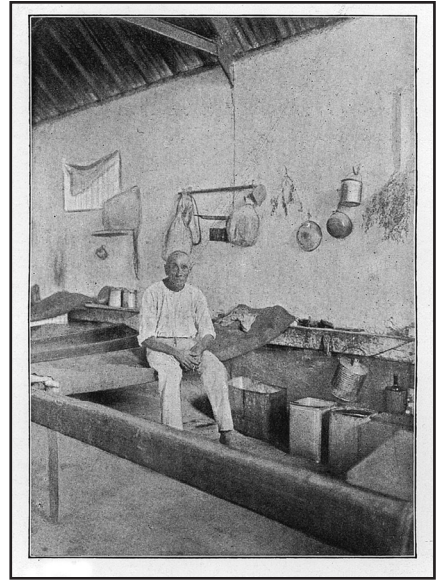
*of Death, an Experiment in Art Writing.* Also useful is Clark’s method of showing how painters think in *The Absolute Bourgeois, Artists and Politics in France*, Clark writes (123) “... that the artist’s power to generalize is founded on particular knowledge, on an accuracy which includes the facts, even details of politics.”<sup>4</sup> This can also describe Kafka.

By placing Kafka’s words from letters, diaries, works and aphorisms on the walls of the room I hoped to create a chronotope—a space-time

to recognize the depiction for what it is? The question—talking about the theme of violence—is not how do I show violence? But, how do I show the spectator his own position in regard to violence and the way it is shown.<sup>5</sup>

Haneke's approach is echoed by Peter Weiss in his own films and writings that compares Breughel and Kafka in *Aesthetics of Resistance*:

*... Breughel's paintings . . . in an autumnal Bohemia melted into the Flemish landscapes of the sixteenth century, just as during the next few days when I read Kafka, the hamlet and the castle he depicted belonged to the dismal, petty bourgeois rustic isolation of my surroundings. Breughel and Kafka had painted world landscapes, thin, transparent, yet in earth tones, their images were both shiny and dark, they seemed massive, heavy on the whole, glowing, overly distinct in their minutiae. Their realism was placed in villages and regions that were instantly recognizable yet eluded anything previously seen, everything was typical, demonstrating important central things, only to seem exotic, bizarre at the very same moment.<sup>6</sup>*



*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Inner View of Prisoner Barracks. New Caledonia.*  
page 49

The baleful beginning of the twentieth century inaugurated forms of violence that were created by Empires already falling apart even while holding onto still-existing Feudal social contracts. Europe itself was becoming a penal colony, as a result of nations being annexed and empires falling into dissolution. WW I, when the story was composed, was not the end of colonization but another passage to future expansions of powerful institutions and the eventual decline of the world that the Explorer-Researcher came from. In 1945, at the end of WW II, Yalta partitioned and rearranged Europe and its peoples. This dismemberment was a continuation of the violence, horror and brutality that Kafka witnessed in WW I. Kafka—in addition to Picasso and others—became a way of seeing the crucial epoch when the means of expression exposed the contradictions

5 Haneke, Michael, *Nahaufnahme, Gespräche mit Thomas Assheuer [Closeup: Conversations with Thomas Assheuer]*, Berlin, Alexander Verlag, 2008, 200. (My translation, J.Z.)

6 Weiss, Peter, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, volume 1, translated by Joachim Neugroschel, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2005, 149.

of monopoly capitalism. People exposed to a world without shelter were also exposed to the new depictions of the vanishing point of the individual. On the agenda in art, music and literary depictions were the modern artistic manoeuvres of what Walter Benjamin called “raising a paw” against the “the products of decay”. In Kafka’s ‘penal colony’ this takes us into the aesthetically unknown, where consciousness exists at the threshold of waking, grief, and the dream of violence remembered.<sup>7</sup> For Benjamin the collector studies and loves the objects because they do not have a utilitarian value, but function as a “scene, the stage, of their fate ... a magic encyclopedia” in discarding exchange value for use value “whose quintessence is the fate of his object.”<sup>8</sup> Here comes the writer. Here comes the Explorer-Researcher! Here comes Kafka.

*I want to write, with a constant trembling on my forehead. I sit in my room in the very headquarters of the uproar of the entire house. I hear all the doors close, because of their noise only the footsteps of those running between them are spared me, I hear even the slamming of the open door in the kitchen. My father bursts through the doors of my room and passes through in his dragging dressing gown, the ashes are scraped out of the stove in the next room, Valli asks, shouting into the indefinite through the anteroom as though through a Paris street, whether Father’s hat has been brushed yet, a hushing that claims to be friendly to me raises the shout of an answering voice.*<sup>9</sup>

The objects Kafka hears are inner as well as external: they mediate the distance between the thin skin of the writer and the interior of the writing. The installation is the prehistory as well as the posthumous memory of objects that are framed by ‘the room’ in Kafka’s head. “Posthumous” because these memories never leave Kafka, they recur again and again; as when the Explorer-Researcher leaves the island, the memory of what happened stays with him—it is *that* traumatic and strange. Memory in Kafka becomes visible, yet is frozen into a strange and alien calligraphy. For instance the Officer whose machine is designed to abolish the memory of violence, even as it inflicts torment tells the Explorer it’s a calligraphy: “Yes,” said the officer with a laugh, putting the paper away again, “it’s

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7 Benjamin, Walter, “Max Brod’s Book on Kafka,” in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, 147.

8 Benjamin, Walter, “Unpacking my Library.” in *Illuminations*. edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, 60.

9 Kafka, Franz, *Reflections on Sin, Suffering, Hope, and the True Way, and Other Posthumous Prose Writings*, edited by Max Brod, translated by Ernst Kaiser and Eithene Wilkens, London, Secker and Warburg, 1954, 40. These are also known as the *Züräu Aphorisms*.

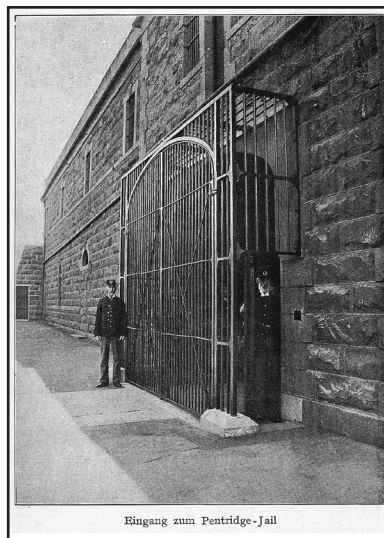
no calligraphy for school children.” Memory is scattered, but functions in the room much like the “Odradek” figure in Kafka’s “The Care of a Family Man” where the figurative nature of memory comes back again and again, but without a name. Odradek, the figure of “care” that haunts Kafka’s work, is an uncanny figure that has not yet become a person. One can say that Odradek illuminates the prehistory of care:

*Some say the word Odradek stems from the Slavonic, others believe it to be from the Germanic, influenced by the Slavic. The uncertainty of both interpretations allows one to assume with justice that neither is the case, especially as neither of them provides the word with the meaningful sense it deserves.<sup>10</sup>*

The installation of objects attempts to create that ethos of the presence of such an Odradek, who once cared for the family, as our guiding principle. The prehistory of the story can be seen as the prehistory of care. *Sorge* in German means not only care, but concern, and even sorrow. In the exhibition, care is centered on the beds and the panorama of the walled old city that stands behind the beds. The figures peering at the beds are the puzzled but compassionate viewers of the torment. Each object in the installation is a relative in Odradek’s care—it’s a family room. Kafka wrote to Felice Bauer, his fiancé, at the time of reading his story “In the Penal Colony” in Munich:

*I had come, borne by my story [“The Penal Colony”] to a city that was no concern of mine except as a meeting place and a deplorable youthful memory, read my filthy story there to complete indifference, no empty stove could have been colder than that hall, then spent some time with people I don’t know—which seldom happens to me here.<sup>11</sup>*

A few years later, Kafka described his struggle with memory: “I am a memory come alive, hence my insomnia”. The walls of the room in which



*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Entrance to Pentridge Jail, New Caledonia, page 193.*

<sup>10</sup> Kafka, Franz, *Franz Kafka, The Metamorphosis, The Penal Colony and Other Stories*, translated by Willa and Edwin Muir, New York, Schocken Books, 1948, 160. [Translation altered. JZ]

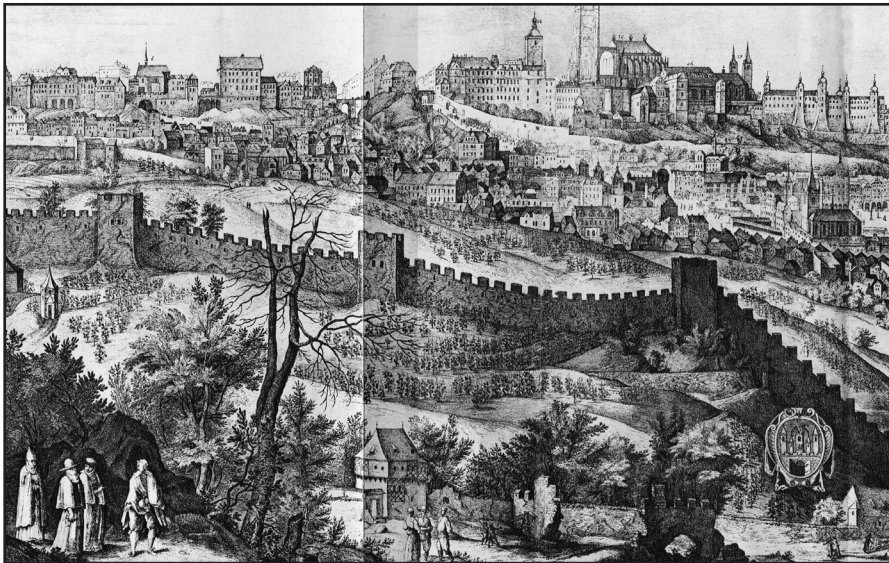
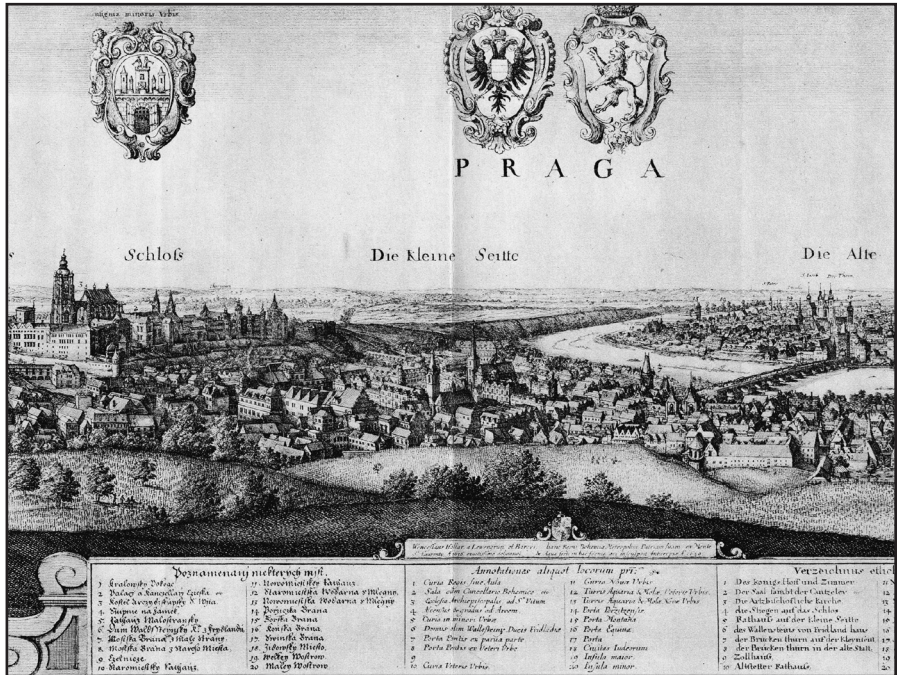
<sup>11</sup> Kafka, Franz, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka, 1914-1923*, Edited by Max Brod, translated by Martin Greenberg with the co-operation of Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken Books, 193.



*Kafka in the Penal Colony* was installed were littered in a planned manner with excerpts from his memoirs, diaries, writings and letters. It is possible to walk the streets of Prague and go into museums and synagogues and see the names of the murdered inmates of concentration camps on the inside or outside of the walls of buildings, or to walk through cemeteries that Nazi troops had rampaged and plundered, destroying tombs and tombstones. Resistance fighters—often Communists are named—have cemeteries throughout the region and there are cemeteries in Prague and elsewhere for Russian soldiers and even Canadian airmen as martyrs of resistance. The Installation of the Penal Colony is also another kind of memento mori. The listing of the dead on walls that commemorate Jewish and other victims of the Nazi penal colony camps is depicted indirectly by my use of Kafka's writings on the walls of the Gallery. The writing becomes graffiti on monuments. The landscape is littered with vanished memento mori.

