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**Immanence and event in early Modernist culture**

**Kwinter, Sanford Noah, Ph.D.**

**Columbia University, 1989**

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**IMMANENCE AND EVENT IN EARLY MODERNIST CULTURE**

Sanford Noah Kwinter

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Columbia University

1989

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## ABSTRACT

### Immanence and Event in Early Modernist Culture

Sanford Noah Kwinter

The dissertation seeks to develop the relation between certain vitalist or immanentist models and the specific philosophical, scientific and aesthetic Modernisms that emerged in the early 20th century. It deals principally with Einsteinian relativity (1907), the technical writings of the sculptor Umberto Boccioni (1910-14), the townplan schema of the architect Antonio Sant'Elia (1913-14), the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1896-1922), and the writings of Franz Kafka (1904-1924). In physics, the demise of absolute time is shown to give way to a theory of the "field" which supersedes the classical notion of space as a substratum against which things occur, and gives rise to a physics of the "event."

Nowhere were these concepts of field and event so profoundly, and so early, deployed as in the theoretical writings of Boccioni and, in the visionary architecture of Sant'Elia. Sant'Elia's massively complex scheme is the first to give concrete expression--aesthetic or otherwise--to the new notions of time and space developed by 19th and early 20th century science. It is also the first schema within aesthetic Modernism to have elaborated a theory of nature in which the ground or first principle is seen to reside at the level of its effects, that is, it was the first to have embodied the principle of an immanent cause.

The second part of the dissertation develops these same themes though moves away from the thermodynamic model to adopt the closely related one of Bergsonian *durée* or virtuality. The objects analysed in this section are the works of Franz Kafka. Kafka's works, despite appearances, manifest a quite coherent cosmology, yet this cosmology can be understood only in relation to a certain type of movement that underlies it. This movement belongs to the realm of what Bergson called the intensive; here movement is caught up in qualitative changes of state, differentiations,

and especially individuations. Only this type of movement can account for the appearance or creation of the "new," even if this novelty is of the most troubling, unforeseen kind. Kafka's world is one in constant (qualitative) temporal flux, even if its appearance is one of (quantitative) spatial stasis--in fact, it is literally defined in terms of metamorphosis, singularity and flight. It is this peculiar (Kafkaesque) instability of Being that I identify as the positive, even affirmative principle throughout the works.

Immanence and Event in Early Modernist Culture  
Sanford Kwinter

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To Morris Kwinter

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

### Modernist space and the fragment

The title phrase "early modern culture" serves here admittedly as a more modest decoy for what is the truly intended subject of this study: the problem of "modernity" itself. Unlike most studies on this subject today, the goal of the present work attempts to cast the problem of modernity as a philosophical problem and not simply as one of historical periodization.<sup>1</sup> According to this approach, "modernity" would need be distinguished from any of the various historical Modernisms whose empirical aspects--whether the result of social or aesthetic avant-gardes or else technical or scientific revolutions--are at best complex, contradictory and indeterminate. What they have in common I will argue cannot be discovered on this empirical level but only at the more abstract plane of relations which underlie them and which form what might be called their "conditions of possibility."

It is at this level then that I have tried to fix my analysis. For embedded within most Modernisms there may be discerned something deeper and more nuanced than the mere, apparent "break with the past." What is more, it is at these moments that the very notion of "past," and of historical time generally, nearly always undergo a subtle, sometimes imperceptible, but nonetheless

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<sup>1</sup> The spectrum of approaches here no doubt runs from Oswald Spengler to Daniel Bell, Paul de Man, Ernest Mandel, Matei Calinescu, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, Ihab Hassan, etc. An extensive bibliography may be found in Matei Calinescu, Faces of Modernity: Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1977) pp. 313-327.

fundamental transformation. In fact, it may be said that it is only in the fleeting but marvelous density that characterizes the actual instant of such "breaks" that Modernism and "modernity" may be said ever to coincide. For the philosophical (ontological) problem of modernity as I have tried to develop it, can be shown to reside in some specifiable condition that actually renders such breaks, transformations or changes possible. If these historical breaks then involve more than just a break with a past (a previous epoch, regime or paradigm) it is because they often imply, somewhere within their complexity, a more irregular and untimely break with a far more expansive tradition, metaphysic or worldview. In short, the concept of modernity that I will try to develop here would need to be understood as a reverse stream that is present virtually (but almost never entirely actualized) throughout history, emerging here or there as a kind of counter history or counter practice. Modernity then, clearly must be more than a mere, benign synonym for "new" or "contemporary" for the problems it raises can conceivably be addressed to any work in any historical period.<sup>2</sup> Whats more, its function as countermemory connects it with those elements in a given culture which necessarily go beyond a dialectical relation with a previous historical period, or with an allegedly hegemonic ideology. It is precisely for this reason that the Modernisms, at once deeply entrenched in the social and existential crises of the 19th century as well as the more sanguine, emancipatory humanisms of the post-Renaissance period, might comprise less the object than the site of an emergent and more fundamental modernity.

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<sup>2</sup> Among those who have reflected, from different perspectives, on the insufficiency of the concept of the "new" are Theodor Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, trans. C. Lenhardt (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) Ch. 2; Peter Burger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. M. Shaw (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1984) pp. 59-63; Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1971).

A distinction therefore ought also be made between the "critical" task of many Modernizing or avant-garde movements and the more fundamental project of modernity, whether avowed or not, of a "transvaluation of all values." The first project addresses at best the specific institutions and systems of representation in which history and power have become incarnate, the second addresses, as I have said, their very conditions of possibility. Insisting on the distinction between them makes it possible to see beyond the largely overrated "critical" project of the Modernisms toward a preliminary descriptive ontology of modernity itself.

Now such a conception of modernity is admittedly problematic, especially as I have said, in its relation to time--its roots, dispersed throughout history may be linked to Lucretius, Bruno, Spinoza, Vico, Nietzsche and others--but it is precisely in its relation to time that its complexity can and ought to be apprehended. Though undeniably heterogeneous in many ways, these thinkers can be said to share a common task: that of thinking Being free of any transcendent unity and without reference to anything outside itself as its cause or ground. In other words, it is, in its first instance, a structural repudiation of the concept of transcendence, ultimately determined in each case by the specific historical conditions in which it arises, that characterizes the notion of modernity I would like to develop here, but always, and necessarily in relation to the counterflow of tradition whose time and space belong to late Greek and early Christian cosmology.<sup>3</sup> These latter, strictly derived forms of time--eschatological, primordial, "historical,"<sup>4</sup> etc.--will be seen to give way to increasingly sophisticated theories of immanence in which time no longer remains spatialized in order to furnish the stable ground or backdrop for phenomena, but meshes inextricably with

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3 The present definition makes no attempt to situate or understand "modernity" beyond the most rigorously local Western context to which it is, by definition, indigenous.

4 By "history" I understand the magical substratum through which events allegedly communicate with one another and in relation to which they are said to occur.

them, and forms the new rule of their endless and aleatory proliferation. Thus space too, will be shown to undergo an exactly analogous emancipation from its metaphysically determined relations (body/non-body, inside/outside, center/periphery, whole/part) as it weds with time and becomes intensive, dynamic or continuous.

In short, the world by the end of the 19th, and beginning of the 20th centuries, was no longer constructed in quite the same way, its elements would no longer combine as they once did. Thought was forced to move beyond its abode in the philosophy of transcendence--too many of the sacred emblems of this tradition such as God, Nature and Truth had by now been sacrificed to the "modernizing" processes of the 19th century<sup>5</sup>--and there arose, amid the vertigo and malaise, a fundamental ontological change that would have important effects on the nature of knowledge, perception and representation. Nothing was any longer absolute and every element was capable of reorganization, redistribution and revaluation. Space and time no longer carried with them their readymade categories of intelligibility, nor did they distribute their contents in quite the same ordered way. What is more, and this was the most unthinkable thing of all, they would no longer remain separate from one another, but merged to create a new field, one which would characterize the rest of our century yet for which a properly solid map will certainly never exist.

If it is true that early Greek cosmological thought centers around the problem of the One and the Many, then our own modern era, through its fixation on the social and epistemological complexities that bear on the relations between Totality and Fragmentation constitutes what could be called a kind of "neo-Hellenism."<sup>6</sup> For the Greeks, it was the task of accounting for the

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<sup>5</sup> Industrialization, rationalization, urbanization.

<sup>6</sup> The immense power of Nietzsche's modernizing gesture in the history of thought is explicit in the radicality of its genealogical method: to descend against the grain of history and Western thought to those moments when transcendence (ie. dialectics, morality) was first introduced into man's being by way of

phenomenon of change that became the central problem, in other words, the task of explaining or reconciling the "corruptive," transformative effects of time in relation to the doctrine of essential and immutable forms. Time ultimately had to be abolished from the ontological schema as an effect of mere illusion (Zeno, Parmenides, Plato) in favor of a theory of participation of Ideal Forms in their imperfect, worldly reflections (copies). Things--the Many--were, if chaotic, at least reassuringly "participated" by the One--the latter conceived as a static, timeless plenitude. But the banishing of time, and the elision of the problem of change, meant that Greek thought would no longer try to think the Many, or the Multiple, in and for itself, that is, free of a reassuring totality that existed and insisted at another level.

It is indeed a cliché, but one that bears repeating at this time, that our own modernity is inseparable from a self-conscious project of "thinking outside of metaphysics." What this entails of course, is an attempt to think phenomena--the Multiple, or the profusion of events and things-- independent of an external, totalizing, foundational schema. But it is just at this moment, as the grid of transcendence dissolves and is drawn away, that Forms themselves vanish and re-merge into the chaotic flux of unstable aggregates and events.

Much of our (Modernist) culture clung exuberantly to this new world, but often only as a radical, new form of totality that was comprised, no longer of oppressive, passé or falsely consoling forms,

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Socratism and Christianity. Nietzsche of course allies himself with the pre-Socratics, Homer, and the Tragedians. See especially Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks, The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music, and the Genealogy of Morals, Bk. III, #25. The anti-Platonist theme is central to the theory of modernity being developed here. This tradition of Nietzschean modernity seems to reproduce this gesture of descent and return as if by programmatic necessity. Cf. Michel Foucault's espousal of the Sophists and Gilles Deleuze's strategic use of both Stoicism and Sophism, in Michel Foucault, L'Ordre du discours (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) and "Theatrum Philosophicum," Critique, No. 282 (1970) pp.885-908; Gilles Deleuze, Logique du sens and appendix, "Le Simulacre," (Paris: Minuit, 1969) .

but of fragments. This came to represent nothing less than an apparent rebirth of matter and meaning, for everything seemed suddenly again possible, the old laws no longer applied, the new ones yet to be invented; all was polyvalency, possibility and promiscuity. But this exuberance of experimentation was seldom separable from an almost universal anxiety of loss, of disenfranchisement and disorientation. Fragments after all were shards, ruins, at best, brave traces of a past and future plenitude. Fragmentation and its attendant spectacle of polyvocality was perhaps an incomplete consolation for a world that would never again serve as a home.<sup>7</sup> Yet are we not still far from the Greek world of happy immanence where delight in phenomena and appearance was everything? Can our own "condition," typified and expressed through the modern emblem of the "fragment," ever be conceived free of the nihilism embedded both in myth and memory, a nihilism by whose agency we define ourselves (and our world) always in relation to what we are not (and never were)--unitary and constant beings? Fragments, for the Moderns, though still for us today, are too often "thought" in terms of a world and a Wholeness to which they no longer have any relation. Is it not possible however, to restore to the fragment that which is properly its due, to develop it in the element of its positivity, as a specific characterization of matter within a continuous, fluctuating, and time-imbued multiplicity?

Now it is precisely this project, this tendency, that I have sought to characterize, on the one hand, as constituting the work of "modernity" itself, and on the other, that I have sought, descriptively as it were, to embody in the present study. The best way of embarking on such a descriptive project, it seems to me, is conceptually to isolate, even partially or provisionally, certain moments and elements or even aspects of moments and elements within historical Modernist culture where this "modernity," understood as a specific approach to the fragment and multiplicity, appears to emerge.

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<sup>7</sup> Georg Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, trans. A. Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971, orig. 1920).

Now it would seem that the heterogeneous field of "Modernist Culture" is susceptible of a whole series of different types of division. It would be possible for example to perform a triage by which different movements, or rather, tendencies within different movements, could be seen as oriented to, or dominated by, one of three basic axes: of classical time, of space, and of force. The "time" axis for example, would concern principally those aspects of Modernist culture in which it is the subject which is endowed with a fully transcendental radicality: meaning, origins and tradition serve as the primary elements within such a configuration, providing a ground for interpretation and exegesis which then become the fundamental heuristic activities. To this category belongs much of both psychoanalysis and phenomenology, as well as the type of historicist/symbolistic Modernist practice associated with the works of Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Surrealism, etc. To say that this Modernism is one of radical transcendentalism is to describe the mode by which the subject is newly invested to form the ground, the domain, and the condition of possibility of knowledge. For time here is always a subjective time, tradition ("history") is tradition-for-the-subject (for this reason it may seem collapsed, spatialized, though in fact it is only re-invented at another scale). The historical significance of this development consists in having reorganized experience and reality into homogeneous and coextensive domains--reality is drawn within the subject to become but one more element of a fluid consciousness, everything is dissolved within the single element of receptive interiority.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed it is arguable Brentano's theory of cognition and Husserl's "intentionality" were in part formulated in order to de-interiorize consciousness, to discover it out there in the world of things, but the noetic framework with which they sought to reconcile subject-, and object-domains, is still the most perfect example of the "single element" or time-based continuum that I have here called, perhaps infelicitously, "interiority." Franz Brentano, Sensory and Noetic Consciousness, trans. M. Schattler and L. McAlister (London: Routledge, 1981), Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

If the temporal axis then is dominated by relations bearing on the subject, the second, spatial axis indeed is oriented almost fully toward developing relations in the object. Here it is possible to group most of the Modernist formalisms, as well as the tendencies, present in many forms and through a diverse range of phenomena, toward mathematical logic, and to ideality. The concept of tradition is here no longer the dominant epistemological category but is replaced by what might be called a rationalist-genetic model. Neo- (Carnap) and logical- (Ayer, Wittgenstein, Russel) Positivism, Structuralism, Formalism (Russian and Czech), but also Cubism, The Modern Movement, aspects of De Stijl, Constructivism, and all aspects of Simultanism in poetry and elsewhere, belong in whole or in part to this tendency which excludes both time and the subject from the field of the work in order to maintain, on the one hand, a certain transcendence of the object, and on the other, a certain positivistic transparency of knowledge and perception. The significant historical transformation effected here is again the following: though this perspective dismisses the subject and its accompanying temporality and complexity, it does maintain the homogeneous nature of phenomena; it replaces the subject-as-ground with apodictic forms--formal logic, "rational" genetic systems--whose basis nonetheless remains transcendent-ideal.

Now the third axis, that of force, actually breaks with the previous classical aesthetic schema; it implodes the opposition of terms subject/object and space/time. Its epistemological principle is neither that of tradition nor a rationalist/genetic ideality but a radical perspectivism. This perspectivism is not subject-based, but is rooted in a dynamic cosmology based on multiplicity, chance and hazard and a universal immanent principle that governs these. In the words of Nietzsche--perhaps the dominant figure of this axis--"Only that which has no history can be defined." In other words, from the moment an object or sign is embedded within the chaotic world of force, its so-called "meaning" gives way to a pure affectivity: a capacity to bear, transmit, or block and turn inward, a unit of Will to Power. In this domain there are only dynamic metastabilities or meaning-events (accidents, convergences, subjugations); matter, form, subjects ("doers") come only later, reintroduced at a second order level, not as ground but as effect. From Nietzsche

onward, what works of this nature have in common, far more than just a critique of transcendence, is the elaboration of a concrete new field endowed with an "immanent transcendental"--that is, "things," phenomena, though sundered from the metaphysical structure which grounds them in "meaning," now find their principle of being nowhere else but within themselves. Both the temporalist and spatialist axes attempted this, but caught within a classical, oppositional, and especially exclusive framework, could achieve this only incompletely. Space and time structures, essentially hierarchical, here give way to the flatness of a pragmatic or "evenmental" multiplicity (abstract becoming) where everything occurs on and among surfaces (surfaces swathe objects in relations, seize them, individuate them, orient them, but neither define them nor immobilize them indefinitely) according to the law of "exteriority" (according to which, every "thing" marks the clandestine site of a willful "doing").<sup>9</sup> The heuristic model here is neither exegetic nor deductive but genealogical/cartographic.<sup>10</sup> This is the real meaning of perspectivism: the vertigo of the radically multiple (not subjective) inside viewpoint. One maps the very reality with which one is inseparably intertwined, because no external viewpoint or image is possible. In this as well lies the difference between genealogy and history: the latter describes the river, its life and its form, the former swims through it upstream mapping its currents. The one is linear, the other turbulent.<sup>11</sup>

Still, so much of the theory of modernity remains deeply bound up in 18th century (classical German) aesthetics. Consider the following passage from one of the seminal studies on Modernist representation:

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of multiplicity is developed in Ch. II, that of exteriority and surface in Chs. III and IV, and of course of the "event" and "becoming" everywhere throughout.

<sup>10</sup> Precisely, in Foucault's sense, "archaeological." Cf. especially Ch.3,fn. 51.

<sup>11</sup> The revival of interest in turbulence both in science and philosophy has played, as will presently become clear, a determining role in the formulation of the problems addressed in the present study.

In both artistic mediums [plastic arts, literature] one naturally spatial and the other naturally temporal, the evolution of aesthetic form in the twentieth century has been absolutely identical. For if the plastic arts from the Renaissance onward attempted to compete with literature by perfecting the means of narrative representation, then contemporary literature is now striving to rival the spatial apprehension of the plastic arts in a moment of time. Both contemporary art and literature have, each in its own way, attempted to overcome the time elements involved in their structures.<sup>12</sup>

Here the rendering fundamental of the categories of space and time (Kant), or more explicitly the opposition of space vs. time (Lessing) determine the entire analysis. These presuppositions are at the root of nearly all theories of Modernism which almost invariably tend to assert some new, powerful primacy of space.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, without deviating an iota from these same received notions the following writer posits--apparently innocently--the diametrically opposed thesis,

The waning of affect however, might also have been characterized, in the narrower context of literary criticism, as the waning of the great high-modernist thematics of time and temporality, the elegiac mysteries of durée and of memory. . . We have often been

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Frank, The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1963) p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years: The origins of the Avant Garde in France 1885 to World War 1 (New York: Vintage, 1968), Sharon Spencer, Space, Time and Structure in the Modern Novel 1880 to 1917 (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1971), Joseph Kestner, The Spatiality of the Novel (Detroit: Wayne State U. Press, 1978), Umberto Eco, L'Opera aperta (Milan: Bompiani, 1962), Steven Kern, The Culture of Time and Space (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1983), Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal, in The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, Pure War (New York: Foreign Agents, 1983), Gregory Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in The Anti-Aesthetic, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983) and so on.

told however, that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism proper.<sup>14</sup>

The latter reflection notwithstanding, it may be said that no idea so dominated post-war thought on the Modernist period as that of simultaneism and juxtaposition. Regardless of whether such emphasis on an anti-temporal spatiality<sup>15</sup> was applied to works of Modernist or so-called "postmodernist" persuasion, one thing remains entirely consistent: the felicitous (even if illusory) harmony, unity and fullness of phenomena was understood to have been sundered by the rapidly reconfiguring technical milieu of the modern world. From now on there would be only incompleteness, discontinuity, fragments. Roger Shattuck's The Banquet Years (1955) was, and remains today, the quintessential formulation of this thesis. For Shattuck the arts of the 20th century are dominated by a type of asymmetrical assemblage of elements from which it is specifically the connective transitions that are missing. Formerly the arts were structured principally around expressed transition or "the clear articulation of relations between parts at the places they join." Things, events, apparently once flowed symmetrically in logical sequence and according to a univocal trajectory, while today all is said to be abruptness, interference,

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<sup>14</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," New Left Review, no. 146 (July-August 1984).

<sup>15</sup> This theme would finally receive an almost paranoid refinement in Michael Fried's work. See his "Art and Objecthood," in Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology (New York: Dutton, 1968) and Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1980). For a somewhat less hysterical development of many of these themes see Stanley Cavell, The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film (New York: Viking, 1971) and Must We Mean What We Say? (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976, orig. 1969).

indeterminacy and above all, stillness.<sup>16</sup> Gone with the unity and seamlessness of the arts of yesterday however is the monumental and closed work limited by a clear beginning, middle and end. The modern work is open.<sup>17</sup> With such openness comes ambiguity, polysemy, and a new boundarylessness that seems capable of including anything, that is, reflecting anything--even the chaotic, hazardous processes of creation-- yet not, notably and by design, actually incorporating time itself. Juxtaposition is said to be the law of such works--it replaces succession with a new type of unstable, supersaturated moment--a surplus of data, no "time" for deferment, the result is conflict and disorder which in turn lead to a dramatic multiplication of random or chance effects. Yet for Shattuck all this disordering, radicality, conflict, destabilizing supersaturation is still reduceable to a new unity, a new "intimacy" which is that of the organic world of the "unconscious." Thus everything multiple, complex, chaotic is so only apparently, he seems to argue, and is in any case ultimately resolved elsewhere, in another dimension.<sup>18</sup>

It is true that Modernist anti-temporal stillness (this is of course not a fact, only an historical mode of understanding) did help to render intelligible the proliferation and indeterminacy of relations which at this time were beginning entirely to surpass and exceed the physical limits of the work. The Modernist work's insistence on autonomy and self-sufficiency made it, more than ever before, like a mere thing among the other things of the world. Here the "dehumanization" of the work actually

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<sup>16</sup> Roger Shattuck, "The Art of Stillness," in The Banquet Years.