It is an assembly of materials related both to Kafka and to my reading of the chronotope of "Kafka". We can also imagine Kafka's continuing presence as an Odradek, who is all around us, a figure hidden in the room. Kafka is in the room and in our lives, yet in the installation his image does not appear. Yet once one enters the room he is never far away. Perhaps that is his secret—to remain invisible yet visible like Odradek who appears many times in the drawers of the vitrines, sometimes as a child's clay model, sometimes in period children's books, often as the character Svejek from Hasek's *The Good Soldier Svejek*, a work parodying WWI and contemporary with Kafka's story. The room is also a place where the memory traces of images from childhood are never far away from Kafka's world. Children have a special place in Kafka's story when the Commandant brings them to the execution for pedagogical purposes. Kafka's often playful and often tormented comments about children inhabit the walls of the room.

This notion of a "chronotope" is key to understanding the installation. "Chronotope" identifies a literary construction that describes representation much like a photographic depiction of an image. It is an image-idea, an Imago. Images abound in our installation, including words on the wall used to represent images. The chronotope is a space-time objectification of non-conscious memory-experiences that the self projects and arranges in space and time. The images function like a language, contiguous with the many other chronotopes. They are the building blocks of experience. They are the shadow of the objects around us. So the salon, the street, the road, the monastery, the conceptual architectonic arrangement of ideas etc., can have a memory function without our consciously knowing it. Cubism, montage, collage and new music are examples of



Prague Hunger Wall, Filipe van den Bosche panorama of Prague including sections of the Hunger Wall, 1606. Hunger wall constructed in 1360 - 1362 by Charles IV as a works project for the hungry, poor and unemployed. Was a defensive rampart as well as boundary. Reproduction in Collection Vaclav Cilek, Prague, with Permission. Prague Hunger Wall and Panorama, Filipe van den Bosche panorama of Prague including sections of the Hunger Wall. 1606.



art movements that sought chronotopes or conditions through which a work could be brought to life and communicate its form and function. The literary work as a model for depiction in works of visual art is of course common. Clearly this can be related to the dreamwork in psychoanalysis where the structure of the dream frames an objectivized set of relationships that exist as immanent and latent content. I use Mikhail Bakhtin's extended construction as found in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.<sup>12</sup> While this can be understood as a psychology of consciousness in Bakhtin, he is looking for something stronger than just the Platonic "image". The image is related to the *eidōs* in Greek, which is way of visualizing an idea or theme or trope. On this basis Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, break new ground in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.<sup>13</sup>

Puzzling as it may have been for spectators wanting to "see" Kafka, my intent was to present scenes that evoke empathy for objects and empathy for writing about a terrible event, torment that we shrink from as we struggle for an interpretation of violence defined as the invasion of the integrity of the person. That is why the walls of the Gallery were filled with sentences from his work. This reactivates the force of Kafka's writing. By confining it in a space, transience becomes the key to the relationships of objects that are collected in the room where Kafka never appears. Only the transient effects appear. In his world it was important to produce a material depiction of physicality and transience in the present. For example, there is the table with an open drawer of cotton batten that is the analogue of the bucket of cotton that has a thin red and blue line of blood placed nearby. Kafka describes this palpable material in his story using his sense of the uncanny life of objects. The chair and the table are replicas of those shown in the documentary photograph of the concentration camp of Theresienstadt's (Terézín in Czech) Small Fortress office. Beneath the picture is a replica of the chair and table plus a clock with the hands stopped at twelve. Unless we know how to read the shadows and light coming into the depicted room, we have no idea whether it is night or day. On the walls of the office are the pigeonholes containing the inmates' files. To the left of the picture on the wall is Kafka's aphorism "A cage goes in search of a bird." This aphorism is repeated elsewhere in the room. Once one builds a penal colony, or work camp, one has to find the labourers to inhabit it. In addition, there is a construction of my own devising, "Double Sided Kafka", in which a news item is sandwiched between two glass plates. The article is a banal report from the back page of an everyday newspaper

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12 Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* translated by Vern W. McGee, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986.

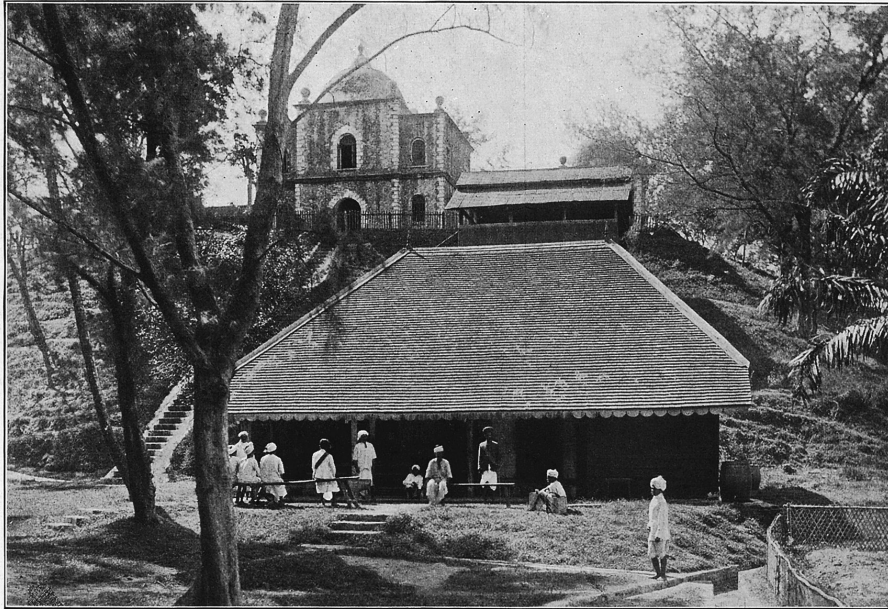
13 Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.

reporting that some letters of Kafka's had recently been discovered. The entire scene reeks of anonymity. The torment of a work camp is displayed as if it is simply a matter of office routine. The many connections of the commonplace to torment, show Kafka as an anarchist sympathizer. For some viewers this anarchist, anti-militarist scene could be the political heart of the installation.

» **“THE INSTALLED DOUBLE ROOM”— KAFKA’S WRITINGS  
ON THE WALL IS A LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT**

The origin of the installation *The Insurance Man: Kafka in the Penal Colony* was in my wish to preserve a view built-up during the many years I have read Kafka, taught his works and written about him. At the same time I know that Kafka's gift to us may be the notion of transience, what Freud called *Vergänglichkeit* or impermanence.<sup>14</sup> For both Freud and Kafka this means to live in space-time scenes that function like a landscape where we are faced with loss, even the loss of loss, where we struggle to confront our mourning for that which was precious to us. To create a room in which impermanence is installed is to come to terms with Kafka and his presence. The story that portrays organized violence in “In the Penal Colony”

<sup>14</sup> Freud, Sigmund, “Vergänglichkeit”, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band X, London, Imago, Frankfurt, 1946.



Polizeigebäude auf der Viperinsel

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies*, Police Headquarters on Viper Island page 384.

is then turned into impermanence through facing the objects and the inner relationship of the images in the room to Kafka's story, where the ultimate violence is the invasion of the inner domain of a person by force masked as law. While I am not a conceptualist, this installation attempts what conceptual strategies have made commonplace: to challenge the gallery as a system where art happens and the autonomy of art is challenged yet maintained as a given, even when reportage "about" art is included. The gallery as an idea also allows for an epistemological break with the museum; so the gallery can be a theatrical set, a site for a utopian project. Put another way, coming to terms with my memory of Kafka allows me to build into the untranslatable Kafka, an homage to his own challenge to literary form. Walter Benjamin understood the exact relationship of collecting to memory:

*What is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from its original function in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind. . . . Plato shelters the unchangeable archetypes . . . and loses himself, assuredly. But he has the strength to pull himself up again by nothing more than a straw; and from out of the sea of fog that envelops his senses rises the newly acquired piece, like an island.—Collecting is a form of practical memory, and of all the profane manifestations of "nearness" it is the most binding. Thus, in a certain sense, the smallest act of political reflection makes for an epoch in the antique business. We construct here an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to "assembly".*<sup>15</sup>

It is not well known that Benjamin was busy writing about Kafka in essays, sketches and letters throughout Benjamin's life. He saw the significance of Kafka's work for understanding his own thinking. Behind the active metaphor of collecting in the installation is the reality that Kafka lived when he traveled among many rooms. The writing on the walls and the central object, the pile of beds, represent these thoughts as his internal writing laboratory. Writing is Kafka's labour, his primary job. Almost everything he writes relates to labour and how others work and toil. It is labour to read him and labour to understand the writing on the walls. This is Kafka's secret. Reading for Kafka is the beginning stages of labour: he relates labour to being wounded.

*I read Hebbel's diaries (some 1800 pages) all at once, whereas previously I had always just bitten out small pieces that struck me as insipid All the same I started to read consecutively. At first it was just a game,*

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<sup>15</sup> Benjamin, Walter, "The Collector", *Arcades Project*, translated Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlan. Cambridge, Massachussets. Harvard University Press. 204 -205.

but eventually I came to feel like a caveman who rolls a block in front of the entrance to his cave, initially as a joke and out of boredom, but then, when the block makes the cave dark and shuts off air, feels duly alarmed and with remarkable energy tries to push the rock away. But by then it becomes ten times heavier and the man has to wrestle with it with all his might before light and air return. I simply could not take a pen in hand during these days. Because when you're surveying a life like that, which towers higher and higher without a gap, so high you can scarcely reach it with your field glasses, your conscience cannot settle down. But it's good when your conscience receives big wounds, because that makes it more sensitive to every twinge. Altogether, I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we are reading doesn't shake us awake like a blow to the skull, why bother reading it at all? So that it can make us happy, as you put it? My God, we'd be just as happy if we had no books at all; books that make us happy we could, in an emergency, also write ourselves. What we need are books that hit us like misfortune that pains us, like the death of someone we loved more than we love ourselves, that make us feel as though we had been banished to the woods, far from any human presence, like suicide, a book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us. That I believe.<sup>16</sup>

The interior is thus the frame, and the objects that are displayed are both real and transient in the tradition of what might be called 20<sup>th</sup> century mannerism. The creation of a tableau using a room as both a settlement and a laboratory allows the room to function as a retreat from life's noisy phantasmagoria. The *Room* is, then, a double room: both an interior set and a dream that fabricates the history of his story within the room.

This is the third tableau I have created as enactments derived from literary works. The others were "The Measures Taken" after Brecht's *The Measures Taken*, Simon Fraser University Theatre, 1973, and "Dialectical Snapshots Against 1984", Carnegie Centre, Vancouver, 1984. These were conceived in part because of my interest in Peter Weiss and his *Aesthetics of Resistance* as well as my study of Benjamin, Bakhtin and the role of depiction in literature and art. The inspiration derives as well from Aby Warburg's attempts to find synchronic relationships across cultures and art forms in order to disinter experience from ritual form. In this sense the Gallery becomes a place of ritual.

Kafka used "history" in the way that the stories contain a concept of

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16 Kafka, Franz, "Letter To Oskar Pollak", January 27, 1904 in *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston, New York, Schocken Books, 1977, 15 - 16.

Flucht-Statistik Neukaledoniens				
Jahr	Gesamtzahl der Sträflinge	Zahl der Flüchtlinge	Zahl der Wieder-verhafteten	Definitive Flüchtlinge
1864	247	14	14	—
1865	245	4	4	—
1866	345	15	15	—
1867	621	24	14	10
1868	1554	115	112	3
1869	2032	116	108	8
1870	2300	66	72	5
1871	2081	81	80	6
1872	3120	75	75	3
1873	4221	124	114	10
1874	5548	159	195	20
1875	6235	171	145	26
1876	6802	157	141	16
1877	7537	148	145	3
1878	8125	284	244	40
1879	7948	403	376	27
1880	8103	709	670	39
1881	6597	584	560	24
1882	6776	394	371	23
1883	7051	885	840	60
1884	7122	940	910	19
1885	7146	409	409	19
1886	7498	720	684	36
1887	7135	738	729	19
1888	6569	619	594	25
1889	6383	735	700	7
1890	6001	641	621	26
1891	5841	469	464	12
1892	5403	474	440	15
1893	5218	297	299	23
1894	5078	240	233	25
1895	4876	175	163	13
1896	9437	180	169	11
1897	9677	248	196	62
1898	9214	501	457	44
1899	8547	385	378	7
1900	7637	359	341	9
1901	7157	166	136	30
1902	7344	193	193	39
1903	6890	127	72	55
1904	6486	61	26	30

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies*, Table showing Flight Statistics from the Penal Colony, New Caledonia including those recaptured and those not yet caught, 1864 – 1904. page 211.

history as the experience of time and space. History is read from the point of view of its contradictions, continuities as well as breaks, and how dreams enter into history. For example, the key aphorism in the installation, placed strategically near the beds and next to the photograph of the Terézin/Theresienstadt “Lager” or Concentration Camp Office, is “A cage goes in search of a bird”.<sup>17</sup> If one builds a penal colony one will have to find, or even invent prisoners and workers to put into such a colony. Kafka’s stories and novels take place in rooms and confined spaces; narrators are disguised as authors who peer out of windows at the life being lived outside in the shelterless expanse of abstract spaces with recognizable landscapes. Of course for Kafka there were no free “natives or workers” who live in some land beyond the Insurance Company or outside the factories he examined in his day job. No wonder Kafka was attracted to stone quarries and walls as repositories of the past that

had become petrified until the art of the “axe” of memory uncovered the images of labour buried there—as if behind the walls of a closed up room.