<sup>17</sup> This de-hierarchization of the work into a field of multiple, receiver-determined entries is the thesis of Umberto Eco's L'Opera aperta.

<sup>18</sup> The Banquet Years, p. 342.

bestowed upon it a new, rather than a lesser, intimacy: the work no longer led one back (through representation) to the daily world,<sup>19</sup> it was (some of) the world itself.<sup>20</sup>

Yet much of modern art stands or falls in relation to a single claim: does it or does it not introduce complexity--the complexity of real things-- into the domains of the work specifically and of aesthetics generally. It is here that so much of modernity seems to be at stake, because by this term "complexity" is invoked nothing less than all that within nature which is irreducible to any finite schema of intelligibility, either mathematical or phenomenological.<sup>21</sup> Complexity, at the first level, always implies the presence within a given system of a surplus of variables whose interactions cannot be correlated or predicted ahead of time with any degree of certainty. Modern scientific culture since the renaissance however has, on the contrary, always oriented its models in the reverse direction, toward the simple, the repeatable and the universal--the criterion of intelligibility demanded that the singular in phenomena always be routed and brought back into relation with

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<sup>19</sup> Ortega Y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art," in The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U. Press, 1968, orig. 1948).

<sup>20</sup> The use of the partitive mode (e.g. /some water/, /some wood/) here and in works of this nature marks a transformation of a relation not just to the "sign," as many have argued but to the activity of signifying itself. It signals a new indeterminacy, and a new materialist and a-signifying approach both to assembling and apprehending work and world. The partitive describes a multiplicity's mode of being in relation to world. Cf. ch. 2, pp. 20-21. On the role of the partitive in relation to modernist and contemporary painting see Sanford Kwinter, "Un peintre au partitif," L'Autre journal, Feb., 1985.

<sup>21</sup> To be sure even the most apparently simplifying, reductive, rationalist tendencies of modern art such as the Bauhaus, De Stijl, or the International Style in architecture were conditioned by a deep reflex toward complexity: the desire to annex or absorb influence from disparate and unorthodox domains of cultural production, ie. technical industrial culture, politics, and modernization processes in general.

sameness, with regular known quantities or constants. But the necessity of grounding a theory of nature within the Same and the Elementary meant relegating it to a certain easily controllable though always isolating timelessness. Extracting individual realities from the complex continuum which nourished them and gave them shape, made them manageable, even intelligible, but always transformed them in essence. Cut off from those precarious aspects of phenomena that can only be called their "becoming," that is, their aleatory and transformative adventure in time including their often extreme sensitivity to secondary, tertiary, global, stochastic, or merely invisible processes, and cut off as well from their effective capacities to affect or determine in their turn effects at the heart of these same processes--the science of nature has excluded time and rendered itself incapable of thinking change or novelty in and for itself.

This idea on its own is hardly new for it lies, in inchoate form as it were, at the basis of much work beginning with the modern economic historians Max Weber, Werner Sombart and Georg Simmel,<sup>22</sup> the social historian Lewis Mumford, and the philosopher Martin Heidegger. What's more this idea certainly played a constitutive role in much work on the history of science since the 2nd world war specifically in that of Alexander Koyré, Ernst Cassirer, Georges Canguilhem, though foremost by far this tendency is reflected in the work of Henri Bergson, whose Creative Evolution explicitly confronts the inability of the conventional scientific worldview to think temporal phenomena in general and novelty in particular. Yet not even this can compare in importance to the much more recent phenomenon in which concrete scientific advances have legitimated and actualized the rationalistic, speculative or intuitive claims of the earlier work. I am referring here to a vast body of literature on stochastic processes, dissipative structures, dynamical or non-linear systems, chaos theory, bifurcation theory, turbulence, etc. For what these new sciences have in common is an attempt to incorporate and manipulate abstract structures whose correlations--

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<sup>22</sup> Marx's analyses of value in volume 1 of Capital are clearly seminal and determinant here.

probabilistic, global, transductive--can be apprehended only through and in time understood as an asymmetrical and irreversible flow.<sup>23</sup>

Some have claimed that a new theory of nature is emerging today<sup>24</sup> though it is one whose roots, whose anxiety, go back to the heart of the Modernist moment, to Ludwig Boltzmann's failure to put his H-theorem on a solid foundation,<sup>25</sup> even to Bergson's equally prescient but equally failed attack on Einstein's theory of time.<sup>26</sup> If time was excluded along with other "flow

<sup>23</sup> In addition to the works cited below see F. Eugene Yates, ed. Self-Organizing Systems (New York: Plenum Press, 1987); John Briggs and F. David Peat, Turbulent Mirror (New York: Harper and Row, 1989); Arthur T. Winfree, When Time Breaks Down: The Three-Dimensional Dynamics of Electrochemical Waves and Cardiac Arrhythmias (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U. Press, 1987) and Leon Glass and Michael C. Mackey, From Clocks to Chaos: The Rhythms of Life (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U. Press, 1988). These works as well as most listed below contain extensive bibliographies on the subject.

<sup>24</sup> Such claims have been advanced by, among others, Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers in La nouvelle alliance, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1986, orig. 1979), and by James Gleick, Chaos: Making a New Science (New York: Viking, 1987) .

<sup>25</sup> Boltzmann's attempt to reconcile the timeless laws of classical dynamics with the a-symmetrical processes of the second law of thermodynamics is recounted in Karl Popper, Unended Quest (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Pub. Co., 1976) pp. 156-62; Thomas Kuhn's Black-Body Theory and the Quantum Discontinuity, 1894-1912 (New York: Oxford U. P., 1978), pp.38-46; and I. Prigogine and I. Stengers, Entre le temps et l'éternité (Paris: Fayard, 1988). On the H-theorem in general see Satsi Watanabe, "Time and the Probabilistic View of the World," The Voices of Time, ed. J. T. Fraser (Amherst: U. of Massachusetts Press, 1980, orig. 1966).

<sup>26</sup> Henri Bergson, Durée et simultanéité (Paris: PUF, 1968).

phenomena"<sup>27</sup> at the very origins of classical physics it re-emerged in the 19th century science of thermodynamics with a vengeance. From that moment on, time could grow only increasingly problematic, for the infrastructure--both scientific and cultural--of our classical worldview was destined to be increasingly incapable of accounting for the phenomena that it offered up. Time now began to function increasingly as a form of pure information<sup>28</sup>: it is after all that which makes differentiation and morphogenesis (i.e. singularities, events) possible, by providing a communicative middle term--a metastability--affording exchanges and absorbing and transmitting tensions across many and various systems of influence. It is also as an informational element that time permits phenomena at great "distance" or at radically different scales of reality to react with one another and to be implicated with one another.<sup>29</sup> Thus time is not just a novel or superadded

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<sup>27</sup> On the counter-history of hydrodynamics and flow phenomena from the time of Archimedes see Michel Serres, La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrece: fleuves et turbulences (Paris: Minuit, 1977) and Hermes IV: La Distribution (Paris: Minuit, 1977). Prigogine cites S. Sambursky's The Physical World of the Greeks, trans. M. Dagut (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U. Press, 1987, orig. 1956) for the assertion that the static view of the world is rooted in the Ancient classical origins of science. Ilya Prigogine, From Being to Becoming: Time and Complexity in the Physical Sciences (New York, W.H. Freeman and Co., 1980) p. x. For Hans Reichenbach it derives from Parmenides and the Eleatic School, Hans Reichenbach, The Direction of Time (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1956) p.11. "Flow phenomena" in the sense that I use it here refers to anything from hydrodynamics to weather, economics or simple iterative feedback equations.

<sup>28</sup> This idiosyncratic use of the term is borrowed from Gilbert Simondon, L'individu et sa genese physico-biologique (Paris: PUF, 1964) pp.15-16.

<sup>29</sup> Scaling is an extremely important if little understood aspect of contemporary mathematics. The uncanny periodic appearance of identical elements or structures within apparently random processes has

variable, it is that which multiplies all variables by themselves--systems communicate with one another--not just different systems distributed or adjacent at a moment in time, but systems now enter into communication even with themselves, that is, with the later or earlier states of the system which may now actually interact with any given present moment.<sup>30</sup>

This new "complex" informational space is today often mis-named by the science that studies it as "chaos." What ought to interest us however, regardless of nomenclature is this science's willingness to engage such concepts as disorder, instability, randomness, interactivity, irreducible complexity and especially change as positive (and not merely romantic) terms. For here, all systems are always open systems, they are labile and shot through with temporality, they are

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spawned so much interest in the last 15 years that it has even been hailed as a revolution in 20th century physical theory on the same order as relativity and quantum mechanics. It is arguable that some form of these ideas have been around for some time but that the technical conditions enabling them to emerge as full empirical scientific discoveries has only recently made their appearance in the form of the pocket calculator, the micro-computer and the revolution in graphic modeling made possible in large part by the interactive cathode ray tube. The increasing use of "phase-space" modelizations of dynamic phenomena--where a static picture is able to express all the information about a continuously evolving system, including its capacity to mutate randomly in time--is undoubtedly of inestimable importance. On this point too, fractal geometry has played a crucial role. Cf. James Gleick, Chaos (1987), Heinz Pagels, The Dreams of Reason: The Computer and the Rise of Sciences of Complexity (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988) and David Campbell, Crutchfield, Farmer and Jen, "Experimental Mathematics: The Role of Computation in Non-Linear Science," in Communications of the Association for Computing Machinery, 28 (1985), pp. 374-84.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to positive and negative feedback there exist other parasitical influences such as attractor states and what is known as "sensitive dependence on initial conditions," a heightened sensitivity at certain moments in the system to extremely minute perturbations capable of creating decisive, but entirely unpredictable qualitative fluctuations in the system's activity or organization.

sensitive and chaotic in the sense that they are creative--they ceaselessly undergo change, produce novelty, they transform or transmit unactualized potentials to a new milieu, in turn giving rise to a whole new series of potentials to be actualized or not. Open systems are thus open, not only to the "outside," but to becoming itself--the outside of all outsides.<sup>31</sup>

What then makes this possible? If time is a pure flow of information determining all actuality and in turn the production of all new potentials, then time is not only that through which matter derives both its capacities and its attributes but is that which can be realized only in a matter caught in the throes of "passing out of step with itself."<sup>32</sup> In fact there is no "time" per se which would be distinct from extension, only a perpetual, simultaneous unfolding, a differentiation, an individuation en bloc of points-moments which are strictly inseparable from their associated milieus or their conditions of emergence. The temporal factor here is not "time" itself (Chronos) but rather a general conception of nature as a "flow phenomenon," a dynamical, richly implicated system of becomings (Aion). After all, if reality has a claim to make on our imaginations it is much less for any theory of what it is than for the fact that things occur within it. When something occurs, it may be said that that which previously remained only a potential or a virtuality, now emerges and becomes actual though only in place of something else which could have arisen here at this time, but didn't. This double "difference" between what is here now but previously wasn't, and

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<sup>31</sup> The principle theme of Simondon, L'individu; Prigogine and Stengers, Entre le temps; Michel Foucault, "Thought from Outside," in Foucault/Blanchot (New York: Zone Books, 1987) and Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1987). Cf. also Gilles Deleuze's, Foucault (Paris: Minuit, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> Simondon's felicitous if difficult expression characterizing the movement or development through which individuation occurs: "une capacité que l'être a de se déphaser par rapport à lui-même, de se résoudre en se déphasant". L'individu, p.5.

between what emerged and what didn't, in all of its complexity and fatality and in all of its own pregnant virtuality or potentiality is what I will call "the event". The event is a principle of individuation, indeed the principle of individuation in a nature understood as complex and dynamic--it divides, limits, but especially produces. Now to see nature in terms of events should not be confused merely with establishing a threshold beneath which classical objects, states or relations cease to have meaning yet beyond which they are endowed with a full pedigree and privileged status. On the contrary, we will soon see how classical objects, states and relations are in fact fully incompatible with a reality considered as a fluid, a becoming. Indeed the units of such a theory of nature are closer to the medieval concept of the haecceitas--that is, singular, correlated, "eventmental" individualities--a concept that I will develop in the fourth chapter below in relation to the work of Kafka.

There is an increasingly rich philosophical and scientific culture dedicated to the problem of time and the event. Our modernity I argue is inseparable from this culture and undoubtedly also from its recent sudden growth. What we lack however is an explicit development or delineation of similar developments in the "softer" areas of our history and cultural life--in music, art, politics, literature, etc. The present work is but a rudimentary attempt to break some ground in certain of these areas, to see where analysis--and especially what type of analysis--might yield fruit, or at the very least unexpected results upon which a less blinded stab might subsequently be ventured.

Now from the perspective of the present study the ontology, as I am calling it, of modernity cannot be considered an entirely new one, though it is arguable that only in the 20th century is it emerging with a specific historical force to become a dominant mode within culture. The individual essays that make up this study are indeed, in a perhaps less modest vein, an effort toward a description of this emergent ontology. Though they seem to announce less abstract objects--a visionary townplan by the architect Antonio Sant'Elia, the literary works of Franz Kafka--it will soon become apparent that this is not, strictly speaking, to be the case. They seek rather to trace a number of themes that were emerging within physical theory at the turn of the century and to

transfer them, however piecemeal at first, onto a single surface where their ultimate consistency can, at least in a preliminary or provisional fashion, be formulated. In keeping with such a method I have rigorously avoided, even at the cost of a symmetrically paced exposition, the customary application of "theoretical" models to practical phenomena as well as the establishment of hierarchies of ideas where those in one domain are seen as determinant of those in another. Nor is there an equivalency being claimed between ideas developed in, say, physics and aesthetics in the early modern period. Rather, I am advancing the hypothesis that the most significant transformations in science, philosophy and aesthetics of the time were those that most deeply expressed the characteristics of this newly emerging ontology rather than those which were content to reflect each another's surface features. Analysis will be directed therefore toward a partial reconstruction of this ontological basis rather than at the comparative level of relations where these disciplines can be shown, however dubiously, to be linked.

Thus the themes I shall try to develop below concern the relation of certain vitalist or immanentist models to the specific philosophical, scientific and aesthetic Modernisms that emerged in the early 20th century. In a sense, the 19th century science of thermodynamics, with its unique, and revolutionary introduction of time into a spatial continuum, will serve as a general backdrop for my study which deals principally with Einsteinian relativity (1907), the technical writings of the sculptor Umberto Boccioni (1910-14), the influential townplan schema of the architect Antonio Sant'Elia (1913-14), the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1896-1922), and the writings of Franz Kafka (1904-1924). In physics the demise of absolute time will be shown to give way to a theory of the "field" effectively superseding the classical notion of space as a substratum against which things occurred, and giving rise to a physics of the "event." Nowhere were these two concepts of field and event so profoundly, and so early, deployed as in the theoretical writings of Boccioni and more importantly, in the visionary architecture of Sant'Elia. Nor was it a coincidence that such a modernity--so radical as to have overturned all the laws of classical physics--should have been at the root of aesthetic Modernism's first, and only absolute, avant-garde movement. Sant'Elia's

massively complex scheme is the first to give concrete expression--aesthetic or otherwise--to the new notions of time and space developed by 19th and early 20th century science. It is also the first schema within aesthetic Modernism to have elaborated a theory of nature in which the ground or first principle is seen to reside nowhere else but at the level of its effects, that is, it was the first to have embodied the principle of an immanent cause.

The second part of the dissertation develops these same themes though moves away from the thermodynamic model to adopt the closely related one of Bergsonian *durée* or virtuality. The objects analysed in this section are the works of Franz Kafka. Here I attempted to show that Kafka's works, despite appearances, manifest a quite coherent cosmology, but that this cosmology can be understood only in relation to a certain type of movement that underlies it. This movement belongs to the realm of what Bergson called the intensive; here movement is caught up in qualitative changes of state, differentiations, and especially individuations.<sup>33</sup> It is only this type of movement that can account for the appearance or creation of the "new," even if this novelty is of the most troubling and unforeseen kind. Kafka's world is one in constant (qualitative) temporal flux, even if its appearance is one of (quantitative) spatial stasis--in fact, it is literally defined in terms of metamorphosis, singularity and flight. Finally, it is precisely this peculiar (Kafkaesque) instability of Being that I try to identify as the positive, even affirmative principle throughout the works.

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<sup>33</sup> Qualities are that which cannot be divided up without changing in nature, quantities that which change only in degree. See chapter 3.

\* **N.B.** Because of institutional requirements the very minimum reference has been made to the scientific culture that underlies the developments in the architecture, aesthetics and literature I have studied here. It would do well however to note that in a general sense, the developments I have tried to outline may be seen at an important level to have been responses to a phenomenon as slow in developing as it was profound and generalized in its effects--the crisis of classical mechanics.

## 2. **Physical Theory and Modernity: Einstein, Boccioni, Sant'Elia**

### **The New Plasticity**

We are passing through a stage in a long progress towards interpenetration, simultaneity, and fusion, on which humanity has been engaged for thousands of years."

Umberto Boccioni, December 12, 1913

### **Technology and Mechanolatry**

The two decades beginning in 1876 saw the appearance of the incandescent lamp, the telephone, hydraulic generators, skyscrapers, electric trolleys, subways and elevators, as well as cinema, X-rays and the first automobiles. By 1903 the spectacle of the first mechanically powered airships and airplanes had shattered the still inviolate horizontality of the phenomenological and geopolitical space of the pre-World War I era. The life-world in Europe and America was being transformed in depth--the unparalleled technical saturation of the human perceptual apparatus (innovations in transport and communications) was redefining the body and its relations to the world beyond it. A new order was emerging whose configuration could be expressed either in

terms of a dynamics of force and a relativism or in the privative terms of nihilism and dissolution. Whatever their ultimate convictions, the philosophies of Bergson and Husserl may be seen to form one axis of this configuration: Bergson's for its insistence on the nondiscrete nature of the contents of consciousness and on the systematic dissolution of spatial form in the fluid and intensely subjective multiplicity of *durée*; Husserl's for its attempt to work out the dynamic of (ap)perception by extending the intentional horizon to the vector of internal time consciousness so that a perceived object (noema)-- already defined as partial and contingent in space--was further relativized in a temporal complex of retained and anticipated images.

The first systematic attempt to express these new principles, however, arose in the realm of aesthetics, first and most fully in the theoretical program of Italian Futurism, yet realized unequivocally only in the work of one of its members, Antonio Sant'Elia. The movement's founder Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, published the Foundation Manifesto in the Paris daily Le Figaro in February 1909. Certainly the most literary of any of the several dozen manifestos which would follow in the next seven years, Marinetti's text recapitulates in its organization and form the same disjunctive pattern it was meant to effect in the real historical world around it. The prologue opens with a description of the Marinetti family apartment with its precious, saturating turquerie and claustrophobic, fin-de-siecle exoticism,<sup>1</sup> then, with scarcely a change in tone turns to a heroic reverie on the new industrial culture formed by machines and "those who sweat before them."

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1. "We had stayed up all night my friends and I, under the mosque-lamps whose filigree copper domes were constellated like our very souls. . . .", Founding and Manifesto of Futurism, Archivi del futurismo, eds. Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori, 2 Vol. (Rome, DeLuca, vol.1, 1958, vol. 2, 1962) Vol. 1, p.15.

The text pauses long enough to affirm Futurists' and workers' common affinity to inhabit the night, before proceeding to the more immediate apprehension of a passing tram, its panoply of artificial lights and finally to an unfavorable comparison of "the arthritic, ivy-bearded old palaces" of the city with the healthy "roar of famished motorcars" that speed among them. The section continues as Marinetti and his companions start out on their famous motorcar race through the streets of Milan. Both the race and the section end abruptly as Marinetti's car capsizes in a ditch, pitching him headlong into the swamp of a factory drain from which he draws at least one "nourishing" draught before emerging to declare himself baptismally delivered into the Futurist world of mechanical splendor.

The main body of the manifesto follows, praising danger, movement, crowds and, above all, speed as a new form of beauty, an éloge to mechanism and abstract energy of all kinds including war and automobilism, while denouncing museums, libraries, contemplation, history, old age and stasis in any form, and pronouncing once and for all the abolition of space and time.<sup>2</sup>

In many ways this text marks a turning point in the history of avant-garde culture. Not only was it the first time a call had been made for a complete break with the past and an insistence that the techniques and subject matter of art be drawn solely from the concrete contemporary world

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2. The text not only dramatizes the passage from an outdated environment to a new and invigorated one, but furnishes in a great number of details sources for dozens of works which would follow in its wake. To mention just a few among them, Giacomo Balla's Velocità astratta (1913), Luigi Russolo's Automobile in corsa (1913), Carlo Carra's Quello que mi disse il tram (1911), and Umberto Boccioni's La strada entra nella casa (1911).

around one, but it was the first to have conceived of this concrete world as inseparable from the industrial and scientific technologies which arrange, and are arranged (however abstractly), within it. Correspondingly, the activities and attitudes promulgated by the manifesto were singularly devoid of reference to aesthetic or literary practice. Artistic revolution was conceived only within a more general program of transformation of the totality of human existence. "Dynamism" was the catchword for the entire movement:<sup>3</sup> through it was expressed the will to intervene politically, scientifically and aesthetically in an emerging order of space-time that was already revolutionizing the social environment.

The most significant technical innovations of the era, from the skyscraper to moving pictures and the automobile, were made possible by inventions--electric motor (lifts), incandescent lamp, internal combustion engine, etc.--which themselves depended on more fundamental breakthroughs in the harnessing and exploitation of energy, most notably of the electromagnetic spectrum. Wireless telegraphy and later the wireless home radio set, the electrification of private homes, streets and public spaces, the proliferation of telephones and automobiles together gave a new fluidity, and a new consistency, to everyday space. What once passed unqualified or as insubstantial began to take on a new palpability, dense with wires and waves, kinetic and communicative flows. It was out of this apprehension of space as a kinetic and substantial plenum that the new plasticity emerged, simultaneously in aesthetics and in the Relativity Theory that was revolutionizing physics in the years between 1905 and 1916.

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3. Marinetti originally wavered between Dynamism and Futurism as names for his movement; cf. Marianne W. Martin, Futurist Art and Theory, 1909-1915 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968) p.40.

## The Field

In his 1905 paper "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies," Einstein first presented his Special Theory of Relativity. The theory's main features were, first, to preserve the Galilean principle of relativity. According to this principle the uniform motion of any inertial system (a time-space reference frame) can be discerned only by referring to a point which lies outside the system. By the same token motion of any kind within an inertial system derives its value only in relation to points in that system. And finally it states that the laws which determine the values of any state of motion are invariant for all inertial systems. To this theory--the very cornerstone of classical mechanics--was added Relativity's second important feature, the principles of Lorentz's transformation equations which provided a simple theorem for relating and transforming time and space coordinates from one inertial system to another. Its radicality lay in quantifying the elastic deformation of bodies and the dilation of time at high speeds. By adding a third principle whose derivation goes back to James Clerk Maxwell--the constancy of the velocity of light in empty space-- Einstein was able to formulate the Special Theory of Relativity. Its radicality lay in freeing time itself of its metaphysical and absolute character and reducing it to just one more dependent (ie. variable) coordinate in the kinematical transformation equations.<sup>4</sup> The new four-dimensional continuum developed in this theory differed from that of classical mechanics in the following way:

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4. That is, all of the mathematics in sections 3 and 4 of Part 1 of "On the Electrodynamics" dealing with transformations of (space) coordinates and times between stationary and moving systems. H.A. Lorentz, A. Einstein, H. Minkowski and H. Weyl, The Principle of Relativity, trans. W. Perrett and G.B. Jeffery (New York: Dover, 1952, orig. 1923) pp.43-50.

time and space were no longer, at least algebraically, heterogeneous; the continuous 4-dimensional manifold could no longer be separated into a three-dimensional section evolving in one-dimensional time, where "simultaneous" events are contained only in the former; rather, each inertial system would now express its own particular time determined as a mutual relation of events to the frame in which they are registered. Events occurring simultaneously can thus be said to do so only with respect to a single inertial system into which they are arbitrarily grouped and outside of which any notion of "now" becomes meaningless. By making time in this way relative and contingent,<sup>5</sup> space-time and the field were conceived as a new entity, irreducible to their component dimensions, objectively unresolvable with respect to their infinitely varied regions (different speeds = different times), and thickened to consistency by the world-lines<sup>6</sup> that career through them.

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5. On three space coordinates, one of which will undergo a change in the dimension parallel to the motion due to the Lorentz contraction, one variable (relative velocity between two reference frames), and one constant (the speed of light).

6. This term was coined by H. Minkowski in his famous article "Space and Time" (1908), which gave the first mathematical formulation to space-time. Minkowski defined a world-point as a point in space at a point in time (a system of values  $x, y, z, t$ ). Attributing the variations  $dx, dy, dz$  to conform to the value  $dt$ , this point would describe "an everlasting career" that he named a world-line. "The whole universe is seen to resolve itself into similar world-lines, and I would fain anticipate myself by saying that in my opinion physical laws might find their most perfect expression as reciprocal relations between these world-lines. Lorentz et al, The Principle of Relativity, p.76.

This consistency too, was of an entirely new kind. The concept of space as it developed from antiquity was founded on Euclidean mathematics for which space, as a continuum with its own independent reality, was never fully posited. The elements of which this system was constructed—the point, the line and the plane—were nothing more than idealizations of solid bodies. Space itself emerged only secondarily, that is, only insofar as it could be derived from these idealized forms and the relations produced by their contact—intersections, points lying on lines or planes, etc. Only with Descartes does space finally emerge as autonomous and pre-existing: an infinite and generalized three-dimensional continuum, where points and figures are describable by their coordinates.

If geometrical descriptions in the Euclidean system were reducible to actual objects (point, line and plane) or aggregates and derivations thereof, the Cartesian system permitted "all surfaces [to] appear, in principle on equal footing, without any arbitrary preference for linear structures."<sup>7</sup> In other words, space now existed independently of solid bodies, preceding them and containing them.

Until the introduction of dynamics the Greek system had been adequate for all geometric needs (e.g., Brunelleschi, Desargues, Mercator, etc.), but the new Cartesian system would be absolutely indispensable for Newtonian physics, in which equations of motion and acceleration play a dominant role. This is because acceleration cannot be expressed or defined as a relation between

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7. "The Problem of Space, Ether and the Field in Physics," in Albert Einstein, Ideas and Opinions (New York: Bonanza Books, nd) p. 279.

points alone but only in relation to an abstract ground of space as a whole. Events could now be conceived of as taking place against a fixed backdrop which also served as their unaffected carrier.

Not until the 19th century did this concept of space and the relations between movements and bodies begin to change. First thermodynamics (problems of heat conduction in solid bodies), then the discovery of the electromagnetic interaction and the wave-theory of light provided both the first treatment of matter as a continuum (or at least as a vehicle of continuous "intensive" movements or changes) and the first evidence of states in free or empty space which are propagated in waves. In the first case matter is treated as a system of states, characterized by independent quantitative variables--thermal differences, volume, pressure--expressible as a function of space coordinates and, most importantly, of time. In the second it was a simple transposition of these same mathematics--partial differential equations--to the propagation of magnetic and light phenomena. Passing from a field theory of masses (thermodynamics) to a field theory of empty space (electrodynamics) meant that classical mechanics had to be superseded.<sup>8</sup>

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8. "Before Maxwell people conceived of physical reality--in so far as it is supposed to represent events in nature--as material points, whose changes consist exclusively of motions, which are subject to total differential equations. After Maxwell they conceived physical reality as represented by continuous fields, not mechanically explicable, which are subject to partial differential equations. This change in the conception of reality is the most profound and fruitful one that has come to physics since Newton. . . .", "Maxwell's Influence on the Evolution of the Idea of Physical Reality", in Einstein, Ideas and Opinions, p. 269. Ernst Mach, whose theories exerted a great influence on Einstein, argued the need to abandon the metaphysics of Newtonian mechanics in his 1883 Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung (The Science of

Maxwell's breakthrough in the theory of electromagnetic processes went far in this direction, but unable to make the final conceptual break he was obliged to posit a material vehicle or medium for this electromagnetic field: the luminiferous ether. The ether played a purely mechanical role as the material seat and carrier of all forces acting across space--though it was imperceptible and only logically derivable, based as it was on the presupposition that every state is capable of mechanical interpretation and therefore implies the presence of matter. The Michelson-Morley experiment of 1888 failed to yield any evidence of the material existence of such an ether. Between this event and the Special theory of Relativity of 1905 came Lorentz's important work which, while accounting for the Michelson-Morley results, established, according to Einstein, that ether and physical space "were only different terms for the same thing."<sup>9</sup> It was a momentous conceptual leap if only a short mathematical step that Einstein took to emancipate the field concept entirely from any association with a substratum. For the Special Theory of Relativity Einstein employed the Riemannian conception of space,<sup>10</sup> whose plastic structure is susceptible both to partaking in physical events and to being influenced by them. The Einsteinian field, and its corresponding notion of space-time, dispensed entirely with the need to posit a material substratum as a carrier for forces and events by identifying the electromagnetic field--and ultimately gravitational fields as well--with the new metrical one. This notion of "the field" expresses the complete immanence of

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Mechanics [Chicago: Open Court, 1902]). Cf. Max Jammer's discussion in his Concepts of Space (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1957) pp. 138-43.

9. Einstein, Ideas and Opinions, pp. 281.

10. Einstein asserts this however, only retrospectively. Cf. "The Problem of Space, Ether and the Field in Physics," Ideas and Opinions, p.281.

forces and events while supplanting the old concept of space identified with the Cartesian substratum and ether theory. The field emerges as "an irreducible element of physical description, irreducible in the same sense as the concept of matter in the theory of Newton."<sup>11</sup>

The field describes a space of propagation, of effects. It contains no matter or material points, rather functions, vectors and speeds. It describes local relations of difference within fields of celerity, transmission or of careering points, in a word, what Minkowski called the world. Einstein himself offered as an example of a field phenomenon nothing other than the description of the motion of a liquid:

At every point there exists at any time a velocity, which is quantitatively described by its three "components" with respects to the axes of a coordinate system (vector). The components of a velocity at a point (field components) [fulfill the conditions of the field for they, like the temperature in a system of thermal propagation] are functions of the coordinates (x,y,z) and time (t).

This hydrodynamic model, of course, deserves no particular priority in Einstein's system for it was still only a rudimentary mechanical model describing a state of matter, whereas Einstein's physics was an attempt to think the pure event, independent of a material medium or substratum. Yet the field theory it typified was emerging in other areas of endeavor, often finding expression through similar or related models of dynamics in fluids. Its mysterious charm was none other than the partial differential function through which alone it was possible to express the principles of immanence, dynamism and continuity.

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11. Albert Einstein, Relativity: The Special and General Theory (New York: Bonanza Books, 1961)

p.150.

### Plastic Dynamism

in aesthetics, no less than in physics, the last years of the 19th century and the first of the 20th brought about a decisive transformation in the concept of space. Beginning with Hildebrand's Problem of Form (1893) in which space appears for the first time both as an autonomous aesthetic concept and, more importantly, as a continuum unbroken and indistinct from solid objects,<sup>12</sup> to its development in Riegl and its ultimate identification with the Kunstwollen, and finally to the later syntheses of Panofsky's "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form'," space emerged with a new positivity as an object of both knowledge and direct experience. One historian situates the emergence of a modern continuum theory of space with Geoffrey Scott's influential Architecture of Humanism (1914), tracing it to the psychological theories of Theodor Lipps and the Beaux-Arts compositional theories of Charles Blanc and Julien Guadet.<sup>13</sup> This latter development, however, would not become fully integrated into architectural practice until the mid-'20s, long after Cubism

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12. Adolf von Hildebrand, Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst (Strassburg: JHE Heitz, 1893) pp. 32-33. "Let us imagine total space (das Raumganze) as a body of water, into which we may sink certain vessels, and thus be able to define individual volumes of water without however destroying the idea of a continuous mass of water enveloping all."

13. Reyner Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981, orig. 1960) pp. 66-67.

(through which it was transmitted<sup>14</sup>) had elaborated and, to a large extent, exhausted it. A more essential evolution of these problems, and one closer to the scientific movement that emancipated physical theory from the old notion of matter and its correlative space, is the basis of the new plastic theories developed by the Futurist Umberto Boccioni in his writings on Plastic Dynamism.<sup>15</sup>

Following in the wake of Marinetti's Foundation Manifesto there is much, undeniably, in these writings of the rehearsed denunciations that were an integral part of the Futurist public relations enterprise. But more than any other of the movement's exponents, even Marinetti--whose flair for public promotion and the right turn of phrase was less amply sustained by consistency of thought--Boccioni's were cogent and forceful ideas that came to be formed into a complex system of concepts bearing on the nature of the physical world.

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14. Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal," in The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976).

15. Umberto Boccioni, Pittura, scultura futuriste: Dinamismo plastico, (Florence: Vallecchi, 1977, orig. 1914) (abbr. PSF in text); Archivi del futurismo (abbr. Ar in text). English translations of some of Boccioni's writings were published in Futurist Manifestos, ed. Umbro Appolonio (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) (abbr. FM in text). Because these translations are extremely unreliable, all citations and page numbers given in the body of the text will refer when possible to the Italian originals. All quotes are either my own translations or are altered versions of those given in the latter work.

In the Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture, the first manifesto published solely under his own name, Boccioni develops in a radically unprecedented way the relationship of an object to its environment:

. . . sculpture must make objects live by rendering apprehensible, plastic and systematic their prolongations into space, since no one can any longer believe that an object finishes where another begins and that there is not an object around us: bottle, automobile, tree, house or street, that does not cut and section us with an arabesque of curved and straight lines. (Ar. I, p. 69).

These same relations are expressed in a subsequent text, recast now in the language of (ancient) atomist physics:

. . . areas between one object and another are not empty spaces but rather continuing materials of differing intensities, which we reveal with visible lines which do not correspond to any photographic truth. This is why we do not have in our paintings objects and empty spaces but only a greater or lesser intensity and solidity of space (Italics added) (Ar. I, p. 143).

Leaving the body/nonbody opposition aside altogether, space is also characterized in terms of two interrelated and interpenetrating fields:

Absolute motion is a dynamic law grounded in an object. The plastic construction of the object will here concern itself with the motion an object has within it, be it at rest or in movement. I am making this distinction between rest and movement, however, only to make myself clear, for in fact, there is no such thing as rest; there is only motion, rest being merely relative, a matter of appearance. This plastic construction obeys a law of motion which characterizes the body in question. It is the plastic potential which the object contains within itself, closely bound up with

its own organic substance, and according to its general characteristics: porosity, impermeability, rigidity, elasticity, etc. or its particular characteristics: color, temperature, consistency, form (flat, concave, angular, convex, cubic, conic, spiral, elliptical, spherical, etc.) (SPF, p. 80).

Relative motion is a dynamic law based on the object's movement. . . . Here it is a matter of conceiving the objects in movement quite apart from the motion which they contain within themselves. That is to say we must try to find a form which will express the new absolute--speed, which any true modern spirit cannot ignore (SPF, pp. 82-83).

Boccioni's system reveals a certain dual nature of space: on the one hand, a fixed and extended milieu with metrical or dimensional properties and, on the other, a fluid and consistent field of intensities (e.g. forces, speeds, temperatures, color). The resemblance to Bergson's two types of multiplicity, the numerical (discrete) and the qualitative (continuous) or, more generally, that of space and that of durée, deserves to be underscored here once again.<sup>16</sup> The basic difference, of course, between Bergson's second, dynamic multiplicity as formulated in the Essai, and Boccioni's is that for the latter there is no separate or privileged internal domain.<sup>17</sup> Specifically, it is the very problematization of this separation that is the point of departure for Boccioni's work.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Henri Bergson, Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1927) Chap. 2.

17. The rhetoric of Bergsonian intuitionism is however, to a certain degree maintained. Cf. Archivi, vol. I, pp. 71, 104, 108, 144.

What remains to both regardless of this difference is the task of giving systematic expression to the world in the modern terms of a continuous multiplicity.<sup>19</sup>

For Boccioni such a conception of the world was implicitly sustained by means of what I shall schematize below as three interdependent hypotheses:

1. The hypothesis of the undividedness of the object field. According to this hypothesis, the world is at once an aggregate of separate fragments and a materially indivisible whole. The main underlying current here is an attack on perspectival space<sup>20</sup> and the correlative "scientific"

<sup>18</sup>Les problèmes clefs de l'art moderne [sont] les problèmes de la représentation de l'espace. notamment le problème de la continuité dans l'espace, et ceux de la transition entre l'espace intérieur et l'espace extérieur. Grace à la spirale, l'espace n'est plus défini par un volume à trois dimensions, mais composé avec une quatrième dimension--celle du temps: la spirale permet...une durée réelle." Noémi Blumenkranz-Onimus, "La spirale, thème lyrique dans l'art moderne," in Cahiers d'Esthétique (1971), p. 296.

<sup>19</sup>. This notion of multiplicity was first developed by the mathematician Bernhard Riemann. Cf. Ch. 3, fns. 47 and 56.

<sup>20</sup>. It is important here to differentiate between those systematic attacks on perspective which were commonplace in the Modernist period (Cubism) and those, such as Boccioni's and Duchamp's, which, more than a simple modification of existing pictorial theory constitute a critique of the conception of the world as an optical phenomenon. This latter movement goes beyond questions of aesthetic dogma, casting its challenge not just to the Renaissance's rationalizing costruzione legittima but to the quasi-entirety of

geometry based on the optical model.<sup>21</sup> "Traditionally a statue cuts into, and stands out from, the atmosphere of the place where it is on view," Boccioni writes; though henceforth sculpture will use "the facts of landscape and the environment which act simultaneously on the human figure and on objects" and "extend its plastic capacities to [these objects] which till now a kind of barbaric crudeness has persuaded us to believe were divided up or intangible . . ." (*Ar. I*, p. 68). This conception yields to positive formulations such as "the interpenetration of planes" (*Ar. I*, pp. 68, 72), the notion, borrowed from Marinetti, of the (*immaginazione*) *senza fili* (both "wireless" as in radio, and "without strings"), and the "absolute and complete abolition of finite lines" (*Ar. I*, p. 70). Closely connected with the idea of interpenetration is Boccioni's belief that the environment not only conditions and acts on objects but is contained by them, forming labile plastic zones of influence (*SPF*, pp. 81-82; *Ar. I*, p. 71). Resuscitating Marinetti's *immaginazione senza fili*, he means to insist on an *analogical*<sup>22</sup> (intuitive, immanent) method of reconstructing space, as well

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western notions of space back to the time of Euclid and Vitruvius. Erwin Panofsky has demonstrated the constant link between optics and geometry. For his discussion of Euclid, cf. *The Codex Huygens and Leonardo da Vinci's Art Theory*, Pierpont Morgan Library, Codex MA 1139, London, 1940; on Vitruvius cf. "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische Form,'" in *Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft* (Berlin: Verlag Volker Speiss, 1980); and for an interesting reference to Riemann and binocular vision, cf. *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1964) p.12.

21. *Archivi*, vol.I, pp.105-6, 144; *Futurist Manifestos*, p. 94. Cf. also Carlo Carra's *Plastic Planes as Spherical Expansions in Space*, *Archivi*, vol.I, pp.145-47; *Futurist Manifestos*, pp.91-2.

22. "Analogy is nothing more than the deep love that assembles distant, seemingly diverse and hostile things. . . . Together we will invent what I call the imagination without strings. Someday we will

as to underscore its technological implications; the wireless radio actualizes and, by this measure, belongs to the invisible electromagnetic plenum which surrounds it. The third formulation deals with finite lines and closed forms, elements whose plastic possibilities have been eclipsed by a new fluid order of becoming ("the law of the unity of universal motion" [FM, p. 94]). This order is one which conceives formed matter as in flux, a momentary and metastable constellation of forces (or force-lines) which originate outside it and continue beyond it.

For all these reasons Futurist art cannot be based on visual principles. Against the fragmenting spectacle<sup>23</sup> of all, even modern, art, Boccioni affirms the fullness of conception (FM, p. 94), dynamic transformation and becoming (Ar. I, p.144), and the synthesis of all body sensation (Ar. I, pp.105-06). "In Futurist art," he declares, "the viewpoint has completely changed"; from now on the spectator will live in the center of the picture, embedded in the "simultaneousness of the

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achieve a yet more essential art, when we dare to suppress all the first terms of our analogies and render no more than an uninterrupted sequence of second terms. . . . Syntax was a kind of abstract cipher that poets used to inform the crowd about the color, musicality, plasticity and architecture of the universe. Syntax was a kind of interpreter or monotonous cicerone. This intermediary must be suppressed, in order that literature may enter directly into the universe and become one body with it" (Italics added), Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature (1912), in Marinetti: Selected Writings, ed. R.W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1971) pp. 85, 89. Cf. also Destruction of Syntax--Imagination without Strings--Words-in-Freedom, in Futurist Manifestos, pp. 95-106; and the discussion below on point of view.