The installation is “After Kafka”, but is not “post-Kafka”. There is no actual depiction of the story itself as one might find in a film or dramatic replica. Instead it has affinities to the Marxist inspired film *Class Relations* (written, directed, and edited by Daniëlle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub), which is a Brechtian treatment of Kafka’s *America* that renders the novel as a remote dream but does not show it as dream-like. I engage with the question of why in “In The Penal Colony” one can find both solace and inspiration in a mimetic relationship with another artwork in order to illuminate its aura, thus furthering its truth by locating aspects of its immanent material reality.

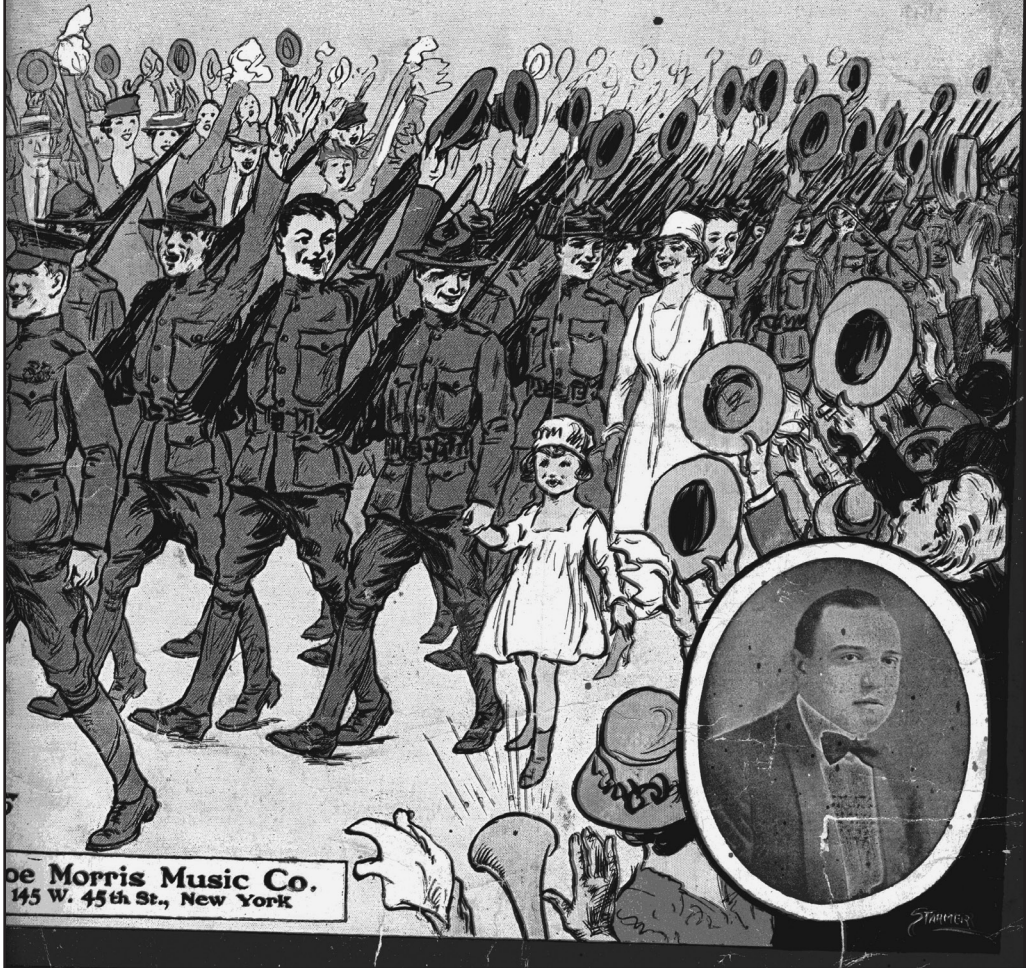
In this case, “In The Penal Colony” struggles with the violence of Kafka’s world that gnawed in his head like the mice he feared and wrote about. The story is a *memento mori* even to the point of hinting at the flagellant tradition of pain and martyrdom common in Western art that depicted the punishment of criminals, or those who violated the faith of the true believers. Images of violence in art were most often seen through religious depictions that took place outside of Europe. Religious paintings of peoples in exile are not uncommon, but most often represent peoples in flight or expulsion;

17 Kosselleck, Reinhart, *The Practice of Conceptual History, Timing, History, Spacing Concepts*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002 for a scholarly view of this idea of conceptual history.

# AFTER THE WAR IS OVER

WORDS BY  
E. J. POURMON and  
ANDREW B. STERLING

MUSIC BY  
JOSEPH WOODRUFF

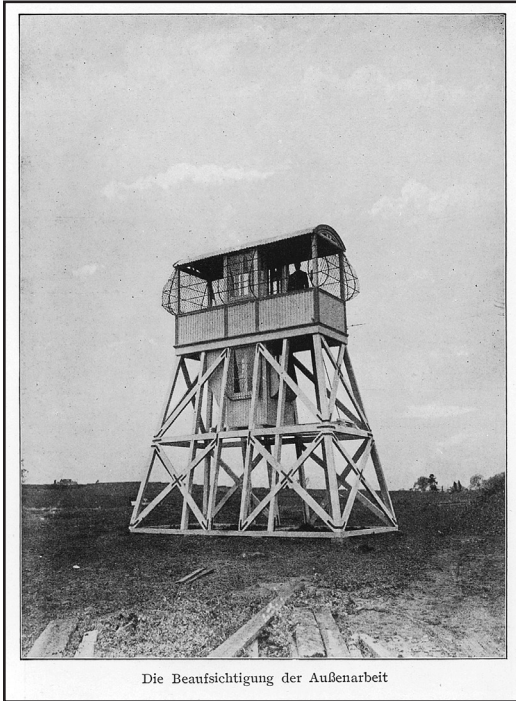


oe Morris Music Co.  
145 W. 45th St., New York

Installation View Music Score of "After the War", in Travel Trunk "Amerika—The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma". Trunk contains Charlie Chaplin Hand Puppet. Photograph courtesy of SFU LIDC.



but images in art of penal colonies or prisons are to my knowledge very few and certainly stories related to penal colonies are rare. Dostoevsky's *Notes from The House of the Dead* is the one great exception. It is possible that Kafka knew of illustrations of Siberian exiles and penal colonies, as he knew of Heindl's book. However, the tableau in the room does not represent violence as such, but re-enacts the culture's resistance and attraction to violence. The foundational context for this tableau is the relationship of art to politics in the age of wars and martyrology depicted from Callot and Goya to graphic portrayals of massacres in World War I journalism. This is referenced in the installation in several ways: a wall display of Ernst



Friedrich's *Krieg against Krieg*. 1924, [*War against War*] a pacifist's Callot-like depiction of atrocities in WW I; and by representations of industrial labour and mining labour depicted in several drawers in the vitrines.

Other representations of violence in the installed room include story book images from the penal colony itself that are depicted by placid, idyllic photographs in a DVD projection from two travel books known to Kafka, but primarily by showing the actual book, *My Journey to the Penal Colonies*; some photographs from Heindl accompany this essay. The ethos and tone of Heindl, reminds one of Alexander von Humboldt's classic *Personal Narrative of a Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the new Continent* (1807–1827). Humboldt

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies*, Observation Tower for Prisoners Doing Outside Work, New Caledonia, page 220.

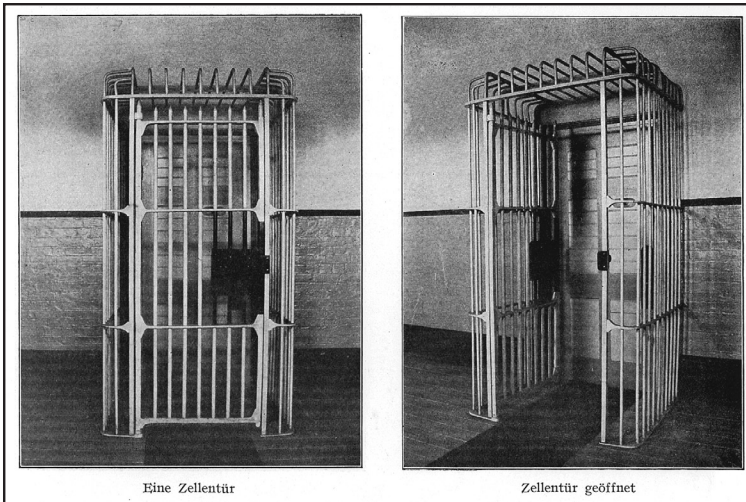
was the model of a progressive sympathizer of enlightened revolution who emulated the Directorate in the French Revolution in his belief that scientific rationality would answer the fanaticism and superstition of the ancient regime. This regime of violence was played out in France in the trial of Alfred Dreyfus and by the “Blood Murders” trials of innocent village Jews. Kafka's story and the installation present this resistance in the homicidal comic-grotesque form of the machine that torments the soldier—who has committed only the crime of insubordination—relying on the meditative distancing aspect of the story that teases us with a legal-philosophical discourse about a murder. Philosophical distancing

is subsumed by the choral device of Kafka's narrator, that is the basis of Hegel's understanding of the comic referred to below in the discussion of films that re-enact the baroque aura of Kafka's work. In particular one thinks of Orson Welles' *The Trial* (1962) that illuminated the catastrophes of the concentration camps, the Nuremberg Trials and Hiroshima-Nagasaki through film-noire stylizing of Kafka's references to the hidden force of law, shown in various measures throughout our installed double room. Information related to images and materials in the installation were referenced in the Gallery for the installation but are not republished here; for example the Dreyfus Affair, The Beiliss "Blood Murder" trials, and Octave Mirbeau's *The Torture Garden*.

» **RESISTANCE AND TRANSIENCE**

At some point in our lives we face the dilemma of the explorer who arrives "In the Penal Colony": when does opportunism become compliance and subservience? How many ways are there to obey, whitewash, surrender to the system; to deny and then lie while learning to live in the grey zone of obedience to the force of law? This is the ethical-political basis of Kafka's tale. Documents, objects and historical images can only reach this zone of complicity if we see that the novel is "an axe for the frozen sea within us." Story in the installation is also installation as story; part parable, but also part prophecy and part gesture. For Kafka, it is the story of his own resistance to being an author.

Kafka's works are scenes. They are not nightmares, nor are they macabre as are the works of Alfred Kubin that were familiar to Kafka (Kubin's images are shown in several books in the vitrines), scenes that capitalize on the distance and proximity of the everyday and commonplace. I



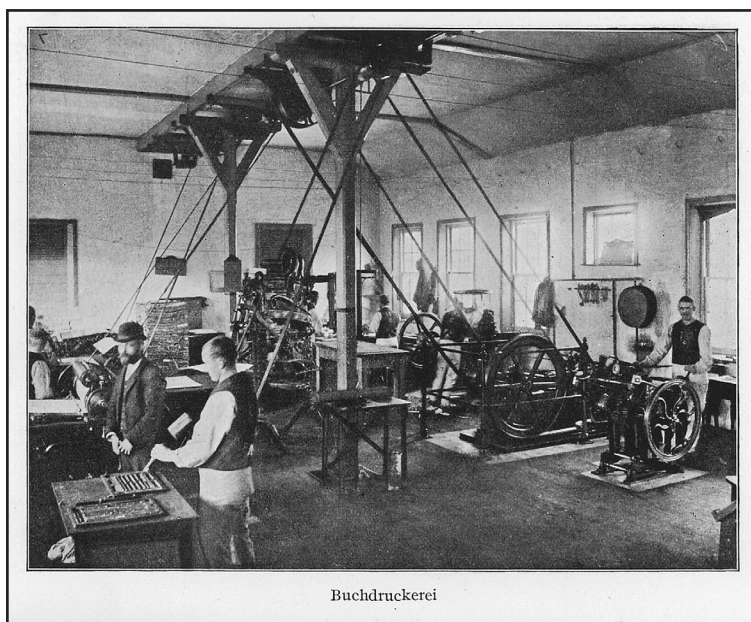
*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Cell, "Cell Closed", "Cell Open". New Caledonia, page 43.*

wanted to convey the convergence of the archaic and the modern that reminds us of the phantasmagorical quality of Kafka and at the same time his realism. The grotesque in this sense is an outgrowth of mannerism. It allows us to see that the grotesque is the art form that best represents a response to the movement of early capitalism into baroque forms of social control; the story and installation, contain many representations of force and violence. The aesthetic point is to show resistance. The installation “resists” Kafka and his own resistance to his work while revealing measures of resistance in his leap into an almost metaphysical “comic-grotesque” denial of progress in the arts, all the while maintaining the musty atmosphere of the commonplace. In his work he appears faceless, as if it were derivative of and the object of, scientific inquiry. He does not retreat into phenomenology by maintaining his relationship to familiar objects: thus the ethos of montage and colportage in the Installation. Along with Walter Benjamin, the figure closest to this working of the streets of the ordinary is Ernst Bloch, who sketched out a position on montage, kitsch, non-contemporaneity, relativism and objectivity in *Heritage of Our Times*,<sup>18</sup>

The story “In the Penal Colony” is one of Kafka’s purest representations of resistance made irresistible. All of his works are connected

18 Bloch, Ernst, *Heritage of our Times* translated by Neville and Stephen Plaice, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1991. The book was first published in 1935.