23. "It is the static qualities of the old masters which are abstractions, and unnatural abstractions at that--they are an outrage, a violation and a separation, a conception far removed from the law of the unity of universal motion," Futurist Manifestos, p.94.

ambient [amid] the dislocation and dismemberment of objects, the scattering and fusion of details, freed from accepted logic and independent from one another"(Ar. I, p.105). Vision alone fragments the field because it gives unity and discreteness to bodies: once the integrity of the field is restored, it is "objects" themselves which appear fragmented:

. . . the entire visible world will tumble down on top of us, merging . . . a leg, an arm or an object has no importance except as an element in the overall plastic rhythm, and can be eliminated, not because we are trying to imitate a Greek or Roman fragment, but in order to conform with the general harmony the artist is trying to create (Ar. I, p.71).

The substance of the world is not resolvable into pure or integral materials or forms. Rather, these latter shift and fluctuate in and out of the formal arrangements that Boccioni calls "plastic zones"; they have become arrangements of materials in the generic sense, formless, random multiplicities. There is now only world-substance--an indeterminate and a-centered aggregate of different materials--no longer "ideal" form, transcendent yet made incarnate in "sublime" or noble material:

Destroy the literary and traditional "dignity" of marble and bronze statuary. Insist that even twenty different materials can be used in a single work of art in order to achieve plastic movement. To mention only a few: iron, cement, hair, leather, cloth, mirrors, electric light, etc. (Ar. I, p.72).

2. The hypothesis of universal motion extends the theory of the continuity of the object field, already more of a fluid than a rigid three-dimensional continuum, onto the axis of time. As we have seen, substance is indissociably linked to motion (absolute), just as motion (relative) is linked to

"speed." The world-substance (multiplicity), now animated, describes a field of vectors of differing qualities and intensities. If the formula "interpenetration of planes" adequately expressed the principle of continuity within the object-field, it is no longer adequate to express vectorial quantities in a field of speed or celerity. Only line can express variation or difference in a field of force; line conceived qua line, as vector not delimitor of form.<sup>24</sup> Thus the hypothesis of universal motion does not bear on the object-field and its relations.<sup>25</sup> It describes an entirely different cosmos whose substance, conceived within time, is speed itself, ontologically pure and without substrate (the pure "d" in  $dx/dt$ ). Yet these speeds constellate, decelerate and change quality to create object-effects wholly outside the realm of form: "the object has no form in itself; the only definable thing is the line which reveals the relationship between the object's weight (quantity) and its expansion (quality)." The object is resolved plastically into its component quanta of force which in turn are determined by the qualities of the field--here gravity and centrifugality. Lines, or rather "force-lines" (linee-forze) describe the object's nature (character and quality of field) not its movement as such (displacement of form against a fixed ground). Force-lines are of an entirely other order; they depict a condition of interface or pure transmission without medium: the becoming-line of matter<sup>26</sup> and the becoming-immanent of both.

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24. Sanford Kwinter, "The Pragmatics of Turbulence," Arts (December 1985).

25. "A body in movement is not simply an immobile body subsequently set in motion, but a truly mobile object, which is a reality quite new and original." Futurist Manifestos, p.93.

26. "Every object reveals by its lines how it would resolve itself by following the tendencies of its forces," Archivi, vol.I, p.106.

This is the essential meaning of dynamism, and it is also the reason that cinematographic and chronophotographic division and delay have nothing to do with Futurism or its underlying physics. The ill-guided experiments of Giacomo Balla of 1912-13 are no exception to this rule.<sup>27</sup>

Dynamism does not characterize an activity of objects in space but describes the quality of a field of immanence or becoming, where the world, in Boccioni's own words, "is conceived as an infinite prolonging of an evolutionary species" (FM, p.95).

3. Time and space are full and have a plastic consistency. This third hypothesis depends logically on the previous two. As we have seen, Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity introduced the concept of inertial systems into physical theory, and in so doing replaced the absolute time and space of classical mechanics by the concept of the field. Though the laws of classical mechanics are valid within an inertial system they do not apply to events occurring outside it. Thus local events seem to obey Newtonian principles, but they themselves are always embedded in a larger fluid framework of space-time where events can be related only through the Lorentz transformation and not through a fixable or universal coordinate. The fundamental novelty in this theory was twofold: first, space, events and matter ceased to function as substrata for one another and were resolved non-hierarchically as interdependent characteristics of the field; and second, the four-dimensional continuum ceased to be reduceable to three space coordinates evolving in

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27. This period included an array of movement studies in which images are multiplied to conform to the optical theory of retinal persistence. The famous Guinzaglio in moto (1912) is one example. This idea of halting and spatializing movement rather than temporalizing and mobilizing static form, further underscores Futurism's fundamental difference from Cubism.

one-dimensional time, but became a truly unresolvable four-dimensional whole in which the four coordinates assume their positions, without privilege or qualitative distinction.

What time lost in universality when it ceased to be absolute it gained in concreteness through its new association with space. And this is all the more paradoxical since it was the very insertion of time into the spatial continuum that first permitted physical theory (notably thermodynamics) to proceed to the theory of the field and to abandon the limiting notion of material points. It could be said then that time replaced the physical particle, and in so doing introduced consistency as a characteristic of the field, where before there was only space and the mechanical need to posit material carriers.

In this sense the thermo- and electrodynamic field is always a field of consistency, a strange new entity because equally abstract and concrete; it does not exist materially yet it exists everywhere and all at once wherever there is force or matter. The field of consistency, to quote Boccioni's phrase, is "the unique form that gives continuity in space."

Force-lines can now be seen as the abstract units which articulate the object's relation to its consistent field. And as we have already shown this relation is one of immanence, or at least a becoming-immanent. Force-lines (vectors) are to the field (space-time) what the old line was to classical mechanics. They are time-imbued and animate world-substance into plastic zones. Plasticity is a property of these world-lines.

With the field characterized in this way there is no conceivable real occurrence which would not mobilize the abstract consistency to form concrete plastic events. The field however does not pre-exist, but is always present as a virtuality, determined within and by the plastic events which

articulate it and render it actual.<sup>28</sup> "We reject any a-priori reality; this is what divides us from the Cubists . . ." (Ar. I, p.145).

By incorporating space so deeply into the body of time as to change its very nature thereby, Futurist theory, like that of Einstein, Bergson and others, undertook to resolve the problem of Being through the concept of a continuous multiplicity. From this fact arises what may be the single most important contribution of Futurist theory to our modern conception of the world. The physics of space-time, one could say, gave rise to a fundamental new entity--the event--as well as the new geometry through which it could be expressed. In its own way Futurist theory made of Plastic Dynamism a scientific hypothesis and an artistic technique, allowing this selfsame event to emerge in its full materiality as the sole substance and medium of man's intervention in the world.

The modern world, then, will no longer be resolvable into separate and autonomous realms of value or meaning, ie., the economic, the social, the phenomenal. Futurist Plasticity is above all a pragmatics which reflects all phenomena--events--through the single screen of a real material consistency. Thus the "swing of a pendulum or the moving hands of a clock, the in-and-out motion of a piston inside a cylinder, the engaging and disengaging of two cogwheels, the fury of a flywheel or the whirling of a propeller, are all plastic and pictorial elements" whose shape and effects can now be diagrammed in their continuity, in their multiple connections to the ever-differentiating outside with which they invariably form a single substance.

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<sup>28</sup> This theme is developed throughout Chs. 3 and 4.

## La Città nuova

The last-conscripted member of the prewar Futurist brigade (the group's composition, ideological predilections and credibility would be altered radically after the war) was the Lombardo architect Antonio Sant'Elia. Born in Como in 1888, Sant'Elia was trained in Milan and Bologna, where he received his diploma in 1912, before returning to Milan to set up a practice and, soon after, to establish an association with a group of architects known as the Nuove Tendenze. Sant'Elia's earliest work (prior to Milan, 1912) was heavily inflected by the highly ornamented stile Liberty whose popularity was then only beginning to wane.<sup>29</sup> In the two years following his move to Milan he executed a large number of drawings and urban concept studies, largely speculative in nature, which were first grouped together under the heading Milano 2000, and later when exhibited publicly with the Nuove Tendenze group in 1914 were collected under the title La Città nuova. The exhibition catalogue contained statements from each of the group's members, including the important preface by Sant'Elia on the tasks of modern architecture. Though Sant'Elia was not yet an official member of the Futurist movement, this text, called simply Messaggio, was undeniably Futurist in inspiration and was adapted a few months later, with the most minor alterations, as the Manifesto of Futurist Architecture.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Note the first projects for the Milano stazione (there would be five in all); see Figure 1.

<sup>30</sup> The texts of the Messaggio and the statements by other members of the Nuove Tendenze as well as the final text of the Manifesto of Futurist Architecture are in the Archivi, vol. I, pp. 122-27 (members'

The Messaggio opens dramatically, effecting the first of several fundamental transpositions of the traditionally conceived architectural object into evermore complex, abstract, yet more deeply and historically authentic configurations. Consider the opening passage with its two opposing notions of history:

The problem of modern architecture is not a problem of rearranging its lines; not a question of finding new mouldings, new architraves, for doors and windows; nor of replacing columns, pilasters and corbels with caryatids, hornets and frogs; not a question of leaving a façade bare brick or facing it with stone or plaster; in a word, it has nothing to do with defining formalistic differences between the new buildings and old ones. But to raise the new-built structure on a sound plan, gleaning every benefit of science and technology, settling nobly every demand of our habits and our spirits, rejecting all that is heavy, grotesque and unsympathetic to us (tradition, style, aesthetics, proportion), establishing new forms, new lines, new reasons for existence, solely out of the special conditions of Modern living, and its projection as aesthetic value in our sensibilities.

Such an architecture cannot be subject to any law of historical continuity. It must be as new as our state of mind is new, and the contingencies of our moment in history.

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statements), and pp. 81-85 (Manifesto). Separate texts of the Messaggio and the Manifesto can also be found in Controspazio, vol. 4-5 (April-May 1971) pp. 17-19. Whether Sant'Elia was or was not a true Futurist, and whether he was or was not the sole author of these texts, has given rise to long and tedious debates. That the ideas in question were those of Sant'Elia has never been put in doubt (cf. Banham, pp.127-28; Martin, pp.188-89) which is all that is relevant for the present context. For a bibliography on these debates cf. La Martinella di Milano vol.XII, no.10 (October 1958), pp. 526-39.

The art of building has been able to evolve through time and pass from style to style while maintaining the general character of architecture unchanged, because in history there have been numerous changes of taste brought on by shifts of religious conviction or the successions of political regimes, but few occasioned by profound changes in our conditions of life, changes that discard or overhaul the old conditions, as have the discovery of natural laws, the perfection of technical methods, the rational and scientific use of materials.

Denounced from the outset is the kind of history which is sedimented and transmitted in the evolution of taste and styles, the narrative of succession, memory and encrusted representations. This history of "differenze formali . . . sogetta a una legge di continuità storica" is renounced in the name of a more authentic and more comprehensive historicity rooted in the "condizioni dell'ambiente" and the "contingenze del nostro momento storico." This disqualification of the past, and the filiative relations whose tenuous claim is to link it with the present, resonates, however superficially, with Nietzsche's repudiation of the disadvantages of history for life made 40 years earlier<sup>31</sup> though in a more profound sense, with the Nietzschean repudiation in general of history as repository and transmitter of anything like absolute truth or meanings. Yet the sudden and quite radical assault on historical epistemology as it was waged systematically by Nietzsche and adopted by the Futurists does not in itself exhaust either of these enterprises' claims to modernity. Of greater importance on this count is the particular kinds of terrain they opened up: for Nietzsche the affirmation of active affects (of which "forgetting" was an integral one) resolved historical time into both a pragmatics and an aesthetics of force (Will to Power); for the Futurists history became inseparable from that transverse line which links concrete social phenomena--

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31. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Use and Abuse of History for Life (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949).

technique, science, art, politics--and embeds them indifferently in material life. In one case as in the other the valorization of life itself endowed it with the character of an aesthetic phenomenon; the metaphysical telos of history gave way to a reality that was, and indeed had to be, constructed anew at every moment, and from within.<sup>32</sup> For the Futurists, "Man's" new privilege was to have no privilege at all vis-a-vis reality or Being: his history and time were no longer separate from the history of material nor the vicissitudes of force. Tradition was seen as not only disadvantageous for life, to use Nietzsche's phrase, but as simply fraudulent; it offered a metaphysics of perpetuity where really there exist only natural laws, a bourgeois academicism of representations where in fact there is only the chaotic and senseless circumstance of force, and finally the mysticism of lineal continuity--influence, transmission, origin, causality--in place of the palpable immanence of the conjunctural, the aleatory and the simultaneous. Historical consciousness was losing its metaphysical infrastructure--a development entirely at one with the superseding of classical time in physics--only to reaffirm itself through an insistence on a profound historical consciousness of the present, an historical consciousness of the world and life as such, rather than through representations derived from its self-constituting Grand narratives.<sup>33</sup>

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32. "Our houses will last less time than we do, and every generation will have to make its own."

Manifesto of Futurist Architecture.

33. On narrative vs. pragmatic history, cf. Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis, U. of Minnesota Press, 1984).

Futurist theory may be read as the first important instance of a pure pragmatics in modernist culture.

It is no surprise that the rest of the Messaggio concerns itself with the specific denunciation of these forms of discredited historical representation:

We have lost the sense of the monumental, the massive, the static, and we have enriched our sensibilities with a taste for the light and the practical. We no longer feel ourselves to be the men of the cathedrals and the ancient moot halls, but men of the Grand Hotels, railway stations, giant roads, colossal harbours, covered markets, glittering arcades, reconstruction areas and salutary slum clearances. . . . we must abolish the monumental and the decorative, we must resolve the problem of modern architecture without cribbing photographs of China, Persia and Japan nor imbecilizing ourselves with Vitruvian rules. . . . We must depreciate the importance of façades, transfer questions of taste out of the field of petty mouldings, fiddling capitals and insignificant porticos. . . . It is time to have done with funereal commemorative architecture; architecture must be something more vital than that, and we can best begin to attain that something by blowing sky-high all those monuments. . . .

Architectural time for Sant'Elia can no longer be that of historical styles--effete, academic and truncated from the natural forces that were once the source of its life--nor is it the apocryphal time of monuments. Architecture is no longer a vehicle expressing the spurious contents of a singular ("grand") history-in-the-making, no longer a constellation of signs operating externally to culture through the intermediary of a code, but an entirely internal and inhering mechanism inseparable from the body of the world and operating on it from within.<sup>34</sup> Thus the classic Futurist theme of

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34. "I affirm that just as the ancients drew their inspiration from the elements of the natural world we too--materially and spiritually artificial--must draw our inspiration from the elements of the radically new

elements and materials becomes crucial once again. Wood, stone, marble and brick will be replaced by reinforced concrete, iron, glass, textile fibers and anything else which helps obtain "the maximum of elasticity and lightness." The nobility of the conventional architectural mediums is undermined; instead, architecture follows sculpture toward a more promiscuous (immanent) relation toward material reconceived now according to the framework elaborated by Boccioni, as a deployment of world-substance, or as an operator of whatever (relations, materials, forces, laws) is contemporary and close at hand. At the same time the tendency toward lightness and kinematic plasticity brings the traditional architectural mass to a greater and greater approximation with force, allowing the research of forms to give way to an emphasis on configurations.<sup>35</sup> Architecture undergoes a reevaluation in terms of a new state of knowledge and technique, and a new

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mechanical world we have created, of which architecture must be the most perfect expression, the most complete synthesis and the most effective artistic integration." Messaggio.

35. This theme, among many others first adumbrated by Sant'Elia, was most powerfully echoed in Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's Von Materiel zu Architektur (1929). "The fact that kinetic sculpture exists leads to the recognition of a space condition which is not the result of the position of static volumes, but consists of visible and invisible forces e.g., of the phenomena of motion, and the forms that such motion creates. . . .The phrase 'material is energy' will have significance for architecture by emphasizing relation, instead of mass." Cf. The New Vision (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947) especially pp. 41-63. Of great importance here as well are El Lissitzky, A. and Pangeometry (1925), in Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), and Iakov Chernikhov's pedagogical notebooks (1927-33) in Chernikhov: Fantasy and Construction (London: A.D. Editions, 1984).

constellation of needs and desires (material, political, and spiritual) while simultaneously assuming its purest artistic role:

True architecture is not an arid combination of practicality and utility, but remains art, that is, synthesis and expression.

Though Sant'Elia did not realize a single building during his mature (post-Liberty) period, he did produce a sufficient number of eloquent studies and drawings<sup>36</sup> which, together with the Messaggio and the Manifesto, constitute a rigorous and programmatic reconception of architectural and urbanist practice whose influence would be felt for decades and whose implications are still today being realized.

The drawings of this period (1913-1914) will be examined in two main groups: the morphological studies in which single architectonic structures are explored--lighthouses, turbine stations, hangars, bridges and other nonspecific structures named simply Edifici and Dinamismi architettonici--and those which develop more explicitly relations within whole regions of the city-manifold. In the first group one sees the elaboration of a formal vocabulary whose themes and implications are realized only at a second-order or molar level--the city--whose concrete substance they indeed comprise yet whose units and ultimate organization they in no way reflect. The form studies will be examined first and the more complex city drawings afterward.

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36. Antonio Sant'Elia. Catalogo della Mostra Permanente a cura de Luciano Caramel e Alberto Longati (Como: Villa Comunale dell'Olmo, 1962). The catalogue lists nearly 300 drawings. Many of the drawings listed in this work and a host of others from other sources will soon be made available in an English edition; cf. Sant'Elia, Milan, Cooper Union/Mondadori, Milan, forthcoming.

One is inevitably struck, when examining Sant'Elia's sketches, by the extraordinary momentum of the draftsmanship, the obsessively precise freehand style with its swift, simplified yet deliberate lines, at once restrained and expressive, volatile and refined. Few historians have failed to remark his predilection for the extreme oblique setting of masses and the close viewpoint which together artificially intensify perspectival effects.<sup>37</sup> The orthogonal lines of the depicted buildings pass almost invariably beyond the drawing's frame. This unusual technique makes the depicted forms appear as molecular fragments belonging to greater but indeterminate wholes; the impression is that of masses framed hastily and close up, further suggesting the brute immediacy of photography. Also, one notes the borrowing of a device common to 19th-century painting, but just beginning to discover new modes of application in the nascent art of cinema: that of allowing the contents of a frame, no matter how spare or "innocent," to become fraught with whatever occurs or exists beyond it. There is considerable method to this technique: the refusal to make available all the information about a building structure through its visual apprehension shifts the problem of its "meaning" from the expression of interior contents to an exterior syntax of combination and connection. The buildings are often remarkably dissymmetrical--despite the constant use of symmetrically apposed elements at the molecular level; they seem to have positive and negative ends, male and female interlocking parts, open and closed elements distributed almost randomly over their surface, and most importantly, a single building complex deploys its several façades in such a way that they have no apparent relation to one another, but

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37. Fewer than 10 percent of all the drawings employ frontal or attenuated oblique settings. The best descriptive study of Sant'Elia's form language is Paulo Portoghesi, "Il Linguaggio di Sant'Elia," in Controspazio, vol.4-5 (April-May 1971) pp. 27-30.

remain completely autonomous with respect to the "building" conceived as an integral organism. These latter are determined rather by specific functions--passage, connection, transmission, reception--defined in terms of specifically located or immediately adjacent external elements--roads, gangways, elevator stacks, landing strips. This general tendency of atomization of the building's traditionally irreducible unity is supported further by an array of secondary devices.

The simplest of the morphological studies describe elongated, ascending, elliptical masses either embedded in, or partially penetrated by, rectangular slabs, which together align in paradoxical configurations as if the result of silent, frictionless collisions. Paradoxical here is the combination of the extraordinarily "sovereign" and ballistic power of the collided forms, and their unexpected suppleness and permeability, their seeming lack of material resistance to one another.<sup>38</sup>

Paradoxical semiotically as well, for the blatant interference of forms, violently splitting and passing through one another, could logically be translated internally it seems only by introducing the most vertiginous disjunctions and intermittence to their lived space. These studies always contain combinations of both tapering and rectilinear forms whose pronounced differences of inertia create effects of virtual separation and vertical momentum. This kinetic tension is further underscored by the smooth unadorned concrete surfaces on which the accelerated play of light confronts the eye less with a coherent object than with a field or *glacis* unencumbered by the friction of detail, texture or articulated features. The careful combining and wedging together of

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<sup>38</sup> This device is already embodied in Sant'Elia's drafting style. Lines consistently overshoot the edges of the forms they describe (this had yet to become a standard affectation of architectural rendering) further suggesting the nodal character of "form" as if this latter were constituted only by perpetually remigrating force-lines.

forms produces a controlled interplay of right angles with oblique surfaces, battered walls with promontory-like abutments. What remains is a simple system of glyptic faces and sharply pronounced arrises whose courses, for all their breakneck precipitousness, provide the eye's only formal guides. Add to this the explicitly narrative "contraforte" theme of the canted surfaces pressing back, and often through other perpendicular ones, shoring up as if to resist great external masses or forces, and one can already intuit the presence of a more comprehensive city vision, based not on aggregation and juxtaposition of separate parts but a differentiating field of pressures with its corresponding mechanical language of resistance and transmission.

At the simple morphological level this language expresses a theory of individuated architecture as servomechanism, where individual units are mere operators or commutation devices within a much larger assembly whose greater intensity they modulate and control. The elements of this language include conduits, circuitry, rhythmized cadences and progressions including rotation, nesting, step-backs, tapers, telescoping and ranked columnar forms, as well as the more literal machine vocabulary of jigs, stops and templates. Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate the rhetorical use of the conduit theme (over and above literal applications, e.g., bridges, gangways, electrical wires) acting less to buttress than to marshal and translate forces from one section to another. Figure 3 attains a particularly high level of abstraction by forming its own independent (short-) circuit in which the flying beams (A) support--or house--a perforated upright structure (B) themselves supported by arch (C) which in turn both transects and forms the absent base of the main structure (B). In this mise-en-abyme system where every element seems in part, only fortuitously there, in part already there relaying forces received from other similar elements, the earth as first principle or ground seems no longer to exist at all; rather, a homeostatic system of circulating currents which, thanks to the visionary use of reinforced concrete, seems virtually untouched by

gravity or any other essential (grounded or original) cause.<sup>39</sup> These same drawings, as well as Figure 4, employ repeated columnar forms though not in the service of the traditional imperatives of proportion and spatial patterning. Here their positive/negative intervals are not static but belong to a more procedural sequence of intermittent coupling like the rabbetted digits on a mortise hinge that either espouse one another to form an unbroken surface or rotate fully beyond (Fig. 4), opening onto other configurations or conjunctions. The themes of rotation and interpenetration belong to a more general tendency to articulate all conjunctions dynamically. Figure 5 provides what is perhaps the most acute example of this tendency, unashamedly miming the conventions of machine assembly with its protruding jig plate acting as guide for an ostensibly movable cylinder and the clear implications of flexion--the jig's acute angle; torsion--the cylinder's counterpoint to its inert squared-off base; and friction--the interaction of shaft and template. Yet it may be said that Sant'Elia's was uniquely an architecture of conjunction, one that does not posit forms primordially, but rather systems whose very expansivity and acenteredness precludes classical individuated expression. Here the very notion of conjunction takes on its maximal significance: these are conjunctions, not of buildings or isolated structures but of imbricating systems, both at the molecular level of interpenetrating guided, rotating or sliding masses and at the molar level of urban megasystems of transport, hydro-electric and informational lattices.

The combination of the system theory of the urban realm with its dynamic interpretation as a pressurized field gives rise to an assembly language based on impregnation, with system elements existing simultaneously, and at least virtually, everywhere, emerging to actualization only within nodes (conjunctions) of mutually interfering systems. Figure 6 literalizes this technique

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39. Cf. the discussion of immanent cause below.

formally within a single structure, where three separate plans superimpose like three individual dispositifs or running systems on the same site--a point-grid corresponding to the chimney stacks, the square plan base of the teepee structure, and the elliptical collector that seals them all into a solid agglomerate. No one system ever predominates over the others, and though together they undoubtedly form a unit, they singly maintain a certain autonomy and separateness due to their extension and resonance within broader, more comprehensive networks. Interference, like the sporadic invasion of electronic images by foreign frequencies, becomes here a positive expression of spatial complexity allowing several disparate architectures (say telecommunications towers, elevator stacks, tram systems) to articulate themselves in a single and same block of matter.

Thus the dominant technique for ordering the various chains within this multilayered systemic space is a special use of transparency different from the literal and phenomenal versions endemic to visual Modernism. Here the transparency is functional and explicitly concrete: masses are placed seemingly only to be pierced, stratified or disaggregated, in other words, as passive and inarticulate carriers of the movement-bearing systems which traverse and penetrate them, or else huge framelike chassis bearing their lading like skeletons yielding to the newly invented X-ray gaze that the Futurists so emulated. Though articulated in often grandiose and imperious sweeps these masses, as we have noted, are in fact remarkably plastic and porous; they are easily incised and punctured, as in the window system of Figure 7 which is literally punched out of a single inert horizontal slab--note the strong, literal implication of perpendicular momentum in the impact-absorbing triangular niches--which, once transformed by this operation, can be read as a lattice-frame.

At every level the morphological studies assume, rather than represent, an extended field of movement and circulating forces. Each element relates primarily to the "horizontal" chain of which it is a link and secondarily to the transverse or vertical system that concretizes it and weds it, however incompletely, to a discrete and grounded form. It is here, more than in any other body of Futurist work, that the laws of Boccioni's physical theory found their full and unqualified application. It is as if the very nature of an art work, as understood by even the most radical avant-gardes of the time, were yet too primitive or ontologically conventional to express the conditions of a revolutionized cosmos. What clearly was needed was not new objects, but a new orientation toward a phenomenal field of events and interactions, not objects but the abstract regimes of force which organize and deploy them. For Sant'Elia this field was the emerging modern metropolis.

Just as the morphological studies drew their principle inspiration from engineering structures--electrical turbine stations, hangars, factories, lighthouses--the large-scale studies for La Città nuova developed out of a series of projects to redesign the Milan Central Station. An early study, Figure 8, still bears stylistic resonances from the Liberty period, with its denser, less precise expressionistic rendering, an organic use of materials which gives the almost palpable sensation of weight settling toward the lower regions, a noticeable lack of horizontal or homeostatic tension or pressure, lending the project an almost old-fashioned, earth-based aura. The accuracy of such an impression however comes to an abrupt end, for in many ways this scheme breaks with previous conceptions of urban planning. The most spectacular innovation is unquestionably the airplane landing strip built in to the upper level of the station. Here the central thoroughfare which traditionally ascends to and grandly frames the station's main entry is decked over to allow for vertical air access. The ease with which this scandalous idea is accommodated, though it is

certainly naive from today's standpoint, is evident from the nonchalance of the parked air vehicles on the runway, not to mention the way the buildings that flank the Viale Vittore Pisani are allowed to frame the runway at such a close distance. This feature sets up another element crucial to Sant'Elia's scheme, its multilayered acentricity. In this exterior perspective alone, one counts seven levels of thoroughfare not including the radio masts, elevators or funiculars, each superimposed like porous grids seeping and flowing into one another. The project exaggerates and develops the nature of its object--a literal commutation point--at once disaggregating its spurious but conventional unity, and multiplying the surfaces of connection within it. It does this by willfully embracing the city block into which it has been literally submerged, continuing its (the city's) present lines of flow (streets, tram routes, passages) through its own, pausing only to effect additional convergences by means of ramps, catwalks and steps. It is difficult to say whether the station system is embedded in the city's fabric or it is the city which runs freely through the station. The novelty of this arrangement has nothing to do with the ambiguity of place produced by such dispersion nor any mere de-centering of once integral architectural forms, but with a more fundamental overhaul that permits one to conceive of the architectural object not as a form but as an agglomeration and interaction of functions, each with its proper series of system elements whose architectonic value and role is defined only secondarily, and wholly in relation to these functions. Thus the Milan station becomes less a "building" than a field of convergence and linkup for many systems of flow, including air transport, trains, cars, radio signals, trams, funiculars, pedestrians, and necessarily all the secondary flows which they host, ie., money, goods, information. In this sense, the "station" comes to be seen as an allegorical representation of the city itself, and necessarily, in terms of the transformation of "place" into a swirling manifold of circuitry, switching points and deterritorialized, non-grounded flows.

In Figure 9 we see a later, clarified version of the station project (whose title incidentally now gives priority to its airport function) where the conventional straining arches have given way to a taut linearity made possible by "new materials." The flanking towers of the main mass have been split into two slabs and mortised into a more finely divided and variegated base system, and finally the heavy monumental quality of the original is throughout refined to more slender platforms and laminae allowing the expression of ductwork to emerge as the dominant visual theme. This reworking also incorporates many of the assembly motifs from the morphological studies, principally the oscillating beats of serial elements with their implied rotation, folding and sliding. Finally, one should not fail to remark the unusual treatment of the plan in both these drawings for it is identical to much of what we have seen in the morphology studies with respect to the treatment of façades. They are treated indifferently as pierceable slabs of matter, instantly transformable through perforation into space-frames revealing yet other systems (or only potential ones) beyond and beneath. In other words, the plan elements have a construction logic and appearance identical to the elevations, giving the "node theory" of construction here a truly literal, three-dimensional validity. This total indifference to absolute (external) determinations of place and direction has the effect of further denying the earth and its "essential" forces and values both as the metaphysical ground of architecture and the social processes it modulates.

The house . . . must rise from the brink of a tumultuous abyss; the street itself will no longer lie like a doormat at the level of the thresholds, but will plunge storeys deep into the earth, gathering up the traffic of the metropolis connected for necessary transfers to metal catwalks and highspeed conveyor belts.

We must exploit our roofs and put our basements to work . . . dig out our streets and piazzas, raise the level of the city, reorder the earth's crust and reduce it to a servant of our every need and fancy (Messaggio).

The most powerful and fully developed of the Città nuova studies is the drawing entitled "La Città nuova: Apartment complex with external elevators, galleria, covered passage, three street levels (tramlines, autoway, metallic pedestrian gangway), light beacons and wireless telegraph" (Fig. 10). The elaborate subheading very well emphasizes the exterior orientation and almost incidental nature of the building itself with respect to the "public works" structures. Of all the elements in the drawing in fact, only the residential block (due to its sheer inertia) seems to lack autonomy of purpose, becoming a passive receiver of vectors filiating in every direction and at best their infrastructural support. What, after all, could remain, now that its entire organic semiotic system has been laid asunder: the once grand or at least centralizing and frontalizing entrance has given way to a promiscuous panoply of multiple perforations, the "palatial" stairwells torn from its bowels and reconstituted outside as mechanical lifts which "swarm up the façades like serpents of glass and iron," the entire enclosing structure now subordinated to a minor role as collector or distributor of primary currents. The façade itself never assumes an integral form, due in part to the lack of organizational ornament that the manifesto so vehemently eschewed, in part to the atomizing effect of the step-back assembly which defines each floor as a separate and apparently slidable, autonomous module, and in part due to the "frame and mesh" construction that highlights the bold chassis trusses and elevator stacks, leaving the façades simply to recede as mere fenestrated infill (cf. especially Fig.11). Figure12, which depicts a secondary pedestrian thoroughfare (the avenue between two backing buildings), shows the affected preeminence of the newly externalized, and constituted, elevator stack presented as an architectural integer in its own right, here totally disjunct from the building (to which building does it belong?) and embedded in and linked up with the exterior manifold of street levels and its pedestrian and vehicular flows. Thus streets, roads, utility stacks and conveyor ramps are now seen as so many

concrete lines, no longer simply connectors of architectural objects and urban blocks, but the very elemental units of which the city is comprised.

The devaluation of the contained unit with its expressive façade can be seen as part of a more general devaluation of all enclosing planes in favor of superinvested surfaces. Roofs for example, are now recoded with gardens, landing strips, beacons and electronic transmission equipment; vertical surfaces now support bridges, balconies, gangways, often baying open to permit passage for traffic, or reconsolidating to bear the weight (and form) of a traveling arc or spanning I-beam. But what might be the most important revaluation of all can be seen in Figure 13, in which a neon publicity panel, explicitly built into the façade of an apartment tower, gives expression, perhaps for the very first time, to the idea that information dissemination processes (ads, signs, graffiti) constitute nothing less than a material intervention in the urban continuum. By adding another totally heterogeneous material to those enumerated in the Manifesto (glass, iron, textile), the introduction of language—and presumably later, of images--into the urban/architectural domain would, besides having far-reaching consequences for the Russian and Dutch avant-garde of the '20s and the later Italian work of architects such as Depero, Dazi and others (Fig. 14), create the conditions for the truly polymorphous, procedural--action- or information-based--architectures that began to emerge in the late '50s and '60s.<sup>40</sup>

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40. In this category one would certainly place the major exponents of "paper architecture," such as Archigram, Superstudio, Coop Himmelblau, but also the work of Ant Farm, the Situationists and artists like Robert Smithson and Dan Graham, whose use of mirrors, video, photography and print helped effect architecture's definitive migration into abstract space.

This same study shows the typical gradinata or graduated setback characterizing nearly all the highrise apartment blocs, and the externalized lift tower motif that gives salient expression to the city's third-dimensional axis, a feature that had certainly never found such full development in any previous town-planning scheme.<sup>41</sup> For this reason we feel it would be wrong to attribute the egregious lack of plan studies in Sant'Elia's oeuvre--and the Città nuova project in particular--to haste, superficial reflection or lack of technical rigor.<sup>42</sup> The lack of plans is at least in part a positive expression of a new form of organization of space, one that resists reduction to two-dimensions, and the conventional planar construction method that derives 3-D representations by combining

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41. This is perhaps the time to mention some of the visionary schemes of planners and architects like Antoine Moilin, Henri-Jules Borie, Charles Lamb and Hugh Ferriss. All of these proposed important schemes based on a superimposed transportation net of roads and aerial tracks and catwalks. But these schemes remained always that--superimpositions necessarily exterior to the objects they were meant to link. Sant'Elia was the first to establish movement or circulation as a first principle which does not so much act upon a substratum as meld with and mobilize the city's actual substance (including its architectural elements).

42. All of these charges have been made, either in criticism or in apology. Not untypical of the outlandishness and the triviality of these claims was the publishing of three rather desultory sketches relating to Milan's town plan accompanied by the claim "We now show that Sant'Elia was also a practical townplanner." Cf. "Antonio Sant'Elia," presented by Leonardo Mariani in L'Architettura, vol. IV, no.9 (January 1959).

vertical elevations with their horizontal plans.<sup>43</sup> We have already called attention to the undifferentiated treatment of horizontal ("plan") and vertical plane elements in Sant'Elia's work, where they are deployed indifferently as surfaces capable of infinite investment, penetrable to a limitless depth, and revealing ever more laminae beneath and behind. Add to this the notions of the pressurized field, the preeminence of linear, vectorial units, the atomization of molar forms, the themes of circulation, sliding, frictionless impacts and wave phenomena like interference and flow, and it soon becomes clear that one is dealing with a space characterized more by hydrodynamics and laminar flows than by statics, metrics or the physics of solids.<sup>44</sup> Because such a space is characterized by a non-hierarchical organization--think of a cloud which has no center, ground or exterior cause<sup>45</sup>--any of its sections, whether horizontal or vertical, could express at best only its own very localized configurations or events. In other words, the very idea of a plan(e) would be rendered obsolete; any information it might contain would still have no necessary

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43. This technique is the basis of quattrocento perspective theory and originates with Alberti's De Pictura.

44. An interesting scientific and philosophical history of hydrodynamics in which many of the above themes are developed is Michel Serres, La naissance de la physique dans le texte de Lucrèce (Paris: Minit, 1977).

45. Pierre Rosenstiehl and Jean Petitot, "Automate asocial et systemes acentrés", Communications 22, (1974). The authors propose mathematical models to account for communication and propagation effects in non-hierarchically organized systems.

repercussions on any other part of the building, and besides, which level could be given priority as matrix or master?

Paolo Portoghesi has characterized the relations of forms in Sant'Elia's work to "jets of water in a fountain," and Reyner Banham has written that Sant'Elia was "the first to give modern architecture "the habit . . . of thinking in terms of circulation, not vistas."<sup>46</sup> The prevalent use of parabolas, ellipses and compressed helical forms, while undoubtedly owing something to their Liberty origin, have undergone a profound formal reorientation,<sup>47</sup> now suggesting an arrangement of forces in disequilibrium, crisis and flux. Conventional town plans, organized on axes or in regular (or irregular) metrical bays have here given way to an almost stochastic distribution of elements, where material seemingly gravitates and sediments in random centers of turbulence. If the complex embedded structures are understood in this way it becomes easy to account for the centrifugal and centripetal effects suggested by the refrains of orbiting and constellated masses, the constant nesting motif, and the gradual tapering and lightening of forms as they develop toward their extremities. In what could easily have been a maquette for La Città nuova, Boccioni's prodigious "Sviluppo di una bottiglia nello spazio" can be read as a tour de force on the hydraulic/turbulence theme (Fig. 15).

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46. Paolo Portoghesi, "Il linguaggio di Sant'Elia," Reyner Banham, "Futurism and Modern Architecture," Royal Institute of British Architects (February 1957); and "Sant'Elia," Architectural Review (May 1955).

47. C.G. Argan, "Il pensiero critico di Sant'Elia" in Dopo Sant'Elia (Milano: Editoriale Domus, 1935).

The most significant innovation brought about by this "new" hydrodynamic model<sup>48</sup> of circulation was the superseding of the most classical though enduring notion of site as an essential, causal or pre-existing substratum.<sup>49</sup> Even Le Corbusier's pylons later did no more than affirm the classical site, either by hygienically clearing it in an ultimate gesture of homage or by positing it, in relation

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48. The hydrodynamic model of course is not new, but goes back at least to Archimedes. As I have already stressed modernity is not so much about the "new" as the "untimely" in the sense of Nietzsche's unzeitgemasse meditations. "Untimely" (and modern) is the emergence of a world-system based on relations of force rather than the qualities of form. Cf. ch. 4, fn. 59.

49. We have already seen to what extent space for the Greeks depended on a substratum of real material bodies. For Aristotle space was never dissociated from the notion of place (topos), which he defined as an envelope or boundary between an enclosed and an enclosing body. "The continuity of space is transformed [in Aristotelian physics] from a geometrical and ideal determination to a kind of objective determination. The continuity of space is not, as in the idealistic theories of space, founded in 'form' and in its 'principle'; rather it follows from what space is as a substantial and objective entity, as a sub-stratum." Ernst Cassirer, The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy (Philadelphia: U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1963) pp. 181-82. Compare the Aristotelian topos to Lucretius's nunc hinc, nunc illinc (now here, now there) which describes the random appearance of the clinamen (swerve, differentiation) in the universal cascade of atoms. Here place lacks all determination save as a relation of pure difference within an indistinct field. The event is there where space is suddenly differentiated from itself. cf. Lucretius, On Nature (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965) Book II; and M. Serres, Naissance de la physique.

to the architecture, as an opposing term.<sup>50</sup> The site, and the hierarchical figure/ground relation it supports, has in La Città nuova begun to give way to an all-encompassing univocity, where the flows that compose its space are continuous with those actually forming the bodies within it.

What physical theory in science and aesthetics had managed to express in a conceptual framework (neither Hildebrand, Rodin nor Boccioni ever found the definitive sculptural solutions to match their ambitions in this area) Sant'Elia was the first to furnish with a concrete and sensible body. The thermo- and electrodynamic theory at the turn of the century as we have seen, already contained a preliminary notion of the field made possible then by the introduction of time into the spatial continuum. The hydrodynamic themes of La Città nuova--the vectors, the concatenating sequences, in a word, its flow--also embody time in a way fundamentally different from previous schemas, including the essentially self-contained spectacle of Baroque architecture or the excessively narrative and romantic Picturesque. Rather, time is put in the service of a certain pantheism. This is first apparent in the inclusivity of the city's networks--one can never be outside them, but always already part of a system experienceable only over time and in pieces<sup>51</sup>, a system

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50. Perhaps the closest he would ever come was in the "artificial sites" of the OBUS linear plan, nearly two decades after La Città nuova. On the OBUS plan see Mary McLeod, "Le Corbusier and Algiers," Oppositions vol. 19/20 (Winter-Spring 1980). Far more radical in this direction were certain experiments in the '20s by the Russian Constructivists--Tatlin, Lissitzky, Leonidov, Vesnin, the Stenberg brothers--as well as the Dymaxion project of Buckminster Fuller.