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies*, Book Printing Press, New Caledonia, page 240.



Buchdruckerei

directly to both the natural and artificial worlds around him. Yet the feelings that emerge are of a reality that is becoming post-humous, forgotten. The memory of pain and suffering shown metaphorically by the torture machine is only relieved by the images of writing as transience, nearness and farness. Writing is the basis of the machine's difficulty in remembering and holding onto torture. The machine implodes. The "look" or aura of the project conveys the archaic nature of our reality as well, as creating a feeling of non-contemporaneity. We need the axe of the novel to open the frozen sea of the memory

of torment. The materials used around the machine convey the idea of fragility: also skin, glass and light suggest movement and fragility. Most are from my own collection or have been created and assembled for this installation. I chose the word "torment" over torture to ensure that the installation is seen in art-historical perspective. Torment is ironically Kafka's distancing perspective, used throughout the story to place torture in relation to history in art. Torture is often portrayed with crowds observing an execution because it reinforces not only law but also the participation by onlookers in the preservation of authority. Torture and/or execution is located in full view of the commons. In Kafka's story the viewers are the Explorer and the reader as well as the soldier and the populace of the colony. However the workers, who are in the Inn at the end of the story, barely know what's going on and are more interested in



Ceuta, Eingeborenen-Polizei



Eingeborenen-Polizei

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Ceuta, Indigenous Police, page 284.*

the Explorer than the day's proceedings.

The films made in the aftermath of the popularization of Kafka elaborate in various ways the philosophical bases of Kafka's stories. In the Gallery this was contextualized through portraits, beds, palm trees, X-rays, contemporary travel books that he loved, classic children's books, *Heimat* books and objects familiar to Kafka such as material from Hasek's *Good Soldier Svejk*. *Heimat* is an almost untranslatable German word that refers to the domestic communal location of language and customs belonging to the village, home and household. The suffix—heim is attached to many German town names, Mannheim etc. ('ham' in English towns). The point here is that the room is a home where care takes place. Odradek, in the "cares" of a family man, is embedded in the ethos of the Explorer's growing concern for what is happening in front of him.

All of these domestic objects are placed in vitrines under glass to remind the traveler-viewers of those exotic installations in museums where open drawers display and preserve the archaic, the lost, the miniaturized and the out-of-context. Also shown are a number of period books that have relevance to the theme of torment as a *memento mori*. For example Octave Mirbeau's *The Torture Garden* brings the tableau into the realm of the immanence and transcendence of pain. The polarities of childlike innocence and fear can be found in the story itself in the way the narrator and the Explorer experience the violence of the machine-that-resists-being shown yet feels homey as well as bizarre—almost a Rube Goldberg contraption.

The image of torment in the installation represents both force as law-preserving violence (in Walter Benjamin's use of the law in his essay "Critique of Violence") and the forces that evade and deny that force of law.<sup>19</sup> In Kafka's case what is left of the force of law are the anecdotal parable-like stories that are not written down as law but are transmitted through stories—voices internal to the culture. This leads the story into both psychological and philosophical terrain. For example, we can understand Kafka's comic sensibility through Hegel's "unhappy consciousness", revealing as it does the denial of violence at the heart of civilization itself. At the same time, as the Explorer learns, we encounter the ways that we can deny violence. My assumption is that the viewer must be capable of seeing that the violence in the story should not be translated into a specific replica of the machine that has frightened so many readers, including the first audience that heard the story in Munich in 1917 in a rare, for Kafka, public reading. Equally, the effort is to steer away from representations of Kafka as in Martin Kippenberger's *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's Amerika*

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19 Benjamin, Walter, *Reflections*, edited by Peter Demetz, translated by Edmund Jephcott, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.



In einem chinesischen Gefängnis

(1999), or representations like the apocalyptic-fantastic which indulges in the search for the mystery of Kafka in some end-time political Messianic techno-fantasy, as in Soderberg's film, *Kafka* (1991).

But since Kafka is alive as a universal character in our artistic repertoire he transcends the genres of the literary. One has to resist the trap of the Kafkaesque or the messianic-apocalyptic and not render him and his work into this or that, allowing him to be applied to everything that is bureaucratic, grotesque or prophetic. His stories are about "work"; they function as a language of situations that have the quality of work, of process, of the office, and of incompleteness. Like great paintings or photographs, the work remains in the mind and comes back time and again without a specific name or label. The stories are in this sense a morphic landscape of memory.

Walter Benjamin referred to Kafka's work as "listening to tradition", which means the way tradition may lie hidden in the cave-like rooms where Kafka experienced his presentness. They contained his fear that he was fast receding into the obsolete. For this reason two paradigmatic works are important to the installation: Ilya Kabakov's "The Man Who Flew into

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, In a Chinese Prison, Ceuta, page 321.*

Space from his Room”<sup>20</sup> and Jeff Wall’s “After ‘Invisible Man’ by Ralph Ellison, the Preface 1999–2001.”<sup>21</sup> Both show rooms in which the dream of escape takes place in a construction that is on the edge of the phantasmagorical world where situations of the commonplace illuminate the strange in everyday life—in other words the aesthetics of morphic memory. The installation depicts the difference between the “everyday” as the quotidian and banal, and the “common situations” that are exaggerated in the dream world, and in the way individuals encounter themselves in the libidinal organization of a society.

Kafka knew that most of our lives are determined by the groupings in which we live; for Josef K. in *The Trial*, and K in *The Castle* these are hard lessons. Equally, the Explorer learns about resistance in his encounter with

the Officer who yearns for recognition from the Commandant who governs the island. In Kafka the everyday is an artistic concept, in much the same way as the commonplace appears in art and literature in the 16th and 17th centuries in the context of wars of annihilation—Grimmelshausen’s account of *The Thirty-Years War* is both a fictionalized-autobiography and documentary of a horri-

ble war, and calamities of all kinds—a “Guernica”. The situational and the commonplace are rendered into what appears as ordinary life-material. Exchange value becomes cultural value. The Explorer-Researcher finds his beliefs sacrificed to the purity of violence. The installation shows ordinary objects that become in their aesthetic reality exchange and fetish objects. Here the Explorer finds a pure group setting, perfect for researching what Europeans have made of the exotic colonies where groups act out their fantasies.

Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Self* (1921) originates



Im Weiberabteil des Namhoi-Gefängnisses

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Women’s Section of the Namhoi-Ceuta, page 320.* Ceuta was a Spanish Prison Island off Gibraltar.

20 Ilya Kabakov “Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment”, 1985-1988 wood, board construction, room furniture, found printed ephemera, household objects, dimensions variable installation view at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, 1988. Photo: D. James Dee. Courtesy of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov and the Sean Kelly Gallery, New York. Reproduced on page 80.

21 Jeff Wall, “After ‘Invisible Man’ by Ralph Ellison, the Preface, 1999-2001”, transparency in lightbox, 174 x 250.5 cm, Courtesy of the artist. Reproduced on page 80.

in the same post-war extreme situations as Kafka's story. Benjamin wrote in a letter to Gershom Scholem in 1938 (he had already written his major essay on Kafka in 1934) that Kafka was about transmissibility of its own failure and failure as such: "Kafka's real genius was that he tried something entirely new: he sacrificed truth for the sake of clinging to its transmissibility".<sup>22</sup> While Kafka hints at parables and the allegorical, Benjamin is right to say that his visual and conceptual representations are of the transitory and transient, their strength is to appear anecdotal. They challenge the force of law in the everyday and thereby establish that the commonplace in all its catastrophic terror exists in the reality of how this machine does away with people. This is why Peter Weiss connected Bruegel to Kafka.

The exhibition is also a dream room. The words that storm the walls in the installation are not placed there helter-skelter but according to the logic of how Kafka read his own torment in dreams and diaries *into* his writings. His words, are not meant to be read as if they are a direct route into the story, but as a colportage in the way they occur to him in a variety of circumstances, turning up to be repeated and worked through in his stories and his letters. One can't "read" words in a dream but one sees the affect of the words and the affect is a result of the transience of the images and our chasing after the images in the way the narrator-author of "In the Penal Colony" chases after—along with the reader—the reality of the Explorer and the Officer.

The Explorer experiences the torture event as both real and unreal in a display of doubt that what he sees can be a real. Walter Benjamin described this as the fundamental turn of the modern:

*This is the voice of the will to symbolic totality venerated by humanism in the human figure. But it is as something incomplete and imperfect that objects stare out from the allegorical structure.*<sup>23</sup>

This is the sense of the physical and the immediately accessible, yet painfully remote quality of Kafka's diaries, experimental aphorisms, letters and drafts of stories that appear in letters and notes that were his laboratory, his totality. These were drafts, but were also memory traces in the manner in which Proust's memory was tolerable to him only as a theatrical tableau. Because Kafka is more of a trickster, a Hermes character who preferred the time-space location of crossroads and thresholds—rooms that

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<sup>22</sup> Brod, Max, "Kafka And Some of My Own Reflections", in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, New York, Harcourt, Brace, World, 1968, 147.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, translated by John Osborne, London, New Left Books, 1977, 186.





*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Weaving Mill, Ceuta, page 324.*

in it. A room is the cave of his writing on the walls of his rooms, which is why there is double window in a constructed wall in the installation so we can look “out” of the room at the artificiality of the landscape seen through a window in an insurance lawyer’s office.

In the installation there are many images of windows, walls, mines, and adventurous hiding places—including a set of 19th century graphics about robbers and their hideouts; these are derivatives of the phantasmal nature of the common violence that takes place in the story itself. Heindl’s book on penal colonies becomes itself a window for Kafka because it describes and documents reformist penal colonies for the German State in the same way Kafka documented his own research into the political economy of factories.

The *Panorama of Prague* that stands behind the beds, that are the tormenting-objects-as-machine, is a picture of “The Hunger Wall” built in the 14th century, standing in part at the southern and western region of Petrin Hill in Prague. The Hunger Wall was constructed in 1360-1362 by the humanist-reformer Charles IV as a works project for the hungry, poor and unemployed. It was a defensive rampart as well as boundary. The writing on the walls in the installation fractures the formal space of the room in the way the wall itself has been broken over the centuries; in Prague today the wall appears as a theatrical tableau in which the viewer walks around and “sees” many of the objects that Kafka knew and then translated into the holes of his hunger-wall as memory traces. His writing reminds us of geometry and physics and in this way it depicts a “mythography” of time and space. Other artists such as Adolf Loos and Otto Wagner in the Austro-Hungarian empire, as well as city builders particularly in Vienna, were also working within the new abstractions of space by showing the connectedness of finite structures in the city to the feelings that

break into other rooms—he places his creatures and people into an dwelling-like structure, for example the cave or room in the head of the burrowing creature in the story of “The Burrow”, which, like the machine in “In the Penal Colony”, is an inner structure and a built-world. In this case a burrow is both a hole in the ground and a building with a hole

worked against the factory system and its bureaucratic phantasmagorias. Civil unrest and migrant peoples in the industrial and squalid sectors of cities contributed to the hope for revolution among the satellite peoples of Austro-Hungary. Vienna and Prague were cities waiting for revolution.