51. Though one will object that this is true of all cities it is not true of their individual architectural elements. It is precisely the way these latter are embedded within a temporality of generalized flow that

in which the observer is either a mobile entity himself, or else the stationary receiver of mobile parts. Second, because the city-system, based on the circulation of force (-lines) wholly disencumbered from reference or relation to an exterior ground or site, must derive its first principle, or principle of differentiation, from something inherent to it (turbulence, interference, etc.). This inherent "first principle" is an immanent cause: an infinitely recurring, always virtual cause, based not on the absolute time of a fixed, exterior origin but a mobile and relativistic time that belongs indissociably to the concrete events that give it form. Nor is the city's structure discernable from any hypothetical outside; it has no divisions or sectors that could be combined into a second order unity or whole. Its unity is always present in its local, molecular relations. For this architecture expresses at its elementary level those global and collective urban functions that it modulates and participates in. It does not allegorize "Man's" temporality--day/night, work/rest, public/private, childhood/school/work/family, etc.--by organizing it into overcoded molar units. Here, "the city" in its virtuality and complexity, is the expressed content of each of its single elements--not those received ideas of what actions, and what order of actions, constitutes a human life. The distinction between global and local is elided, pre-empting—for better or for worse-- the molar, hierarchical, or centralizing formations endemic to any social and political urban

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interests us here. The objection moreover is unfounded in another way, for most cities are still today capable of traditional cartographic representation while La Città nuova is not. One need only consider the difficulty New York City has had in producing an overview map of its relatively simple (maximum two levels) subway system to appreciate this problem. What would be needed for n-dimensional systems are procedural maps or protocols, which again re-introduces the question of time. Cf. the closing discussion of this essay.

system.<sup>52</sup> Like a three-dimensional crabgrass the city proliferates as if through some internal mechanism--it does not expand along a boundary or front but simply produces more of itself randomly (*nunc hinc, nunc illinc*), differentiating, ramifying and recombining basic elements. The field it develops, like the one described by Einsteinian physics, is radically heterogeneous if viewed globally (though it is precisely this global view that is no longer interesting or even possible), yet the same laws unfailingly hold for every local instance. *La Città nuova* is a system then, with no inside or outside, no center and no periphery, merely one virtual circulating substance--force--and its variety of actualized modes--linear, rotating, ascending, combining, transecting.

The implications of such a new temporality were vast. The 19th century had already forged an obsessive oeuvre of these and similar changes through the works of Flaubert, Engels, Baudelaire, Dickens and H. G. Wells to mention only a few. The industrial city was then rapidly multiplying and fragmenting not only as a spatial image but as a temporal one as well; its slow or permanent rhythms, which once seemed to furnish a stable reference or support for man's chaotic and fluid experience, were now themselves, due to industrialization and accelerated technical innovation, beginning to mutate and incorporate change over shorter and shorter periods of time, slowly atomizing and becoming ever more fluid. What once served as a global, stable ground to man's temporal figure was threatening now to become as labile as he, and in this process of

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52. This is a considerably more optimistic interpretation of *La Città nuova* than the one to be found in Sergio Los, "Città macchina gigante," in *La Città macchina* (Vicenza: Assessorato Cultura, 1974). Los opposes transmissive (global) to communicational (local) systems, seeing in the former an inevitable reproduction of the "relationship of domination."

drawing forth the ground to embrace the figure--a tactical innovation so well known to Modernist painting--menaced to dissolve him completely.

Generations of critics to this day have interpreted Modernist culture as a specific resistance to this threat of dissolution. And this despite the fact that the unmasterable and chaotic were developed as much as possible on the side of the object, leaving man and his consciousness to the greatest possible extent unmolested. The works of Joyce, Proust, Kafka and Woolf are seen as part apologia, part lament for the modern facts of fragmentation and flux, but only as part of a more resounding and reassuring affirmation of a transcendentality of the subject and internal privatized time. Today we still need to be reminded that these works, more than just mirrors reflecting a prodigiously mutable world, were important spatio-temporal entities themselves, places for the dedicated explorer to navigate and apprentice him/herself, no longer in the techniques of reading, but more properly in the mapping of this very world, and just as it was lapsing forever into illegibility. What we might hope to discover today when returning to the works of this period, alongside all that was valid in the existentialist-humanist view, are principles and remains of rudimentary maps once formed, consciously or not, from some beyond point of representation. To do this, analysis would need bypass, not only traditional notions of "meaning," but also most currently accepted notions of "structure." For even this latter "progressive" term remains victim of a perennial transparency myth: the belief that beneath the shifting profusion of appearances there lies, accessible through proper operations, the finite, essential pattern of the real. At its most sophisticated, structure was understood as the abstract but always immobile framework--perhaps even a true component--of a living signification. Yet even as interest shifted from the analysis of systems of signification to topographical configurations and mapping, what seemed a

critical innovation too often fell back on the structuralist bias for spatial systems to the proper exclusion of what I have been calling the "event."

The event belongs to a complex and abstract realm of space-time; so must the cartographic techniques that sketch out its lines. Difference, a value whose so-called disappearance is today lamented only by those insensible to its subtler yet increasingly insistent effects, becomes the new transcendental principle of the field: the differential equation ( $dx/dt$ ) with which physics replaced the material point, the perpetual becoming of Boccioni's force-lines, and Sant'Elia's ever-differentiating field of pressures and flows. None of these configurations however would resemble maps in the traditional sense. They are rather what I will call procedural maps, made up not of "global" representations, which tend to reduce entire multiplicities to static and finite schemas, but of protocols or formulas for negotiating local situations and their fluctuating conditions. To construct such a procedural map it is necessary, first, to abandon the following two principles: (1) the epistemological prejudice that gives priority to the visual, spatial logic of simultaneity--the "image" of traditional cartography; and (2) the illusory exteriority of the subject vis-a-vis the map and the mapped. Here again it is the insertion of the dimension of time into the field that establishes a relation of continuity between subject and object, figure and ground, observer and event. Time is no longer exclusively subjective and private nor objective and absolute, but forms the seamless plane that gathers and gives consistency to both the subject- and object-effects that are in actuality corollaries or by-products of the event. To call these by-products is not to diminish them in any way, but rather to underscore the fact that they are derived, locally and in immanent relation to the event that constitutes them; they are not pre-given entities arriving readymade from without.

What is at stake in the question of modernity is, of course, an ontological problem regarding the nature of Being, but equally important and equally at stake is an epistemological one dealing with the nature of knowing. Today's crisis, as discussed at the beginning of this study, may be seen as an effect of the discrepancy between the steady emergence of a new mode of Being and the failure to evolve adequate modes of knowing that would be proper to it. This situation today is often an extremely confused one. Typical, and symptomatic, is the work of one author who, while acutely eliciting a number of the most trenchant, problematic and richly challenging artifacts of our time (the work of Nam June Paik, Michel Foucault, the analytic of schizophrenia, high technology, the contemporary urban environment . . .) is led to disqualify them routinely in the name of a more overriding need for representational schemas--depth-model hermeneutics, a theory of the social field based on cultural dominants, subject-centered consciousness and cognitive mapping--in short, the resuscitation in every possible way of the subject-object relation that by his own admission had already lapsed into oblivion.<sup>53</sup>

It is, of course, no accident that the city has occupied a privileged position in the emergence of our modernity. It was here where the compounding of technical innovations would have its first and most profound effects on mental and social life. But the culture of cities also belongs to much more fundamental moments in our history--the rise of the first "artificial" (technique-based)

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53. I am referring to a series of articles and lectures of Frederic Jameson including the final essay in which these studies culminated called "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", New Left Review, no. 146 (July-August 1984). The monotheistic themes propounded throughout are notable and avowed.

civilizations as they break more and more fully from the "organic" earth-based world with its single lived-time and legible naturalistic space; and, of course, the rise of capitalism whose radical reordering of the relations of production made these other revolutions both necessary and possible.

The myth of the machine was more than a metonym of this new culture, it expressed the autonomous, detached, infernal, abstract, self-regulating, euphoric functioning that characterized the new order; it was in itself the very recognition that this new order was about the mobilizing and productive possibilities of abstract functions rather than the invention and deployment of yet another register of objects and elements. The cultural space occupied by this machine obsession was always an ambiguous one. At one extreme were the excesses of mechanolatry of figures like Marinetti whose understanding of the machine failed to develop the question of productive relations that it on so many levels implied. At the other was the Taylorism of both the Soviet revolutionary and the American capitalist variety, which conspired to draw the social field and the worker's body into the well-oiled delirium of an efficiently producing machine.

La Città nuova belongs properly to neither of these groups, but rather to a third, open-ended category that left its own powerful though tacit mark on Modernist culture. To this category belong those machines whose task it was to produce other machines, or more precisely the "machinic" itself, and to set this latter loose as some kind of autofunctioning demon that appropriated, combined and connected to itself a limitless array of materials and forces, assembling perverse hybrids and mixtures of social, political and erotic flows. Duchamp's Large Glass, but also the procedural Green Box that contains its assembly instructions, the infernal bureaucracies and apparatuses of Kafka, the exotic conjugations of Rousset's performing machines, and in both these last two cases, the strange writing machines that subtended them, are among those

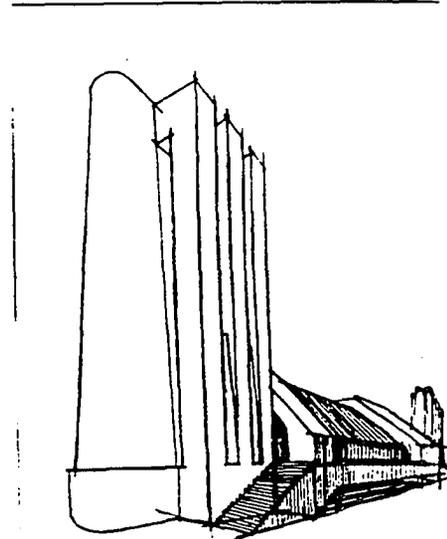
identified in the '50s as bachelor machines.<sup>54</sup> La Città nuova may be understood in this light less as a literal, realizable program than as a set of instructions, governing not only the assembly of isolated modules of (bachelor) machinery, but the composition, in its most pragmatic and concrete form of a universal machinic consistency. It is this consistency alone which is capable of endowing with a substantial body all those events, processes and flows, and all those invisible or "surreptitious" alliances, communications, and even subjugations that once may have seemed, as today they still do to certain modes of thought, so unfathomable and abstract.

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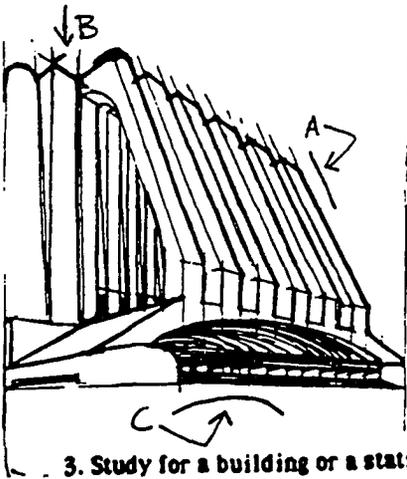
<sup>54</sup> Michel Carrouges, Les machines célibataires (Paris: Arcanes, 1954). Cf. also Junggesellenmaschinen/Les machines célibataires (Venice: Alfieri, 1975).



1. Project for the façade of the New Central Station of Milan, 1912.



2. Study for a building, 1913.



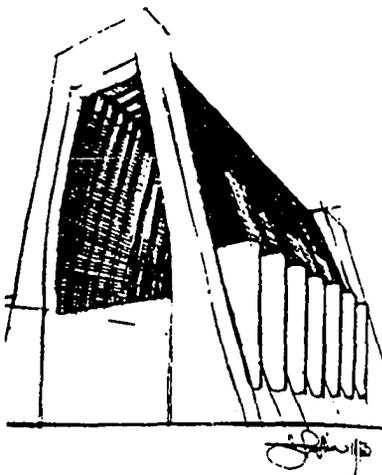
3. Study for a building or a station, 1913.



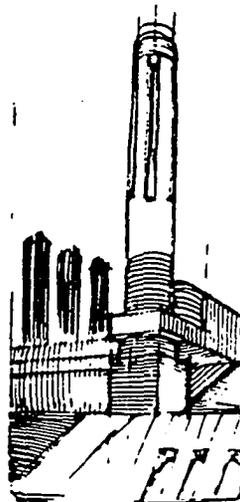
Lighthouse, 1913.



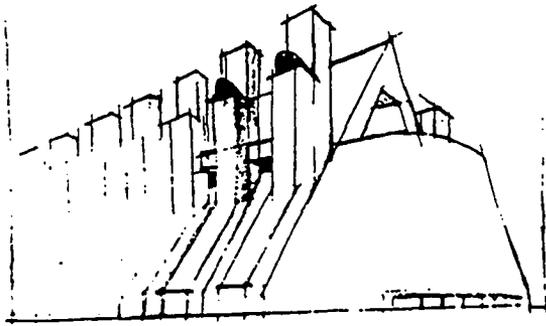
Lighthouse, 1913.



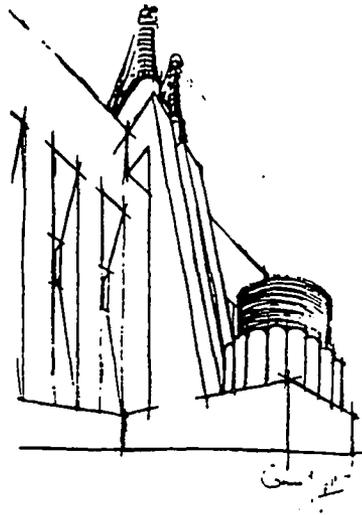
4. Study for a building or hangar, 1913.



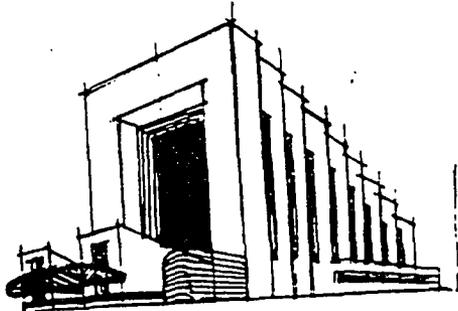
5. Study for an electric power station, 1913.



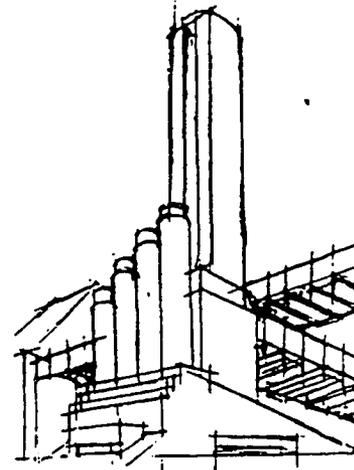
6. Study for a building. 1913.



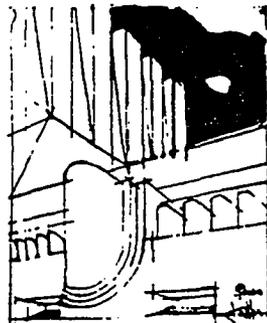
7. Study for an electric power station. 1913.



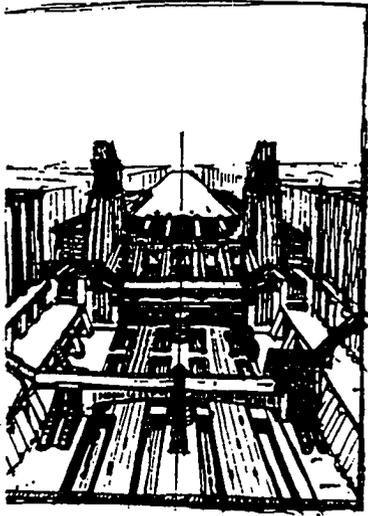
Study for a building or hangar. 1913.



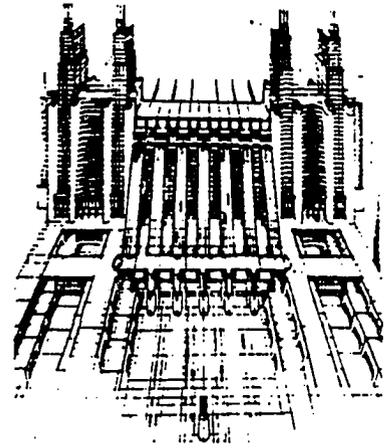
Study for a building with bridges. 1913.



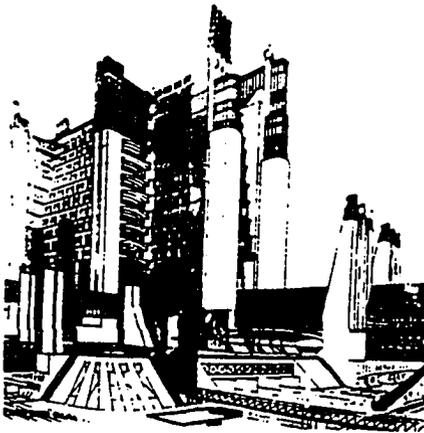
Study for a building or electric power station, 1913. (with revealed nesting).



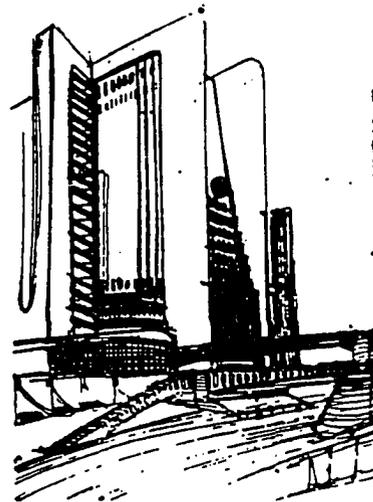
8. Station for trains and airplanes, 1913-14.



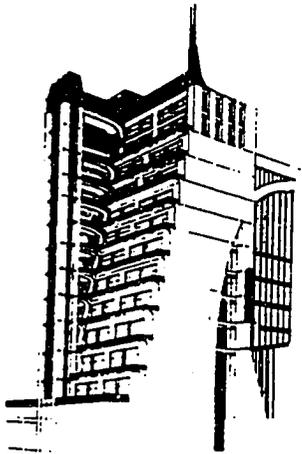
9. Station for airplanes and railway trains.  
with funiculars on three street levels, 1914.



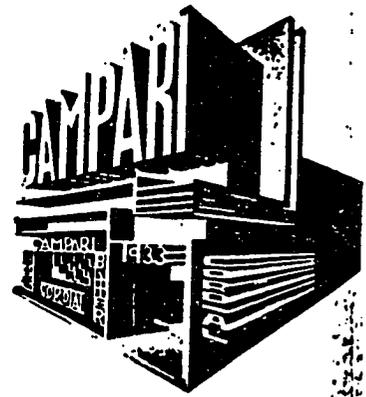
10. La Citta nuova: Apartment complex with external elevators, galleria, covered passage, three street levels (tramlines, autoway, metallic pedestrian gangway), light beacons and wireless telegraph, 1914.



11. Study for the Citta nuova: Apartment house with external elevators on three street levels.

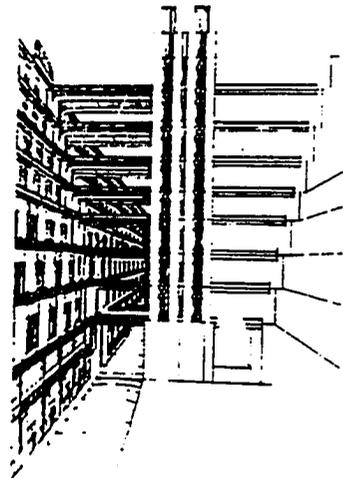


13. Apartment house with graduated setback and external elevators. 1914. (with neon advertising).

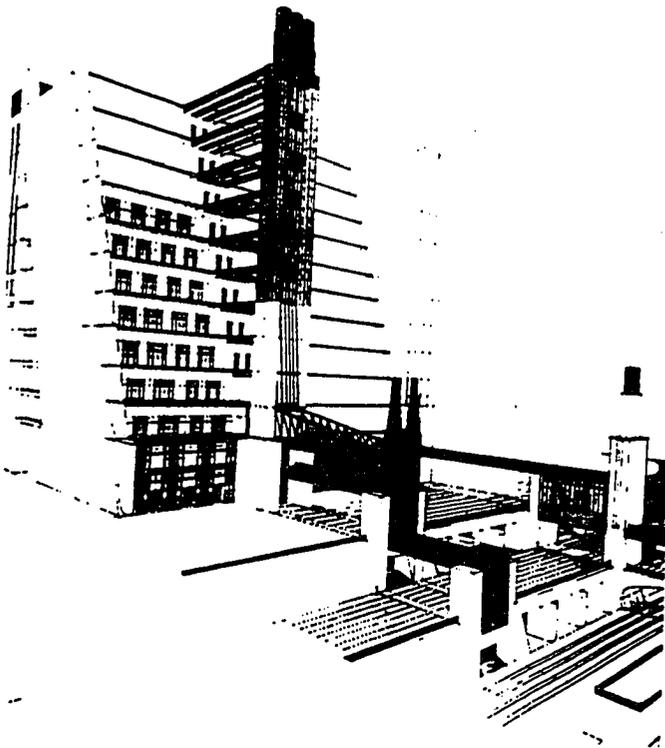


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14. DEPERO.



12. La Citta nuova: Secondary street for pedestrians with elevator in middle. 1914.



15. Umberto Boccioni. Development of a bottle in space. I

### 3. Virtuality, or "the Kafkaesque"

The work of Franz Kafka was among the first of European literary Modernism to be situated entirely within this new field. If his work often has been called "indecipherable," it is because the kinds of relations it offers up to the reader are no longer those of the conventional literary forms: meaning, metaphor or organic, developmental narrative. And unlike the work of such advanced Modernists as Conrad, Proust and others, Kafka's may be seen as remarkable, not so much for the expression, as for its very remove from the crisis and neurosis that accompanied the multiple losses of the 19th century<sup>1</sup>. This is not to say that the work is unrelated to these events, only that it is accomplished in some beyond point where the negative play of loss was already giving way to the new "positive" formations of the modern world: bureaucratic state power, mass phenomena, relativism (epistemological and perceptual), the recoding of social space and time by electromagnetic technologies, etc.

Of all of these developments however, it is clearly the image of bureaucratic organization that is generally considered preeminent in Kafka's work. Yet, what are the historical elements that may be

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<sup>1</sup> Of God, of experience (urbanization, automation), of the anthropocentric cosmos (Darwin's evolution, Maxwell's entropy), etc.

said to determine the specificity of this relation? It matters little, strictly speaking, where one chooses to fix the origins of the bureaucratic state--ancient Egypt, China, Rome, the Catholic Church--for what is certain, and must be underscored here, is that the formation of what one could call a specifically modern bureaucracy, is one based on the prolongation of the division of labor beyond the merely economic sphere, that is, into the civil and social sphere itself (a development made possible in the first instance by the advent of a money economy). This development may be said to bear the same relationship to modern or late capitalism as, say, did double-entry bookkeeping to capitalism's earliest stages: for both increased manifold the administrative capacities of increasingly large-scale enterprises and permitted them to act at greater and greater distances from the social and economic flows that it was their business to monitor. Now this "distance-effect" is directly proportional to how generalized bureaucratic technique has become in a given society or, expressed another way, how rationalized has become the civil separation of producers from the means of production (here the separation of civil servants and administrators of all types from the means of public administration), a movement which always entails a concentration of these means in increasingly centralized organizations.

Though legitimately "bureaucratic" formations, it may be argued, were known in modern Europe since the time of Louis XIV, it is only in the 20th century that this kind of formal and technical rationality achieved an absolute and systematic nature. Among its most acute expressions in the early 20th century are perhaps the scientific Taylorist and Fordist methods of industrial production. Here "specialization" may be said to have been pushed to its extreme degree leading at once to the maximum alienation--that is, abstraction and separation--of the worker from the production process and his/her maximum subsumption into the overall capitalist mechanism itself. Undoubtedly these movements were inseparable from America's historic rise as a dominant political and economic power. This is all the more understandable when one considers that

capitalism and bureaucracy seem, at least in certain configurations, inseparable from the processes of political democratization. For even the basic movement toward equalizing political representation seems necessarily to call upon the the establishment of a massive juridical and administrative apparatus if only to prevent the random exercise of privilege. That a cousin form of this bureaucratizing movement arose almost simultaneously in the revolutionary Soviet Union only to harden soon after into its Stalinist incarnation is neither a coincidence nor a contradiction. For it is a paradoxical characteristic of bureaucratic formation that its function, in Max Weber's own words, as a "precision instrument" of technical and political rationality, "which can put itself at the disposal of quite varied interests."

The rise of National Socialism in Germany in the '30s certainly capitalized on this pre-existing virtual mechanism as well as on the newly constituted, very specific form of "mass personality" that it fostered. What emerged was the specific mode of atrocity made possible by the abstract regulation of individuals reduced to the status of "files". It is this coexistence of "banality" and "evil" that distinguishes the modern bureaucratic holocaust of the Nazi regime from other historical massacres.

Fascism, bureaucratic socialism, capitalist democracy; these are unquestionably the constitutive social/political events which express western political rationality in the 20th century. Each presupposes and develops, in its own way, the specifically modern techniques of bureaucratic organization. It would already be enough to point out that Kafka's work stands at the foot of these great and ominous historical developments. But far more than this, it is in Kafka's work that one encounters for the first time in literature--no 19th century work, neither that of Balzac nor even of Dickens is so ontologically fraught with the abstract relations of social organization--an entire novelistic universe whose objects, spaces and relations are apprehended and manipulated in the same distorting though diabolically fecund terms of the emerging megamachine. One need only

consider the deep structuring role in Kafka's universe of the bureaucratic "distance-effect" discussed above to appreciate the extent to which Kafkaesque "irrationality" is always steeped in a broader, deeper and more importunate total rationality.<sup>2</sup>

Yet what emerges, almost paradoxically yet with absolute clarity from even the most cursory reading of Kafka's work is that the sweeping panorama of the 19th century novel has collapsed. Gone is the novelistic landscape, at once remarkable for its infinite capacity to contain and order phenomena from the most expansive perspective to the minutest detail, and for its capacity to lay out in three dimensions a profuse but legible web of social, political and psychological relations. The world of Kafka presses rather inward; it is close, circumscribed, airless, at once saturated and vacant. It is a world without overview, without the vast and gaping perspectives that once revealed the natural relations between things. Yet it is at the same time a world fraught with immense and untraversable distances, a world where what is missing are not the connections between things--for in Kafka everything is complicated, in the theological sense<sup>3</sup>, within everything else--but the very image of the order they have.

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<sup>2</sup> On bureaucracy in relation to Marx's concept of division of labor, to democracy, to files, and to the polyvocality of bureaucratic organization, see Max Weber, Economy and Society, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, 3 vols. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968) vol. III, pp. 956-1003. On the language of Kafkan narration and its relation to bureaucracy, and especially on the problematization of this relation, cf. Gunther Anders, Franz Kafka, trans. A. Steer and A.K. Thorby (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> "Complication" from the medieval pairing complicare/explicare is one of the earliest proto-concepts of immanence. It derives from the Platonic concept of participation though of course becomes

The task of Kafka the writer was perhaps no different from that of "K." the land-surveyor in The Castle or the accused in The Trial. It was, on the one hand, to chart the topography of this peculiar emergent world, to discover the laws of how things combine, and on the other, to trace by trial and error the mysterious principle of its functioning. But at the same time no sketch or figure will be anywhere offered up, unless it be one of those deliberately scrambled and illegible images like the Officer's blueprints for the inscription apparatus in the Penal Colony.<sup>4</sup> For in Kafka, the task is no longer to trace the visible form of the world by recourse to an external schema or representational mode, but to somehow espouse its very substance, to become of the world by becoming one with it.

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"theological" only when later developed and adapted by Plotinus (emanative cause, Enneads), Proclus, Boethius (complectiri, The Consolation of Philosophy), The Chartres School, and finally Cusanus (complicatio, De Docta Ignorantia). Cf. fn. 22 below.

<sup>4</sup> Such figures of indifferenciability abound in Kafka's work. The Castle alone offers dozens of examples: K. considers his two assistants as one man (this is later echoed and underscored in the pair of officials Sordini and Sortini), the town's telephones supply a cacophony of voices instead of a message, signatures on any written messages are invariably illegible, Bürger's monologue degenerates into a formless flow of gibberish, the landlady's photograph of Klammer is so unreadable that it becomes an object of pure speculation and conjecture, K. finds vocation and life so profoundly interlaced in the town that "sometimes one might think they had exchanged places," and finally of course, the Castle's relationship to the town is, from the very outset, never anything other than an indifferenciabile and absolute coextensivity. Franz Kafka, The Castle (New York: Schocken Books, 1978); Das Schloss (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1981).

It is in Kafka then that one may begin to speak not only of a new narrative order of space-time, but of a new topographical mode of writing.<sup>5</sup> Problems of transmissibility and non-transmissibility, affiliation and separation, and of the complex relations of physical parts to (metaphysical) wholes, now replace the traditional literary meditation of interiority: meaning, psychology, truth.<sup>6</sup> The subject--either as protagonist or narrator--is no longer continuous, stable or identical with itself, but is caught in a perpetual, complex, and nearly imperceptible process of variation and transformation. Now an objection will quite likely be raised here, for clearly one will argue, no character, neither in life nor in literature, could withstand a close and rigorous scrutiny that sought to reveal the flux and discontinuity beneath its self-identical persistence in being. But this is not the question. Let us, at random, take Tom Jones, Lucien de Rubempré or even Ivan Karamazov

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. fn. 58 below.

<sup>6</sup> Theodor Adorno: " 'For the last time psychology'. . . Immersion in the inner space of individuation, which culminates in such self-contemplation, stumbles upon the principle of individuation, the postulation of the self by the self, officially sanctioned by philosophy, the mythic defiance. [In Kafka] the subject seeks to make amends by abandoning this defiance." In a comparison of Kafka with Freud: "To come closest to understanding the relation between the explorer of the unconscious and the parabolist of impenetrability, one must remember that Freud conceived of an archetypal scene such as the murder of the primal father, a prehistorical narrative such as that of Moses, or the young child's observation of its parents having sexual relations, not as products of the imagination but in large measure as real events. In such eccentricities Kafka follows Freud with the devotion of a Till Eulenspiegel to the limits of absurdity." (my underscoring) Adorno goes on to compare Kafka's work with the detective novel genre, where the "world of things" takes precedence over "the abstract subject." Prisms (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981) pp. 270, 251, 265.

as examples. The question to be asked is: Are these characters--however dialogically constituted they may be, and however unsure of their metaphysical grounding--constituted as subjects, that is, as formal and organic essence? And does this essence function as a constant, despite the fact that it is perpetually introduced into equations where it is challenged and put into dynamic relation with variables of the most chaotic order? The answer invariably is yes, though in the case of Ivan Karamazov one wonders whether one is not already witnessing the emergence of something new. Either these questions all reduce to one: What is the relation of these characters to their respective worlds, that is, with what type of individuation are we dealing?

On the one hand, one would have the individuation of essences (realization) and the development of forms (representation): it is here that subjectivity is produced as the defining characteristic of an "individual" ("character" or "subject" in the classic and recent senses respectively), creating of this individual a first term in relation to which everything else differs: the world, other individuals, etc. Formal or Ideal essence is given here as the principium individuationis, or in other words, the principle of individuation is understood as preceding every actual instance of individuation as its substratum, that is, as if it were an already existing possibility that needed only to be realized.

But, one is impelled to ask, can the principle of individuation be found, as I attempted to do in Ch. 1, on the side of the event rather than on the side of forms and essences? After all how do we account for the fact that in this essentially static mirror-world of reflected Ideas and Forms there is nonetheless a constant production of innovation and change? it may be possible then to oppose to this kind of individuation another type whose principle this time is developed in relation to the new, that is, in relation to its conditions of emergence (as opposed to "formation"). Now these "conditions" are once again inseparable from a temporal order; they always imply an ever renewable present that is complex and multiple, a continuous proliferation of divergent or singular

instants/points. In fact, every new mixture of a "now" and a "this" suffices to constitute such a singularity. The world could then be seen to unfold as a perpetual production of individualities continually actualizing themselves in blocs or ensembles of moments/relations rather than realizing themselves in eternal forms.<sup>7</sup>

But in what could this singularity or individuality exist if not in subjective essence? It would exist precisely in the ever shifting pattern of mixtures or composites: both internal ones--the body as site marked and traversed by forces which converge upon it in continuous variation; and external ones--the capacity of any individuated substance to combine and recombine with other bodies or elements (ensembles), both influencing their actions and undergoing influence by them. The "subject" then is but a synthetic unit falling at the halfway point or interface of two more fundamental systems of articulation: the first comprised of the fluctuating microscopic relations and mixtures of which the subject is made up, the second of the macro-blocs of relations or ensembles into which it enters. The image produced at the interface of these two systems--that which replaces, yet is all too often mistaken for, subjective essence--may in its turn have its own individuality characterized with great rigor. For each mixture at this level introduces into the bloc a certain number of defining capacities which determine both what the "subject" is capable of bringing to pass outside itself and what it is capable of receiving (undergoing) in terms of effects.<sup>8</sup> It is in this sense that the ground is brought forward to embrace the form, and the subject dissolves back into the very immanence from which, I have sought to argue, the [central problems

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<sup>7</sup> On the difference between actual and real cf. discussion below pp. 89-90.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. below my discussion of Umwelt theory and the work of Jakob Johan von Uexkull.

of the] culture of modernity arises. It is precisely this immanence that characterizes the world of Kafka's fiction.<sup>9</sup>

Thus metamorphosis, in a profound sense, is in Kafka's case opposed to development. The principle of "character" no longer belongs to a naturalistic (geometric) universe governed by "rational" and organic development, where these latter are determined both by a protagonist's displacement through space and time, but also his/her spiritual and biological evolution and growth. Character abandons the usual linear processes of accumulation and embeds itself in a different field of movement that can only be called the realm of the intensive.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The principle of individuation known as "haecceitas," first used by Duns Scotus and his school in the 13th century, is sometimes used today to describe these instant/points or "singularities" as I have called them here. Cf. Gilbert Simondon, L'individu et sa genese physico-biologique (Paris: PUF, 1964), Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, Dialogues (Paris: Flammarion, 1977) pp. 110-115.

<sup>10</sup> Intensive may be understood for the moment in its simple opposition to extensive, following Bergson's distinction between qualitative (intensive) multiplicities, and quantitative (spatial, extensive) ones. The qualitative or intensive multiplicities are defined as those which cannot be divided without changing in nature.

This is because extensive, quantitative multiplicities are actual and discontinuous and, unlike intensive ones which are virtual and continuous, can divide without changing in nature precisely because they change only in degree. Duration, according to Bergson, is the milieu in which continuous multiplicities are distributed. These multiplicities are fundamentally intensive and are characterized by a process of continuous "actualization." The becoming actual of the virtual proceeds by differentiation rather than

One of Kafka's central motifs then concerns the problem of passage from one state to another. But what exactly is a state? For Kafka, "states" are never simply interior or autonomous moments but always have to do with larger--often immaterial--ensembles in which individual elements are caught up. It is these ensembles which Kafka's work attempts to map, and it is the passage from one such ensemble to another, a purely intensive and not extensive movement, that constitutes the dynamism of the work.<sup>11</sup>

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representation (reflection)(see discussion below, pp. 87-90)--and is alone capable of accounting for the production of the singular and the new. Bergson called this creative movement "élan vital:" the principle of individuation conceived as "immanent cause." Clearly this definition of intensity does not imply a merely interior state. Henri Bergson, Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience, and L'Evolution créatrice (Paris: PUF, 1941).

<sup>11</sup> Much of the present analysis might at first seem already to apply in the most commonplace way to other literature, eg. Romantic poetry, even in wholesale fashion to the entirety of Modern literature (Eliot, Joyce, Proust, Woolf, etc.) though only if one fails to recognize the following distinctions. First, the notion of intensity is used here to characterize a real, physical milieu, a universe in the concrete sense, not simply consciousness or an internal or psychological state. And unlike Romantic poetry the Umwelt that corresponds to the protagonist's perceptual apparatus is not suspended "out there" in isolation from a self or as a field of natural but distant signs accessible through the body's senses nor introjected and infused with private meaning. It is a dense network of concrete ensembles of which the protagonist is an integral part, yet which is not available, as such, to perception. Much of literary Modernism certainly was tending in this direction, Kafka perhaps only its most pure example.

The Kafkan narrative is itself a consequence of these same attributes. Events do not have the character of succession, they do not concatenate evenly, follow or flow through one another as effects might be said to unfold from causes. Things (i.e. narrative objects: characters, places, events) no longer necessarily find their links, nor their sense, in the flow of abstract time.<sup>12</sup> Characters for example, bear little orientation to a past or a future, and certainly none at all to a real, that is, supranarrative historical time. What's more, the works are almost singularly devoid of Events in the traditional sense.<sup>13</sup> For anything that could legitimately be called an "Event" seems

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<sup>12</sup> What I refer to here as "abstract" time, is a linear, homogeneous or numerical time, as opposed to pure "duration" in the Bergsonian sense: the real time in which everything exists as virtuality, that is, as intensive, as becoming. Abstract time is measurable, spatialized time, in other words a time that can be divided without changing in kind or nature. It is what Bergson called an impure composite. It is the (spatialized) time of the clock, the fixed, external ground against which events occur, not the actualizing flow within which they arise.

<sup>13</sup> An Event with uppercase <E> may be defined as an objectively significant (signifying, despotic: cf. Ch. 4), historically measurable occurrence that extends its effects simultaneously into a quasi-totality of phenomena, thereby gathering reality around itself like a center and commanding a certain measure of space. (Such "Events" are analogous to what constitutes, in Jean-Francois Lyotard's terms, the Grand narratives of a still metaphysically determined Enlightenment Modernism.) It may be said, on the other hand, that it is precisely the development and especially the problematic treatment of random occurrences and peripheral or minor happenings (as well as "petits récits") that characterizes much of Modern literature from Musil to Blanchot. These effects, which are in fact the extension of the historical process of the "mixture of

either already to have happened, preceding the narrative as its dubious and distant cause, or else seems perennially just on the verge of occurring. Yet they never do occur in narrative time, properly speaking, as in a before or an after. They exist rather in some atemporal, virtual space, already incorporated into phenomena, already contracted in, and unfolding from, the real.

But what precisely is this relation between the virtual and the real? It is in Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896) that this question is first, and most explicitly addressed. Here the theory of memory is developed as that through which the past is able to co-exist with the present, as a virtuality to be either actualized or not. Indeed virtuality (multiplicity) may best be understood in its distinction from "possibility" (Identity). For whereas the possible is opposed to the real, the virtual is opposed to the actual. Now the possible, by definition, has no reality just as the virtual has no actuality, yet the virtual, nonetheless, is always real. This deeper distinction is important for indeed everything depends on how the possible comes to "realize" itself. Two factors may be said to determine this process--that of resemblance and that of limitation. Resemblance, because the real is supposed to conform to the image of the possible (possible as image, resemblance) that it realizes; limitation, because not all "possibles" can or are realized, something must limit that which may pass into

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styles" as far as possible beyond the domain of a naive, positivist realism, were supported by a new and emerging form of "literacy" fostered by the ontology of the cinema (see fn. 29), the collapse of the external universal viewpoint, and the rampant psychologism that dominated the novel for decades and which, by offering it refuge, ultimately preserved this form in its quasi-integrity. Significantly, this third factor does not apply to Kafka's work. On Grand narratives and petits récits cf. Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1984).

reality. The virtual on the other hand does not have to be realized, only actualized or, let us say, incarnated. Crucial here is the fact that the actual does not resemble the virtual as something preformed and pre-existing itself. The rule of virtual-actual is always one of difference or creation. Realization (of a possible) and creation (through actualization-differentiation) are in fact two very different processes, the first supposes a world already formed and given in advance (preformationism), the second a continuous, positive and dynamic process of differentiation and evolution (creationism). This is because actualization occurs in time and with time, whereas realization, by limiting itself to the mere unfolding of what pre-exists actually destroys novelty and annihilates time. In the first case, time is real, in the second it is artificially derived and abstract in relation to events. Thus for Bergson metaphysics is based on the fallacy that there is a "realm of possibility" underlying the world of actuality. Such a system he argued, at the basis equally of mechanism and finalism, is incapable of thinking--and in actual fact excludes--the concept of novelty.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the essential tensions of Kafka's universe follow from these distinctions. Consider how the "beyond"--regardless of whether this is understood as an "inside" to which one painstakingly seeks admittance, or an "outside" which serves ex machina as a divine guarantor of origins and ultimate meanings--is always at a distant, even infinite, remove. No message emitted from its depths--and these depths contain nothing but messages emitted with implacable constancy--will ever arrive. All of Kafka's work may be said to be lodged within the wait for a message from a realm

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Henri Bergson, "The Possible and the Real," in The Creative Mind (New York: The Wisdom Library, n.d.), Introduction to Metaphysics (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961), Gilles Deleuze, Différence et répétition (Paris: PUF, 1968) pp. 272-75, Le Bergsonisme (Paris: PUF, 1968) ch. 5.

beyond, not for what it might contain but rather because the very achievement of such a transmission would imply the existence of an unbroken tissue, however convoluted, linking recipient and Law in a seamless emanation and across a single divine substance. But no such transmissions are ever successfully completed, which leads to a more fundamental set of questions: What links the here and now to what exists both before and after, as well as beyond and below it? Is this world here, these events, anything more than a series of accidents freely adrift on a shifting sea of indetermination? What filament or anchor links them to the terra firma of the Law, eternal, infinite and absolute? Being itself suddenly appears hopelessly cut off from its substratum and now risks a type of mortal shipwreck, or worse, it risks losing itself utterly at sea without hope even of this negative deliverance. In Kafka, the ship of Being has been made rudderless and subject only to the peripeties of winds, currents and tides:

"I am here more than that I do not know, further than that I cannot go. My ship has no rudder and it is driven by the wind that blows in the undermost regions of death."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "The Hunter Gracchus," Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1946) p. 230. In this story the mythical 4th century hunter falls from a precipice while chasing a chamois. The fall is fatal yet for reasons unknown he is unable to die out of this world. The bark or death ship meant to carry him to the eternal beyond loses its way: "a wrong turn of the wheel, a moment's absence of mind on the pilot's part, the distraction of my lovely native country, I cannot tell what it was; I only know this, that I remained on earth and that ever since my ship has sailed earthly waters. So I, who asked for nothing better than to live among my mountains, travel after my death through all the lands of the earth." p. 228.