Kafka inserts himself into the genre of the novel in the way strangers come into culture, knowing that there is usually danger lurking within any culture. Simmel's now famous account of the wanderer explains the sense of dislocation and danger that Kafka's characters experience as their unknown known:

*If wandering is the liberation from every given point in space, and thus the conceptual opposite to fixation at such a point, the sociological form of the "stranger" presents the unity, as it were, of these two characteristics. This phenomenon too, however, reveals that spatial relations are only the condition, on the one hand, and the symbol, on the other, of human relations. The stranger is thus being discussed here, not in the sense often touched upon in the past, as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the potential wanderer: although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going. He is fixed within a particular spatial group, or within a group whose boundaries are similar to spatial boundaries.<sup>24</sup>*

Like Cezanne, Kafka moved the optical into a place of apparent confusion. Kafka regarded the inner world as terrain that had been invaded by forces never before imagined; he projected these forces onto the moving screens of an external world that was swiftly changing and being undermined by powerful forces such as the factory system and military weaponry. This was the end of verticality and the thinking that allowed vertical construction to become a symbol of the gods. It is also the end of the "horizontal" sense of time that evolves and develops; thus resistance occurs at both ends of the spectrum of space and time. Modernism is the result of those artistic inventions.

WW I violently overwhelmed the precarious forms of resistance to law and the force of law, depriving the emerging revolutionary-Syndicalist movements of the vocabularies and experiences of transformation, being felt by the masses. The sense of force registered by the machine in "In the Penal Colony" is depicted by the mattresses in the installation: Writing bed, Hospital bed, Travel bed, Office bed, Machinery bed and at

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24 Simmel, Georg, "The Stranger" in, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by Donald N. Levine, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1971. page 143

the entrance to the Gallery the tubercular Death bed. Letters from Dr. Robert Klopstock are displayed in the vitrines. Klopstock was the Doctor who was with Kafka toward the end of his illness.<sup>25</sup> Klopstock recognized that Kafka had X-ray vision into the substratum of consciousness that leaked through the gaps of the built-world: some X-Rays are shown in our room. The commonplace situations that history brings to the doorstep and thresholds of our encounters are situations that can terrorize us because they may not have meaning until we recall the objects that make up and surround terror. This includes objects that have no use until one finds a use for them. In regard to the material, haptic qualities of Kafka's stories, Walter Benjamin understood the materiality of the tableau of memory in his own work, and his essays on Kafka reveal how deeply Kafka influenced him. In "The Interior, The Trace" section of *The Arcades Project* (212) Benjamin writes:

*The importance of moveable property, as compared to immovable property. Here our task is slightly easier. Easier to blaze a way into the heart of things abolished or superseded, in order to decipher the contours of the banal as picture puzzle—in order to start a concealed William Tell from out of the wooded entrails, or in order to answer the question: "Where is the bride in this picture?" Picture puzzles as schemata of dreamwork were long ago discovered by psychoanalysis. We, however, with a similar conviction, are less on the trail of the psyche than on the track of things. We seek the totemic tree of objects within the thicket of primal history. The very last—the topmost—face on the totem pole is that of kitsch.*<sup>26</sup>

The Explorer-Researcher comes to the island as a world traveler, a world-flaneur who learns to observe human behaviour in extreme situations. The question raised is whether the Explorer will return to his previous life as the same person who left Europe to write reports about penal colonies and their material qualities—"the thicket of primal history" and "wooded entrails". The portraits looming over the beds and on the nearby walls conveyed this question. The traveler-researcher who came to the penal colony to observe something he has only read about in books, comes away having observed himself. Reproductions of coloured woodcuts of idyllic folkloric scenes of adventure and storybook robberies are shown in the installation as well as in the vitrines. In a demonic reversal of ethnographic observation, the machine that is supposed to execute the prisoner has been transformed into beds that prefigure in

25 Klopstock, Robert, *Kafka's Letzte Freund* [Kafka's Last Friend], Wien, 1993.

26 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 212.

layers of torment everything that the protagonists cannot reveal of and to themselves. The object here is to show torment without the horror and brutality of torture. In the story that is what the machine is actually doing by inscribing the words “Be Just” and “Obey your Superiors” on the body of the prisoner.

Because Kafka compiled his impressions as if they had no beginning or end, they appear as assemblages of raw materials that occur in the contiguous plastic manner of the dream. The Room is both dream as supplementary (*nachträglich* in German also means aftermath) interpretation of the story as well as a complementary chain of connections and contiguities coming together as a room of transitory objects. The path through the installation leads eventually to the vitrines and the drawers that contain ethnographic materials in the manner of relics in an anthropology museum or map room, and then the very books that Kafka used as source materials are shown as totems on a television.

» **EVERY ROOM HAS AN OUTSIDE**

*“Everyone carries a room about inside him. This fact can be proved by means of the sense of hearing. If someone walks fast and one pricks up one’s ears and listens, say in the night, when everything round is quiet, one hears, for instance, the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall.”<sup>27</sup>*

The Room should also be seen as a dream room that resists overt surrealist features. In Kafka the dream dreams the dreamer. The writer uses the dream situation as if the dreamer didn’t exist and in this way the world outside of the dream becomes contiguous with everyday life. So his writing functions as a reverie or daydream. The window in the wall opens up as a dream-like object because it shows a lawyer’s office in Vancouver where last wills and testaments are spread on a table. But the wills are, like art, illusion.

The story is not only an ordinary dream but is a tabooed self-representation that cannot be duplicated. To believe in the machine the way the Officer cajoles the Explorer to accept it only makes the viewer feel complicit in the execution: thus the beds are material objects that have metamorphosed out of the Explorer’s story into visible illusions complete with a battery (depicted in the story), which in the installation is connected to the mattresses and to the Officer’s genitals. One can’t ever duplicate a dream! This is why Freud believed in the autonomy of the artwork as a

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<sup>27</sup> Kafka, Franz, “The First Octavo Note-book”, in *Wedding Preparations in the Country and other Posthumous Prose Writings*, translated by Ernst Kaiser and Ethne Wilkins, London, Secker and Warburg, 1954.

reality-dream. In Kafka's stories, affect appears to be absent. The reader has to work at it, just as Josef K in *The Castle* or K in *The Trial*, have to work at what is happening to them. That way 'dream work' is a totality that resists being broken down. The dreamer who speaks about the dream should be able to realize some aspect of the unconscious that the dream resists. For Freud a theory of dreams can't be understood without the most difficult aspect of psychoanalysis: resistance. This installation accepts the story but also resists making it into a Kafkaesque theatrical extravaganza.

Wall Collage,  
Jerry Zaslove.

What does this set regarding "In the Penal Colony" mean in terms of my own reading of the story? In the set Kafka disappears as a figure in a

*mise-en-scene*. We can imagine that he films himself somewhat in the vein of the unfinished novel *Amerika*. We know Kafka travelled everywhere throughout Bohemia and also walked the off-the-beaten tracks of Prague. He travelled to Munich where he read the story that was conceived while living in different rooms; much of his life was observed with his camera eye while moving and traveling. Noting what passed in front of his window was always a literary and aesthetic possibility. So the "room" is also a traveling compartment—the window is the screen through which one watches the actors who are collaborators in one's



imagination: the phantasmagoria of Kafka's everyday life flashes by. It is a re-enactment or recasting of the story, similar to what Benjamin means by dialectical images that add up to a "profane illumination" of what was once "sacred" (i.e. memory) and has now become integrated into the destiny of the common situations we live in.<sup>28</sup>

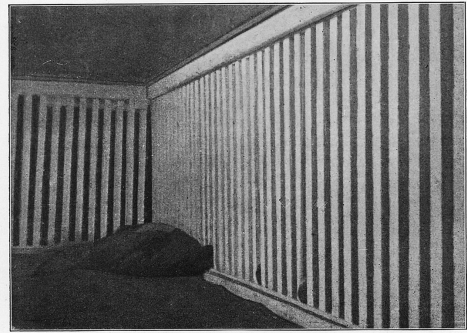
<sup>28</sup> One should reference the "Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Being Subjected to Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" of the U.N. Resolution of December 1975. See the contribution in this book by Tom Morris.

The scene in the installation that refers to the Terézín camp and the office in which the documents were held and organized is referenced not only because Kafka's sisters were murdered in Auschwitz after their imprisonment in the Terézín camp, but because of the legal apparatus that was used to identify and classify files to permanently extinguish everyone in all but their names and numbers. The set becomes an enactment of the narrator's position in the story, the cultural shock of seeing and denying that what he is encountering is the result of European civilization's most recent account of itself in the work, life and relationships that Kafka lives in the "room" called Prague. As I have pointed out, the set is a colportage of "transitional objects", or inner images, that come to life under certain conditions of remembering, when trauma does not intervene to cause amnesia about violence. The Narrator-Explorer experiences a form of trauma, expressed as denial, and it takes time for him to contain and assimilate what he is seeing as an experience, not just a sensation.

The beds are labelled to show that the story cannot escape the embedded nature of the Explorer's sense of the onto-theological nature of the violence in front of his eyes. The writing on the walls is organized by keywords—noise, children, letters, memoirs, etc in bold. It was intended that the viewer read these texts that tormented Kafka. It is not possible to read these wall-writings in one visit to the gallery. The reader-viewer might come back again and again to a situation that Kafka confronts, namely the illegible nature of the "machine": the writing on the body of the ordinary man sentenced to death as a creature that is nameless. Most religions particularly Christianity see us as mere creatures influenced Kafka in his stories and fables about humanized animals and animalized humans. Voices of children were incorporated very quietly into the installation by using tracks from *Brundibár, An Opera for Children*, composed by Hans Krása, and performed in Theresienstadt (Terezín) concentration



Mittagsmahl der Sträflinge an Bord



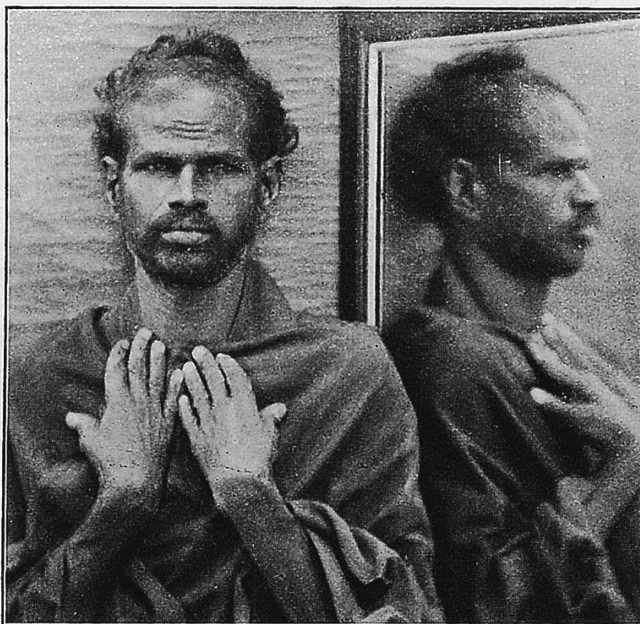
Eine Zelle auf dem Transportschiff

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies*, Top: Mid-day Meal of Prisoners on Board Prison Transport Ship, page 332. Below, Prison Cell on Transport Ship, page 332. .

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, A Chinese Prisoner on the Andaman Islands, page 333. Below: Indian Criminal Type, page 333. Note the mirrors that provide a profile view*



Ein chinesischer Sträfling auf den Andamanen



Indischer Verbrechertyp

camp. In addition, Czech songs sung by children were heard. The object was to show the purity of children's voices under these circumstances. Elsewhere in the installation depictions of Kafka's awareness and attitude toward children were posted on the walls.

So I see the story itself as Kafka's confrontation with the violence in life around him and the in-built nature of that violence in the world that he sees both near and far from his windows. The Room is his "camera"—his apparatus—a set like all of Kafka's stories. We look outside through the brightly lit window in the wall this is related to Kafka's meditation on "The Street Window" and "The Wish to Be a Red Indian". Primitive accumulation in the Colonies masks the laws of ownership. This is also the fate of Karl Rossman who paly's his part in the "Oklahoma Nature Theatre" in the novel *Amerika* which was written before *In the Penal Colony*, but uses the same theme of a traveler confronting a colonial world of work. "Oklahoma Nature Theatre" the concluding utopic trip in *Amerika*, assures the reader and Karl Rossman that in the "nature theatre" everyone will have a job. It will be a workless world of work. In the installation, the American Dream and The American Phantasmagorical future are shown in the traveler's trunk that is situated at the foot of the bed next to the masked Officer, who stands over the bed and the trunk. This shows the continuity of work to penal colonies and penal colonies to utopia. The trunk contains patriotic paraphernalia including an important translation of *Amerika* (1946) with an introduction by Klaus Mann who later became a friend to Dr. Robert Klopstock who he consulted for his various addictions.

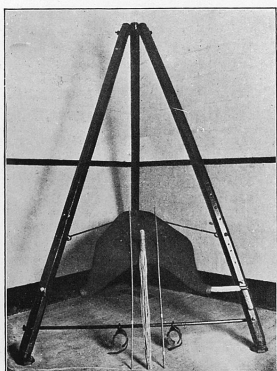
The colonies are about collecting, hoarding and the archiving of laws and people. They reveal the deepest logic of capitalism, preparing everyone for the Second Coming of the Millennium of Progress by collecting and storing whatever is not destroyed by the machine world. The system of violence is camouflaged as a way of life. But the Officer reveals the heart of the matter—becoming the "hero" of the story. This is the Hegelian heroic portrayed as that which "feasts on its own offering, that itself is the Fate to which the secret is betrayed, no matter what may be the truth of the independent substantiality of nature."<sup>29</sup>

The description that the Officer gives of the machine (posted at the doorway to the installation) is a sign that this machine can only be imagined. The Explorer sees the machine but is unable to read the blueprint, and this is the beginning of the suspicion that the machine might go awry. The machine does go berserk while seeming to contain a self-conscious knowledge of violent wars of both the past and present. The legacy of

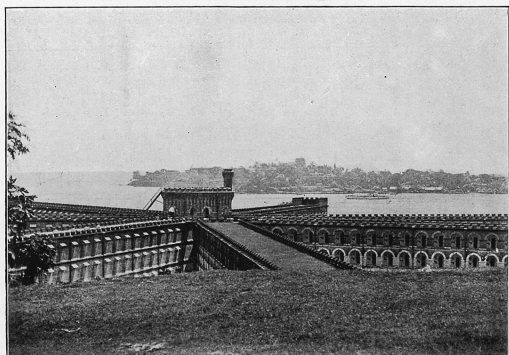
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29 Hegel, G. W. H., "Ethics and Tragedy", in *Hegel on Tragedy*, ed. Anne and Henry Paolucci, New York, Anchor books, 1962, 299





Prügelapparat



Das Aberdeen-Gefängnis

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies*, Top: Cudgel/Thrashing Apparatus, page 337. Below Panorama View of Aberdeen Prison, page 337.

*In the Penal Colony* is about a face-to-face encounter with another human being, while others watch the spectacle of the execution, it is important to have a scene where others watch this extreme and ludicrous situation. The everyday horror extends to the detail of the handkerchief in the Officer's belted uniform. The forceful and panicked interrogation of the Explorer-Researcher by the Officer plays with the concept of order and fate. These startling images bring the reader-viewer to see the reality of the Explorer and the Officer who encounter each other as adversaries. The portraits impress me as pietistic, internalized concentrations of vital energy. The visages are stern and look upon the beds of torment without apparent emotion. But this is deceiving. The background to this empathy for the victim is informed by the radical dissenting nature of the Hussite martyr-religion with its long historical life in Bohemia. This form of dissent can be closely aligned with the Protestant radicalism of Hegel and his theory of tragedy and comedy. The portraits of cultural figures: actors, writers, actresses and political figures who were known to

this religious warfare is found in the Strahov Monastery near the Prague Castle, its library depicted on the Panorama where a photograph of Monastery books are seen as captured objects. Kafka's office writings are housed in a building adjacent to the Strahov Monastery in the Czech National Literary Archives.

The ethical-political meaning of the self-consciousness of the Explorer is related to the portraits of the Prague cultural dignitaries staring down at the beds. Facing the beds on the opposite wall are portraits of ordinary people. These are portraits of Rodin-like heads that I liken to "The Burgers of Calais". They are models from the Prague School of Fine Arts; the artist Bozena Kozakova painted the figures during the period of the story's conception. Since *Kafka*

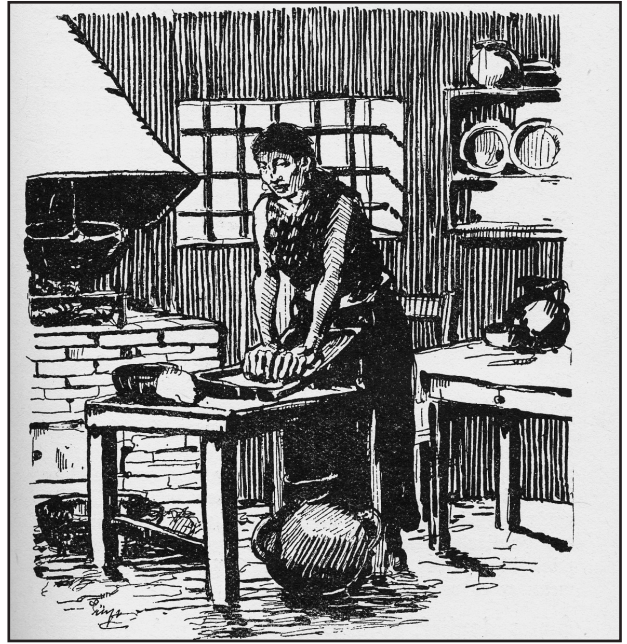
Kafka and his contemporaries hang on the opposite wall. By placing them in the installation the images represent the figures in the story who fix their eyes upon the execution. Their eyes are the counterpart to the eyes of the pietistic onlookers torn by conflict. The unspoken question is who can trust what they see?

The masks placed on the two mannequins should be understood as gestures. One represents the Austro-Hungarian Officer, the other the ladies whose handkerchiefs adorn the Officer's uniform. Masks disguise and reveal the philosophical underlay of Kafka's sleight-of-hand philosophy that takes refuge in trickster forms of humour. The Officer and the Explorer experience a psychological transference in each others' wish to avoid what is going on before their eyes. The Explorer doubts that the Officer's self-abandonment can be meant seriously, and the Officer doubts that the European onlooker can see the virtues of his machine.

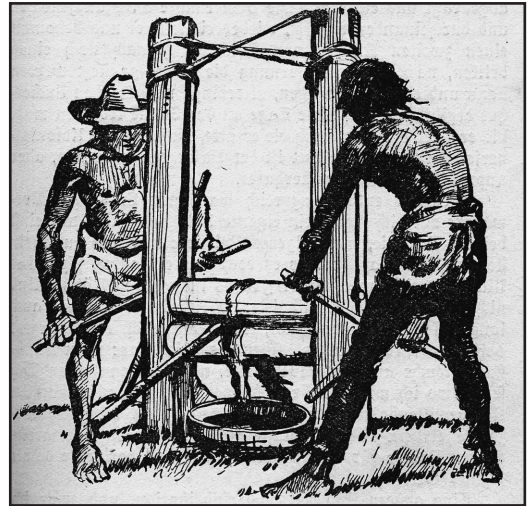
We begin to have some sympathy for the Officer because he acts out the love of violence—a taboo that the culture hides. We guiltily participate with the Explorer by watching the progressive diminution of the Explorer's confidence that he should know what it is that he is seeing. The Explorer doesn't show disgust, only frustration and he becomes dizzy when his hold on his consciousness weakens; however he does see that this is a "murder" and not a trial.

Kafka was thoroughly familiar with the deportation of the poor and immigrants to the edges of the "Universe", whether the outreaches of Siberia or the Pacific Islands. The deportation of convicts was a standard civilizing "journey". He heard lectures from law professor, Hans Gross, who argued the virtues of deportation. Hans Gross, the jurist father of Otto Gross the renegade psychoanalyst, was the author of the classic book on criminal anthropology and deportation. He committed his anarchist-oriented Dada son to a psychiatric institution. Kafka and Otto Gross had planned to create a journal on the subject of the will to power. It is easy to imagine that Hans Gross is the "Old Commandant"; but it is the subject of deportation, exile, and criminal typing that brings Kafka to this subject. The Explorer sees the consequences of his own culture vividly acted out by the Officer, who insists he is carrying out the orders of the Old Commandant to make the prisoner *Unschädlich*—harmless. The Officer revels in his certainty that he is administering a humane punishment. To render someone "harmless"—in all its meanings—provides the Officer with anticipation and excitement. Thus, connecting the battery cable to the officer's genitals in the installation reverses the image of the Officer's demands by showing his masochism.

Readers often bring up religion or symbolic meanings in the story.



*Der Zuckerbaron—Schicksal eine ehemaligen Deutsche Offiziers in Süd Amerika, 1914. ("The fate of a former German officer in South America, 1913). Green Band Collection, Hermann Schaffstein, Köln,n.d., Collection Jerry Zaslove*



It is certainly a way to see a larger metaphysical dimension to the attraction we have to sacred violence and the denial of our social and individual complicity in watching power acted out. But only through the critique of religion can we see his realization that writing on the body documents symbolic sacred meanings. The words on the walls are Kafka thinking, including thinking about religion. In writing down the law, the law becomes clearer for what it is: a violent—and in the Officer’s case—aestheticized Dada-like machine that transmits this sacrifice through writing. This is Kafka’s comic-grotesque critique of violence in religion—when the execution fails the Officer falls apart.

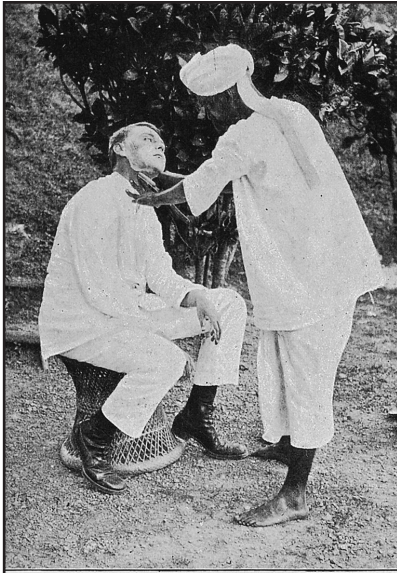
The locale, as in all of Kafka’s nondescript and misleadingly abstract scenes, is precisely rendered so that we see the familiar in the totality of the unfamiliar. The subreal surfaces seem utterly normal until one actually sees what is happening. Cotton batten in the desk drawer symbolically depicts the Terézín Concentration Camp and the bucket that collects the prisoner’s bodily fluids is used to show this palpable material that lies at the base of the story’s object-oriented obsessions. The problem faced by the Explorer-Researcher is how to take seriously the fear that fills the scene. Astonished, the narrator and the reader watch the Guard and the freed prisoner dance around the event of a murder—not of the prisoner, but of the Officer—“I am the narrator of the penal colony”. In other words there is another “voice” in the room, the compiler-author who builds the *mise-en-scene* and gives the viewer an image of the abstract nature of the event, whose words “Obey your Superiors” and “Be Just”, are not, in the end, inscribed on the body of the victim. That voice is the voice in the room. I wanted the participants who came to the installation to become that narrator. Filmmakers seem to have understood the relationship of Kafka’s work to scenes, adaptation, improvisation, and collecting. Sets often use the compilation of materials to illuminate the particular and general in his thought. We know the locale, but can’t quite recognize or name it, although it has precise contours and we know we have been there, but we feel safer in denying it.

» **KAFKA AND HEGEL—TWO COMEDIANS  
OF THE DEAD SPIRIT**

The attraction to Kafka for filmmakers began in the post-war period with Orson Welles’ *The Trial* (1962). But “Kafka and film” began with Kafka’s own visits to movies. Hans Zischler’s account of Kafka’s film habits make a strong case for the *mise en scene* tableau approach that I am taking.<sup>30</sup> Kafka’s consciousness of film and photography might be

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<sup>30</sup> Zischler, Hans, *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2003.



Der Mörder als Raseur



Der Mörder als Kindermädchen

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Murderer as Barber and Murderer as Children's Maid, Penal Settlement, Andaman Islands off of the coast of India, Probably Fort Blair*

described as his “Speaking Eye”, owing to his astonishment at the use of the photograph. He expressed this in his letters by frequent allusions to the photograph, especially in his correspondence with various women; in this regard his own “speaking eye” might be called the “The Eye of Sancho Panza” after Kafka’s several references to Panza.<sup>31</sup> Sancho Panza often appears in Kafka’s thinking—a point not lost on Walter Benjamin. The reference here to the “speaking eye” is also to Wayne Burns’ *A Panzaic Theory of the Novel*. Burns was one of the first to use Kafka as the basis for a material theory of the novel. Hegel too, understood that the unhappy consciousness is the material mask of fate put on by the self:

*The self, appearing here in its significance as something actual, plays with the mask which it once puts on, in order to be its own person; but it breaks away from this seeming and pretence just as quickly again and comes out in its own nakedness and commonness, which it shows not to be distinct from the proper self the actor, nor again from the onlooker.”<sup>32</sup>*

31 Burns, Wayne, *A Panzaic Theory of the Novel*, The Howe Street Press, 2009, with my Introduction, “To the Future Readers of this Book: Who’s Afraid of Sancho Panza?” Also see Wayne Burns, “‘In the Penal Colony’: Variations on a Theme by Octave Mirbeau”, *Accent*, XVII, 1 (Winter, 1957), 45-51.

32 The Self-Conscious Language: Comedy”, in *Hegel on Tragedy*, edited with an Introduction

Sancho Panza is or pretends—we are never sure—to be the fool whose fate is to interpret on his own body the idealistic consequences of the law-abiding Don Quixote. For Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* the Quixote Principle is understood through Odysseus, the man whose life is “determined by domination” and who is “the prototype in the hero who escapes from sacrifice by sacrificing himself . . . in other words the history of renunciation.”<sup>33</sup> The room that Kafka refers to in his notebooks, cited at the opening of this essay, is the setting through which the eye notices what the mind only later comprehends. The room provides an angle of vision, an aperture, the world made distant and near, hidden and secret, as well as at the same time natural. The photograph is the prototype of the totality that always recedes into the distance while promising nearness. The photograph functions like a silent mirror.



*Kafka's Father's Fancy Goods and Notion Store, Prague.*  
Reproduced with Permission of Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, Berlin

It was easy in post-war America to assume that Kafka's work belonged to the expressionist traditions of early film. The films of Kafka's work appeared on the scene simultaneously with the paranoia and surveillance mentality of the Cold War and fear of Communism. The investigation of exiles and dissenters was part of the landscape of political terror. Steven Soderberg's *Kafka* (1991) uses this ethos, but unfortunately the public awareness of the Cold War had vanished by 1991. However, because of Max Brod it became evident that Kafka was himself being observed through biography, as if the works were only understandable through his life; the question of translation from one medium to another allowed Kafka to become “Kafka”, both writer and observer tarrying in the sinister rooms where space and time are alienated from any hope that might extricate the observer from what the observer sees. In this sense the Explorer-Researcher is an Odysseus-figure who lands on an island that bears the mark of a degraded totality; an island where renunciation of ethical justice acts out a pure-survival existence disguised as utopia.

Allegorical readings of Kafka, even of those who reject Kafka through rigid Marxist analysis, as Georg Lukács did in 1962, opened the dispute over Kafka.<sup>34</sup> Many Marxists (Ernst Fischer for one) have read Kafka creatively, as did the Frankfurt School authors whose work is indebted

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by Anne and Henry Paolucci, New York, Anchor Books, 1962, 299.

33 Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W., *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cummings, Allen Lane, London, 1972, 55.

34 Lukács, Georg, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, London, Merlin Press, 1962.

to Kafka. Günther Anders, a radical phenomenologist who studied with Husserl, was one of the first to recognize the depth of Kafka.<sup>35</sup> However, it was Arnold Hauser who saw that Kafka was a Mannerist and that his work is similar to a waking dream, that lends itself to cinematic enactment.<sup>36</sup>

Rooms, space and time, contiguities and extended metaphors, architecture and the built-world of the city, walls, bridges, streets, and the outsider's view of degraded humanity became chronotopes that lead naturally to film. These qualities come through in films such as Straub's *Class Relations*, a Brechtian version of Kafka's novel *The Man Who Vanished into America*, and later Michael Haneke's *The Castle*.<sup>37</sup> Both fall within the axis of the Frankfurt-Augsburg-Berlin films of Alexander Kluge that originated with Rainer Fassbinder's films and slightly later Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade*: these were historical chronicles of the German wars determining the historical pathos of the commonplace as the everyday. Meaning is stripped of theatricality even as the theatre as an institution is used to show the epistemological divides in seeing, remembering and forgetting. Filmmakers appreciate stories, but while Kafka breaks through story; he seems to attract the cinematic. The cinematic, *mise en scene* is so open to the art of reverie, compilation and colportage, as well as to allegory understood as Benjamin reads allegory—with epistemological eyes.

"In the Penal Colony" takes place in the full daylight and in this sense can be related to the alien vision of Mannerist art, when the theatrical is contiguous with the Baroque plays of mourning. The character of Karl Rossman in "The Man Who Went Missing" (re-titled *Class Relations* by Straub/Huilet who adapt Max Brod's artificial title *Amerika* for Kafka's unfinished work) exists in a world of loss. It is in fact a loss of loss emerging somewhere between fetishism and phantasmagoria that plays at the edges of baroque allegory in the way that Walter Benjamin describes allegory as the genre that brings into view the creature stuck in the mirror of the theological-judicial mode of thought. Benjamin, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, states that "The creature is the mirror within whose frame alone the moral world was revealed in the baroque."<sup>38</sup> Benjamin is surely thinking of Kafka when he writes in the *Arcades Project*:

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35 Beck, C.H., *Franz Kafka Pro et Contra*, Munich, 1951.

36 Hauser, Arnold *The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origins of Modern Art*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1965. Also more directly about film, Hauser's "The Film Age" in *The Social History of Art*, vol. IV, New York, Vintage Books, 1951.

37 These films along with several shorter films were presented at the Vancity Theatre, June 1st–July 6th, 2009 under the title "Kafka in the Dark—The Strange and Sinister Cinema of Franz K."

38 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragedy*, 91.

*Allegory recognizes many enigmas, but it knows no mystery. An enigma is a fragment that, together with another, matching fragment, makes up a whole. Mystery on the other hand, was invoked from time immemorial in the image of the veil, which is an old accomplice of distance. Distance appears veiled. Now, the painting of the Baroque—unlike that of the Renaissance, for example—nothing to do with this veil. Indeed, it ostentatiously rends the veil, and, as its ceiling frescoes in particular demonstrate, brings even the distance of the skies into nearness, one that seeks to startle and confound. This suggests that the degree of auratic saturation of human perception has fluctuated widely in the course of history. (In the Baroque, one might say, the conflict between cult value and exhibition value was variously played out within the confines of sacred art itself.) While these fluctuations await further clarification, the supposition arises that epochs, which tend toward allegorical expression, will have experienced a crisis of aura.<sup>39</sup>*

The best Kafka films re-enact and juxtapose allegory, story and image by depicting the immanent meanings of Kafka's work. The films are a moving *mise-en-scene* and bring the reader in through the alienating quality of monastic sparseness and proximity that illuminates the lives of the characters. This functions in an anti-theatrical mannerist form in both Straub/Huillet and Haneke. Karl Rossman in *Class Relations* is related to the Explorer-Researcher in *In the Penal Colony*. He observes the surface of things. He floats. He watches. He denies authority its right to coerce him, but he goes along in a classical Svejik-manner that exposes the ridiculous. The Explorer-Researcher notes the common situations he encounters on the island as much through curiosity as through fate. It is culture shock of the kind Kafka, as ethnographer of the city, experienced every day. The same shock affects the Explorer-Researcher until he abandons the island.

Kafka would frequently vanish on his excursions into the suburbs and countryside of both the Germanized and Bohemian towns. His ethnographic eye carried and treasured his own sense of exile in "going missing" just as the poor peasants and shopkeepers who manned the castle beneath its walls in Haneke's *The Castle* existed in a propertyless, space waiting for the revolution to unmake their lives. The Land Surveyor, "K" who comes uninvited into their walled village and intrudes into their very rooms, is a nuisance reminding the people of their own comic-serious complicity and subservience to the castle. The Divine law is both material and comic. The Explorer comes into the penal colony as K comes into *The Castle*. In the penal colony there is no divine law, only the banality of the machine and

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39 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 365

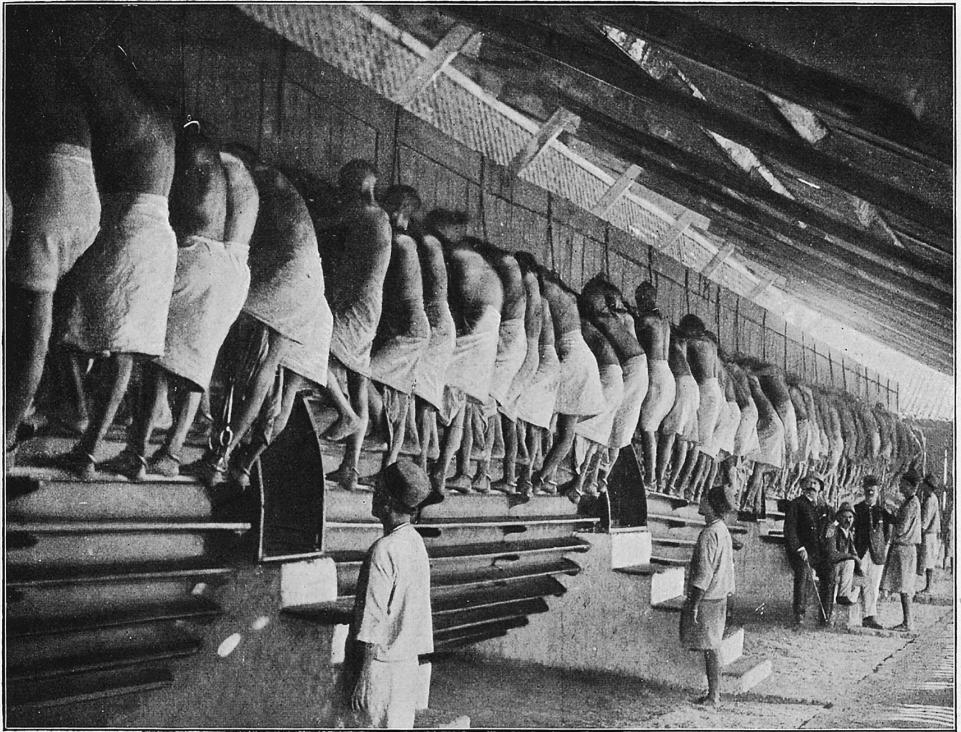


the tradition of the underling, prisoner and worker extending for centuries into the past. Kafka was well aware of the class alignments and the Feudal arrangements that led from the landless peasantry to the landed and religiously opportunistic gentry's reorganization of Feudal privilege. The transcendent and burgeoning bureaucracy mediated the transition from Feudalism to Statehood. This became the philosophical basis of Kafka's comedy: *mise-en-scene* was a way of life.

In Haneke's film, *The Castle*, the castle doesn't exist just as it doesn't exist in the novel. The messages from the castle are garbled. Klamm, the director of the castle's operations, doesn't appear. The people live a *mise-en-scene* existence. Klamm's directives are mere notes that torment the people who read them, just as the Officer's blueprint of the Machine torments the Explorer. Writing is laughably false redemption. Writing should break the spell of the disease of civilization that makes a proud and strong people, but instead joins with the castle's silent authorities and weakens our defences against the Klamms and the castle. We see this in the opening scenes of Haneke's film. Writing, like marriage, is the ultimate sacrifice of the body to a force that has no name. The castle, writing, and the women become themselves "transitional objects"—they embody messages and hopes and temporary erotic attachments—but the castle engineers the split of inner objects that come and go. The writing harbours a dream for the future, the dream of reaching the castle. This corresponds with the Officer's dream of total redemption through his "writing"—his sacred blueprint for a violence that in the end is denied redemption.

Welles' expressionistic version of the messenger at the door of Joseph K's room in *The Trial* is a microcosm of the comedy of the philosophical need to render terror into the comedy of immanent danger, and to turn violence into a comical justification of law. In *Class Relations* The Oklahoma Nature Theatre is the farcical utopia that releases us from Karl Rossman's penal colony. The beds in the installation—the tormenting mattresses—function comically as the impossible-what-is-happening here on the mattresses. Catastrophic violence is just around the corner. Welles' *The Trial* is a baroque period piece that could support a Benjaminian interpretation of an "emptied world":

*The baroque knows no eschatology; and for that reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered together and exalted before being consigned to their end. The hereafter is emptied of everything which contains the slightest breath of this world and from it the baroque extracts a profusion of things which customarily escaped the grasp of artistic formulation and, at its highpoint, brings them violently into the light of day, in order to clear an ultimate heaven,*



Eine Tretmühle

*enabling it, as a vacuum, on day to destroy the world with catastrophic violence.*<sup>40</sup>

*My Journey to the Penal Colonies, Treadmill, Andaman Islands, page 449.*

The scenes in *The Castle* show the artificial nature of the village: snow, water, rooms, corridors, and the goofy assistants—the lost Odradeks—who try to tell K something but deprive meaning of its essential substance. At the end this leaves us hoping to wake up into another life where we are all free. That would be the Oklahoma Nature Theatre where everyone has work but also some inkling of care as in “The Cares of the Family Man” [Odradek] where K’s kindness toward the humiliated subverts the degradation that he sees, except he has no vocabulary to describe it. This is the reason why there is an “Oklahoma Nature Theatre” travel trunk at the foot of the beds in the installation. The “kindness” or compassion in Kafka registers in the way the author sees what is happening to the figures, characters in the fables, the creatures, the animals, stories, etc. In my reading of the story it is almost an act of

<sup>40</sup> Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragedy*, 66.

'kindness" for the Explorer to leave the island because if he were to stay he would fear becoming a person just like those on the island. Kindness is all we have left in the world and it is rationed out for those who have hope not for us, but for the hopeless, to paraphrase Kafka. This anarcho-ethics is echoed in Haneke's *The Castle* but it is so muted that no critic that I know of really sees the wretched resignation of the people to the castle—like people today living in barrios who are faced with working at avoiding a degradation no one had ever been able to imagine.

An unknown future is captured in the illusion of uncertainty in the cinematography of both Straub/Huillet and Haneke. In order to reflect Kafka's passion for the everyday that exists outside his window I included in the installation five small 19th century Xylographic hand coloured newspaper illustrations of the kind of outdoor scenes that Kafka treasured. They are from a book entitled *From the Sketchbook of a World: Robbery in a Silvermine; Birdseye View of Oostende; Saltmine Wieliczka; Coin Washing; A Mine*. Travel books that he is known to have treasured are in the vitrines.

» **EPILOGUE: THE SHADOW OF THE OBJECT OF KAFKA**

At the beginning of this essay I cited Haneke's comments about his films and his mode of depiction: "How do I give the spectator the possibility to become aware of this loss of reality and their own participation in it in order to emancipate oneself from being the victim of the media by being its possible partner?" Similarly I have characterized Kafka's "In The Penal Colony" as having a philosophical outlook toward violence when that outlook comes into what might be called "performance": to find a way to show his work visually by seeing its provisional qualities, their traces, as if in a photograph.<sup>41</sup> The viewers of the installation become, in Hegel's world, the chorus. To explain this briefly, it means that Kafka was sensitive to the fact that unknown forces were displacing the theocratic state, which had provided a looming collective consciousness. For Hegel, self-consciousness occurs when the actor, split from the mask reveals the fate of both mask and actor. The chorus is the crowd of onlookers who become aware of their own latent comic-consciousness when the mask no longer protects the illusory character of the conscious individual in all its "nakedness and ordinariness".<sup>42</sup> Kafka's Explorer-Researcher suddenly sees the Officer wearing the mask of what Hegel calls "the legal recognition" of the unfulfilled person: the

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41 Kracauer, Siegfried, "Photography," in *The Mass Ornament, Weimar Essays*, translated with an Introduction by Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1995, 62.

42 Hegel, G. H. W., "Ethics and Tragedy", in *Hegel on Tragedy*, ed. Anne and Henry Paolucci, New York, Anchor Books, 1962, 299.

Officer is a grotesque imitation of a human being.

Kafka's narrator shows that the Explorer-Researcher has what Hegel calls "Stoic independence of thought", but in passing through the "dialectic of the Skeptical Consciousness" it "finds its truth in that shape which we have called the Unhappy Self-consciousness", which is "the counterpart and the completion of the comic-consciousness". In order to reach this self-consciousness "the ethical world and the religion of that world are submerged and lost in the comic consciousness, and the Unhappy Consciousness is the knowledge of this total loss." This total loss, which I would call the "loss of loss" in Kafka, is what Hegel notes as the "loss of substance as well as the loss of Self, it is the grief which expresses itself in the hard saying that 'God is dead'". Hegel writes as if anticipating Kafka: "In the condition of right or law, then, the ethical world and the religion of that world are submerged and lost in the comic consciousness, and the Unhappy Consciousness is the knowledge of this total loss".<sup>43</sup> The history of torment that is depicted in paintings since the 15th century provided the public with the aesthetics of the spectacle of public executions. In "In the Penal Colony" this loss of a public world of pain and brutality expresses the hope for the elimination of the theocratic state, itself a penal colony complete with spectacles of public executions and privatized compliance with violence.<sup>44</sup> The execution of the insubordinate soldier and the immolation of the Officer take place in the outdoors away from judicial scrutiny, making a mockery of justice administered through ordered systems of power.

The immanent nature of the comic-grotesque in Kafka lies in an anarchist radiance that emanates from his sense that the world is absent of any trustworthy legal or juridical justice. In the end of the story and in Kafka's world no juridical-theocratic solution is possible. That possibility has been scrambled so that no depiction can liberate the world from the loss of reality. The world that is created within the *Room*, in order to be ethnographically rich and sensitive to human activities that make the world, must be surrounded by Kafka's writing on the walls. The writing, on the walls then become a bureaucratic labyrinth like the bureaucratic writing on the walls of Kafka's office and in his head. The room built for *Kafka in the Penal Colony*—is "after Kafka"—it is a double room with elements of real life, concrete details that remind the viewer-reader of the other room that Kafka "erects", "an intricate scaffolding of dead elements revealing in their outward existence the language and the historical

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43 Hegel, G.H.W., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 455.

44 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 450 ff.

circumstances that replaced the inner elements of the ethical life that housed, created and inspired them”.<sup>45</sup>

Many Europeans imagined their continent purified of extraneous criminal elements and ancient human sacrifices, and even imagined aborigines as cannibals, while constructing penal colonies that cannibalized the prisoners, and grotesquely in Kafka’s story, cannibalized themselves.<sup>46</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere, explores the cannibal myth in his account of how Captain Cook and other “explorer-researchers” in their tales of their travels to the South Sea Islands perpetuated the myth of cannibalism.

While there is no evidence that I am aware of that Kafka read accounts of cannibalism, the German word for cannibal, *Menschenfresser*, or man-eater, is portrayed by the machine that consumes the Officer. The dry, official and statistically rich bureaucratic account of penal colonies in Robert Heindl’s *My Journey to The Penal Colonies* does not conceal the cannibalism of the machine, and opens the story to the dead elements in Hegel’s comic spirit. While livelier examples of the negation of negation can be imagined, they would have to encounter Kafka’s creations that embody the phantasmagoria that fills the dream room of “In the Penal Colony”.

Agonies in bed toward morning. Saw only solution in jumping out of the window. My mother came to my beside and asked whether I had sent off the letter and whether it was my original text. I said it was the original text, but made even sharper. She does not understand me . . . Through this and several other observations of myself I have come to believe that there are possibilities in my ever-increasing inner decisiveness and conviction which may enable me to pass the test of marriage in spite of everything, and even to steer it in a direction favorable to my development. Of course, to a certain extent this is a belief that I grasp at when I am already on the window sill. . . .

Diaries, August 15, 1913

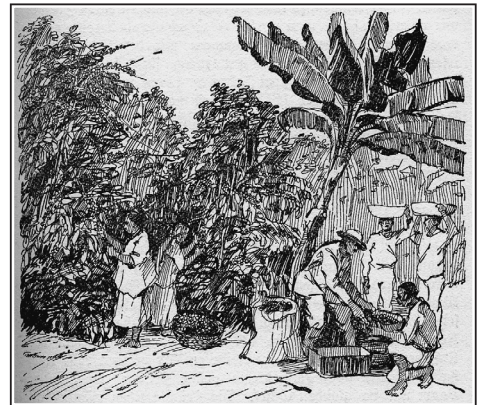
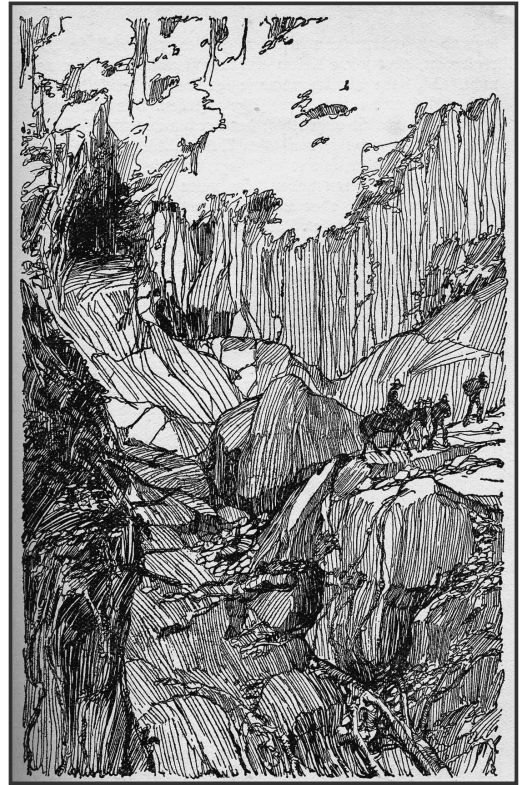
Kafka’s diaries

45 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 454 – 456.

46 Obeyesekere, Gananath *Cannibal Talk, The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2005.



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Oskar Weber: Briefe eines Kaffee-pflanzers Zwei Jahrzehnte Deutscher Arbeit in Zentral-Amerika, mit Zeichnungen von Max Bürger Köln: Hermann & Friedrich Schaffstein [Letters of a Coffee Planter—Twenty Years of German work in Central America with drawings by Max Bürger.] Collection Jerry Zaslove

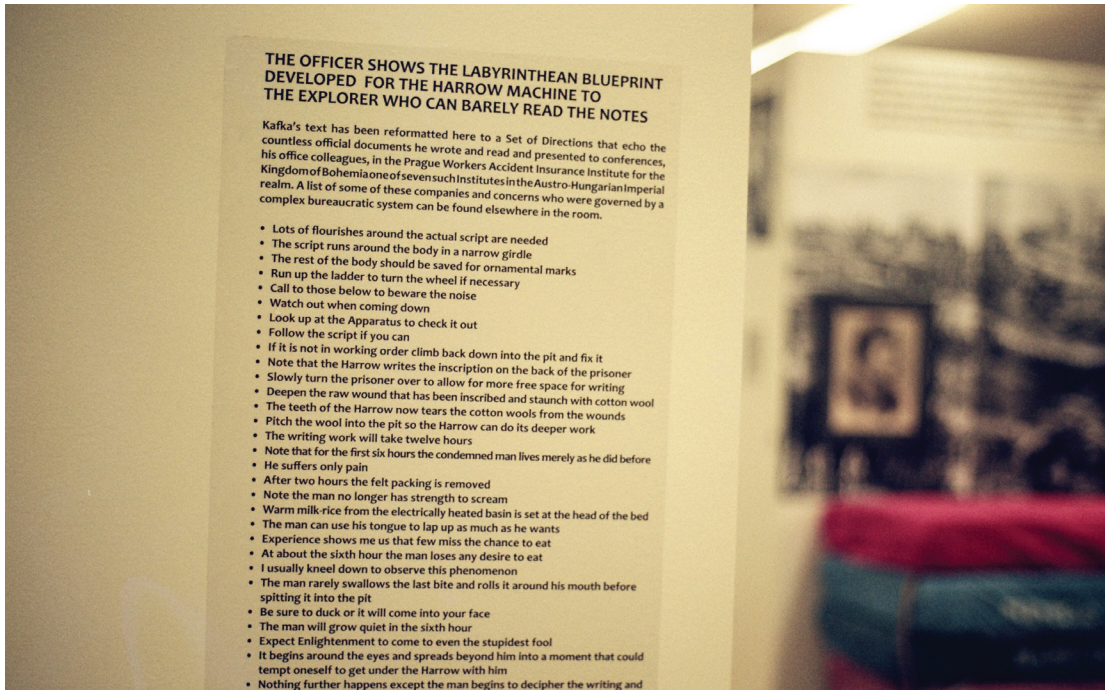


Installation view: Comedia Masks on mannequins. Reproductions of masks from 18th century baroque theater in Cesky Krumlov, Czech Republic.





Installation view: Torment Machine The Beds; Prague Panorama, with trunk Amerika. Trunk with cultural ephemera related to Kafka.



Installation view: Blueprint.



Installation view: Wooden Ladder and Cotton Batten in a basin beneath reproductions of graphics by Ernest Freidrich, War Against War 1924.



Installation view: Bozena Kozakova, Prague School of Arts. The Torment Machine with Prague Panorama, Battery, Officer and Beds of 'Machinery,' 'Sleeping,' 'Marriage,' 'Office,' 'Hospital,' 'Writing,' Watched over by "Explorer". Charcoal and crayon. Photograph courtesy of SFU LIDC.



Installation view: Dirk Reinartz photograph Small Fortress Office, Theresienstadt Concentration Camp, with montage construction Double Sided Kafka, Sandwiched Glass Newspaper Clipping with 'Unknown Letter of Franz Kafka Found'. Montage construction Jerry Zaslove.



Installation View adjacent to Torment Beds, Nigerian Mask, Woman's Hatbox, Austrian Officer's Uniform with Handkerchief in Belt, and Basin with sand and cotton batten to catch fluids from Prisoner.



Installation view: "Construction of Wall and Ladder with Window of Insurance Company View of North Shore, Vancouver, with "Last Will and Testament" Photograph by Jerry Zaslove



Installation view: Comedia Masks on mannequins. Reproductions of masks from 18th century baroque theater in Cesky Krumlov, Czech Republic.



Stills from "The Castle", by Michael Haneke, permission of Wega FILM Vienna





Ilya Kabakov. *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment* 1985-1988. Wood, board construction, room furniture, found printed ephemera, household objects. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov and the Sean Kelly Gallery, New York.

Jeff Wall, *After 'Invisible Man' by Ralph Ellison, the Preface* 1999-2001 transparency in lightbox 174 x 250.5 cm Courtesy of the artist





the KAFKA FILES:  
Responses To The Installation

A view of the Kafka Family's Asbestos Factory Photograph Reproduced with Permission of Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, Berlin.