On the other hand what one discovers, in the default of this transcendence and founding link to a beyond, is always a massive and complex mechanism<sup>16</sup> comprised of an infinity of little parts, miniscule events and fragments--all intrinsically empty and meaningless--yet all functioning together without forming an apprehensible whole. Each part of the mechanism is linked to the others not through its meaning but through its functioning, through their mutual partaking of a complex event (or complex of events) which themselves have no relation to a substratum. Reality reveals itself, however partially, and never more than partially, in the immediate, the fragmentary,

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This story simultaneously traces the two themes of the impossibility of transcendence (passing to a beyond) and the theme of life as a dying into the world, a rudderless, meaningless wandering without real beginning or end.

These themes would later find their most acute elaboration in the work of Samuel Beckett beginning with his trilogy of novels onward. Furthermore the idea of rudderlessness elicits the extremely rich and complex problem regarding the role of objects in such "death in life" narratives-- Beckett's partial objects and aids to locomotion: crutches, broken bicycles, bum legs, walking sticks, etc. and of course the strange, equally sparse, but different range of objects in Kafka--Odradek, the Penal Colony apparatus, the flying bucket, books, brooms, buttons, tops, teeth, human bridges, stairs that grow, doors that multiply, balls, photos and articles of clothing in The Trial, Leni's webbed fingers, Georg's box and the uncle's desk in Amerika, and so on.

<sup>16</sup> The ship, the hotel and later the Nature Theatre in Amerika, the judicial apparatus in The Trial which is at least as complicated as the world itself, and then some, the civic bureaucracy of The Castle, the imperial system of rule in "The Great Wall of China," and so on.

the minute, never through the monolithic Event whose origin and meaning arrives externally constituted and given in a beyond or another dimension (the possible). The event now becomes immanent to the real though it is as if in so doing it had to be divided into a million small pieces to be woven all the more indistinguishably into the very fabric of Being itself.<sup>17</sup>

Kafka's world as we said is on first impression a still one, without the habitual grand lines of progress, development or climax.<sup>18</sup> Its narrative seems rather to develop in terms of fine hairline movements and frozen images, and this latter undoubtedly explains the importance of

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<sup>17</sup> The "learned ignorance" of the philosopher character in the story "The Top" expresses perfectly both the heuristic model of knowledge in the "complicated" Kafkan universe as well as the pantheist theme:

"he believed that the understanding of any detail. . .was sufficient for the understanding of all things. For this reason he did not busy himself with great problems, it seemed to him uneconomical. Once the smallest detail was understood, then everything was understood, which was why he busied himself only with the spinning of the top."

Franz Kafka, Complete Stories, p.444. Cf. also fns. 22, 44.

<sup>18</sup> Most critics have stopped here, preferring to describe--though often admirably--what they take to be the lineaments of an apparent Kafkan stasis. Several footnotes throughout the present study refer to the best of these. An interesting exception however--the only one I know of--is Austin Warren's observation that Kafka's world is no different from that of "a Mack Sennett comedy--one of chase and pursuit, of intense movement, horizontal and vertical" in "Franz Kafka," Kafka: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Ronald Gray (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962) p.124. Emphasis mine.

photographs and snapshots in the work as well as in Kafka's life.<sup>19</sup> Yet it would be a mistake to treat too simply or literally the notion of "images", for their ultimate use is not always primarily visual or representational.<sup>20</sup> These images comprise nothing less than a concrete plane of the real, a

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<sup>19</sup> Kafka placed a great value on photographs, both as a technique for collapsing and expanding distances, and for breaking down grand and vertiginously sweeping movements (love/marriage) into fine, manageable ones. The photograph, like the gesture freezes movement, though by no means to immobilize it completely. The true purpose seems to be to frame it in order to transpose it from one ensemble or series to another, in other words, to permit the excision of specific elements so that they may be placed in relation to an entirely different series of objects, or affects. This "ralenti" effect bears more than a merely incidental relation to the cinematic montage in which, in addition to the unique mode of progression through successive still images, any object may be put in relation with any other merely by placing it, however arbitrarily, into the same sequence. Lev Kuleshov's famous montage experiments in Russia in the late teens and early '20s only slightly predate Kafka's. Kafka gave over an enormous amount of time over to the analysis of photographs. See for example the correspondance around his first exchange of photographs with Felice, Letters to Felice, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born (New York: Schocken Books, 1973) pp. 29, 62, 65, 67, 75, 82-3, 84, 88, 90, 91-2. For a rather acute example of a literal montage-effect in Kafka's narrative use of photographs, see the lengthy, but precisely framed parenthetical excursus in "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor," Complete Stories, pp. 178-79.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari have argued in their Kafka, that photographs can function only as representations and therefore as zones of blockage of affect, of destructive regression to interiority and subjectivity. The matter however is far from being quite so simple. cf. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Kafka, pour une littérature mineure (Paris: Minuit, 1975). It ought to be noted here that many of my

constellation of elements and fragments projected onto a surface, that is, an ensemble, or site of a potential transformation of states. Every image (those by means of which the narrative proceeds as well as those literal, photographic ones that are embedded as objects within it) implies a world, at once autonomous and connected in perpendicular fashion to every other. Every world conjoins and intersects with every other one. We may agree with Erich Heller who has written that Kafka's works "take place in infinity,"<sup>21</sup> though one is obliged to add that it is an infinity of a very special kind; not an infinity of extension, but one of an unlimited complication in the sense developed by theological philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Every moment and every point in this universe constitutes a

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arguments throughout this study rely heavily on the methodological writings of Michel Foucault as well as on the work of Gilles Deleuze including certain aspects of his work with Félix Guattari (ie. A Thousand Plateaus). The Kafka work cited above is unquestionably their weakest effort (excessively reductive and often clumsily structuralist in approach) and one in which Deleuze's influence was clearly at a minimum. The work nonetheless inaugurates--and in this, no other study comes even close--the possibility and the necessity of a contemporary ethical reading of Kafka's works unhindered by the baggage of a sclerotic, and in its own way reductive, literary critical-hermeneutic tradition. However, I have used many arguments taken from Deleuze and Guattari's other works to refute many of the hasty, Procrustean, or insufficiently subtle propositions made in their Kafka. In relation to the present example, for instance, I have found it more useful to develop their own concepts of post-signifying and passional regimes, and of faciality to explain Kafka's use of photographs in particular and images in general. Cf. especially my discussion in ch. 4 of the "double turning away."

<sup>21</sup> Erich Heller, The Disinherited Mind (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1975) p.200.

<sup>22</sup> This term was developed by renaissance neo-Platonism, particularly in the work of Nicholas Cusanus. Complicatio describes the enfoldedness of the many, including all opposites, in the One, or the

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(mystical) ascent from the many and the particular to the One (the infinite). Its complementary term, explicatio, describes the reverse process, an unfolding of the many from the One, or the descent from Unity (God) to particularity (the world). Like the ancient neo-Platonist concept of emanation the complicatio-explicatio relation attempts to reconcile the Platonic doctrine of transcendence or separation of realms (existence on one side and ideality or "meaning" on the other) with the Aristotelian concept of development which posits a continuous, if graduated path between opposites. The fundamental difference however is that whereas the earlier schemes sought to maintain the transcendence of the One and the centeredness of the cosmos, the later one seems to argue for the immanence of the many in the One, a move, one of whose tasks was to bring the infinite into the realm of the sensible. For if the "center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere," this is because all of Being, though it is certainly the explication of the Absolute, is also present as mirrored, or complicated, in each individual part. Being may thus be actualized in either, or both, directions at once--in the direction of abstraction and unity as well as in the direction of the concrete and the multiple.

Transcendence, and the doctrine of the graduated universe, were weakened here by God's "immanation" in the Many (all things). The principle of the coincidentia oppositorum simultaneously enriched the minutiae of existence but also flattened Being by giving it a kind of overall equality (God existed more or less equally everywhere, as do all opposite terms) which ultimately gave way to a new field of virtuality or immanence. This system laid to waste Aristotle's geocentrism and prepared the ground for the pantheistic cosmologies of Bruno and Spinoza. It is also, undoubtedly, the philosophical origin of the idea of an expressive universe.

These and other Cusan notions seem indispensable to a proper understanding of the Kafkan cosmos. For it is here that the "modern" (renaissance) problem of a hierarchical vs. univocal Being is given a fully political dimension. I have whenever possible, related the emergence of a particular kind of immanence in Kafka's work to that of a contemporary, Henri Bergson. The complicatio/explicatio doublet appears in Bergson as contraction/detension (virtual/actual).

Ernst Cassirer, The Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy; Giordano Bruno, Cause, Principle and Unity, tr. with intro. by Jack Lindsay (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1962, 1976); Erwin Panofsky, "Die Perspektive als 'symbolische' Form," Aufsätze zu Grundfragen der Kunstwissenschaft; Frances Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1964); Alexander Koyré, From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1957); Gilles Deleuze,

crossroads, the need for a decision, and the vertigo of an accelerated escape--real, not fantastic--into an alternate world.<sup>23</sup> Writing becomes less a question of representing a world than of explicating or unfolding the many potential worlds complicated within every point or instant and of tracing the routes and connective pathways between. Not the horizontal line of development, superhighway of the grand Event, but the diagonal line of connection and changes of state, webwork of microscopic fissures and openings. Reality here develops as a multiplicity of hypotheses continually etching themselves into the concrete, a reality founded not in Truth or given a priori, but recreated at each point anew through minute, specific gestures, actions or speculations.<sup>24</sup> This world is more like the one of Cusanus or Bruno: infinite, centerless and complicated.

The qualities of such a world are nowhere so deeply inscribed as in Kafka's descriptive techniques. We have already noted the absence of "rational" (continuous, homogeneous, etc.)

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Spinoza ou le problème de l'expression (Paris: Minuit, 1968); Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory (New York: Zone Books, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> "Because I could not help it, because my senses were reeling, [I] called a brief and unmistakable 'Hallo!' breaking into human speech, and with this outburst broke into the human community..." A Report to an Academy," The Complete Stories, p. 257. There is probably no better example than this of the theory of individuation based on fluctuating mixtures and changes of state.

<sup>24</sup> Exemplary among critics who have seen Kafka's works as experiments or hypotheses pushed to logical (or illogical) outcomes are Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Modern Tradition," The Reconstructionist, Apr. 3, 1959, pp.8-14; Gunther Anders, Franz Kafka, p. 52; and Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka.

time-space relations in this narrative universe. This may now be seen as linked to the absence of traditional novelistic overview, that is, the lack of a fixed point of vantage or focus external to the world depicted. The viewpoint in Kafka tends, as I noted above, toward the microscopic, the extremely proximate, and the apparently insignificant or contextless detail. Wholes neither exist, nor are constituted within the realm of perception. This microscopy also plays its role in diminishing "temporal perspective;"<sup>25</sup> for there are no true yesterdays or tomorrows, no temporal depths or backgrounding from which events emerge, only an intensified and autonomous present. Everything is presented as if pushed up to an ever murky foreground so that characters seem to be born each day (if not each scene) anew. If particular descriptive elements or relations remain constant from one "frame" to the next, this is due only to chance or else the narrator's explicit decision that they do so. For example, the vertigo that is an inherent effect of "Description of a Struggle" is due precisely to this continual shifting and inconstancy of usually stable elements. What is important here is that the main protagonist himself does not experience the vertigo, which, in a sense, is why we do. We experience the labile, shifting, always incomplete and dislocated world through the protagonist's only nominally unified "I," a world that is manifestly not a problem for him, and one which he manages to navigate with the same seamless, ramifying trajectory represented by the {I, II i, II ii, II iii a, . . .} nomenclature that divides and makes cohere the story's parts. For this story is generated by means of a forced convergence of three distinct diegetic conventions: narrative, description (Beschreibung), and the promenade. Here

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<sup>25</sup> This notion is used in the same sense as Auerbach develops it in his Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U. Press, 1953). Cf. especially p.7.

"description" of course overcomes the other two, but only because the pseudo-parallelism of narrative and promenade--for these are neither analogies of one another nor are they coextensive--is first exposed as such so that their asymmetry may then be deployed to such spectacular effect: not to perpetuate a linearity (narrative) but rather to propagate singularities. Such a potent narrative technique is so simply achieved merely by exploiting the technical and ontological possibilities of the ever-renewable and always virtual chance encounter.<sup>26</sup> What results is an unmooring of narrative flow and the release of new, less organized movements such as "precipitation" and "drift."<sup>27</sup> This dis-organizing tendency caused by the friction of the

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<sup>26</sup> This very element, conceived however in a more superficial sense, would later be exploited and fetishized by the French Surrealists Guillaume Apollinaire and André Breton. It is also worth recalling here the brilliant if eccentric hypothesis of Benjamin which derives the incessant breaks in the continuity of modern existence from the shock effects that the worker experiences at his machine, and that the citizen experiences in the metropolitan crowd. Such atemporality both favors chance and hazardous occurrences--thus the cults of the boulevards and especially of gambling--and annihilates the time of labor and economic accumulation and imbues events with a special indeterminacy and volatility. . . even at the cost of their enduring meaning. Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1976) pp. 134-45.

<sup>27</sup> Both of these of movements, which properly might be characterizable only as modal intensities such as occur in a musical continuum, have yet to be formalized in a literary critical context. It is worth noting in passing that the German tradition provides what are perhaps the purest forms of these qualities. It might be said that precipitation belongs to the Kleistian narrative just as drift would find its fullest expression only in the modern day post Kafka film "narratives" of Wim Wenders. In Wenders' most recent work for

asymmetric narrative/promenade convergence finds a correlate in the motif of the continual crumbling--literally dislocating--and redressing of the body as it occurs throughout the story. This bizarre process however serves perfectly to underscore this work's essential tension: the (ironic) development of a narrative "form" which is in its nature radically opposed to and ultimately undermined by the propagation of pure points-moments, individuations, singularities, haecceitas.

The extraordinary proximity of the subject to the world and its contents is a prime quality of the "Kafkaesque" and may be likened to the newly emerging cinematic techniques of description. Walter Benjamin compared these new camera-based techniques to a "surgical" penetration of the body. He opposed this to the typical, more removed position, the "natural distance" from reality that characterizes the theatrical or painterly gaze. By retaining the natural distance from phenomena, theater permits the simultaneous apprehension of organized wholes and the organic relations that exist between parts. The painter or theatergoer obtains a total, or at least totalizing, picture of reality, but only because s/he does not penetrate into it, that is, s/he forgoes

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example, Wings of Desire, the desultory pattern of human encounters is rendered as a musical convergence of errant voices momentarily passing into individuated presences only soon to pass back into the indistinct ground of choral babbling. The angels drift through this field, producing narrative, or narrative fragments, through their capacity to isolate momentarily a single voice from the dense and tangled murmur. They do this merely by randomly linking up to another drifting mortal body, individualities existing now truly only as pairs (conjunctions), or as pairing-events (anchored to a haecceitas), that is, in "struggle." Within German expressionist cinema itself the two terms of the pair might be typologically represented by Wiene's Dr. Caligari (precipitation) and Lang's M (drift, replete with musical theme).

his/her own potential position within it. The cameraman however, like the surgeon, penetrates deeply into the body of reality at this or that specific place, to isolate and render precisely a single, previously invisible detail. These separate details are then recombined, though not built up into the totalizing space of "natural" perception (for the very dream of such a total space had been definitively abolished by cinema) rather, they are arbitrarily assembled in a synthetic narrative continuum according to entirely new laws (montage).<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, the cinema owed its capacity simultaneously to augment and fragment reality to its penetrative function and its multiplication of perspectives. It was in cinema that it first became possible to montage vast panoramas in a sequence with tiny, and otherwise imperceptible details, so that these latter, by staking the same claim to reality and having the same capacity to fill a frame, were given an ontological status equal to (if not greater than) that of the composed and totalized world that offers itself up to "natural" perception. Second, not only was there an infinity of individual details capable of standing in as the full ontological substitute of traditional "world-shots," but there was an infinity of different angles, an infinity of different distances, mises-en-scene, perspectives, possible combinations with other objects, and positions in the chain of montage. In brief, what is brought literally into the realm of everyday human perception, though here in a discontinuous mode is the same phenomenon whose development so strongly marked the 17th century--then in a continuous mode and not at all in the realm of everyday perception--

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) pp. 228-38. Eisenstein's reflections on the importance of Kabuki theater for cinema, and particularly his concept of a "monism of ensembles" are equally important here. Sergei Eisenstein, "The Unexpected," Film Form (New York: Harcourt, 1977) pp. 20-22.

with the invention of the microscope and the telescope. These two technologies merely concretized a problem that had already come to dominate Renaissance thought and aesthetics: the reconciliation of "the two infinities"--the infinitely large and the infinitely small.<sup>29</sup> It was in the diegesis of cinematic montage that this problem, one might say, is ultimately resolved for the senses. Needless to say cinema is the art par excellence of illusion, and this is due to the fact that it proceeds by means of exclusion; it claims to construct perfect and integral worlds but, relatively speaking, with an extreme economy of details.

Even in these purely technical developments it is possible to recognize the particular physico-cosmological conditions upon which Kafka's "theological" solutions were brought to bear. Modernity in general and cinematic ontology in particular re-posed the classic philosophical theme regarding the relations of the One (the good infinity) and the Many (the bad infinity). For how many separate details are needed to comprise the world in its integrality? And since details can be shown to proliferate inexhaustibly (as I have said, even a single detail offers to the camera an infinity of aspects) this direction of inquiry cannot be other than futile. Kafka's own strategy thus often tends toward a negative or apophatic theology, that is, the mystical/mathematical procedure by which one arrives at a state of Wholeness (the good infinity) through elimination of enriching though fragmenting and infinitizing detail.

Finally, it is worth considering in what way precisely the penetration of the camera eye into the continuum of objects actually transforms these objects into "expressive," even animistic entities, or at the very least, into "singularities" each expressing the world from their own specific and unique perspective. The camera eye is in no simple way a mere extension of a subjective point of

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<sup>29</sup> See fn. 13.

view, it is a windowed object that transforms other objects into windows too. For the camera, Being is distributed (more or less) equally everywhere and is reflected, and complicated, in every detail.

The pervasive and oppressive closeness to things in Kafka, though it depends on much that was first worked out in cinematic ontology, is here fully assimilated to a technique whose effective purpose is to deprive the world of anything that might resemble a larger or more comprehensive meaning. Kafka's genius was to situate his work within this new field--in a way to occupy it like a terrain--and to conduct a series of operations from, in and on it. One might well say of Kafka's narratives that in organizing themselves in this way, they constitute not a strategic space, but rather a tactical one:

J'appelle "stratégie" le calcul des rapports de force qui devient possible à partir du moment où un sujet de vouloir et de pouvoir (un propriétaire, une entreprise, une cité, une institution scientifique) est isolable d'un "environnement." Elle postule un lieu susceptible d'être circonscrit comme un propre et donc de servir de base à une gésation de ses relations avec une exteriorité distincte (des concurrents, des adversaires, une clientèle, des "cibles" ou "objets" de recherche). La rationalité politique, économique ou scientifique s'est construite sur ce modèle stratégique.

J'appelle au contraire "tactique" un calcul qui ne peut pas compter sur un propre, ni donc sur une frontière qui distingue l'autre comme une totalité visible. La tactique n'a pour lieu que celui de l'autre. Elle s'y insinue, fragmentairement, sans le saisir en son entier, sans pouvoir le tenir à distance. Elle ne dispose pas de base ou capitaliser ses avantages, préparer ses expansions et assurer une indépendance par rapport aux circonstances. Le "propre" est une victoire du lieu sur le temps. Au contraire, du fait de son non-lieu, la tactique dépend du temps, vigilante à y "saisir au vol" des possibilités de profit. Ce qu'elle gagne, elle ne le

garde pas. Il lui faut constamment jouer avec les événements pour en faire des "occasions." Sans cesse le faible doit tirer parti de forces qui lui sont étrangères.<sup>30</sup>

The principle difference between strategy and tactics then, has to do with the space in which they are deployed. Or rather, the "space" by definition remains the same--being wholly attributed to, even constructed by the strategic regime--what differs are the modes of negotiating that space, of holding it, or holding oneself in it. Strategy proceeds by projecting, fixing and consolidating; it circumscribes in order to oppose (this to that, the Same to the Other). Strategy belongs to the discrete totalizing order of space; it is comprised of distinct things and "proper" places. It is oriented toward the domination and mastery of global phenomena: a territory or domain. Tactical regimes on the other hand, do not exist on the same level, nor are they oriented toward the same types of phenomena. Tactics does not have a "proper" place, it belongs to a non-space which is that of a shifting, transitory and volatile materiality, a materiality of flux and movement, in a word, the materiality of the event.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Michel de Certeau, L'invention du quotidien: 1. Arts de faire (Paris:10/18, n.d.) pp. 20-1. Cf. also pp. 82-92. Untranslatable quote.

<sup>31</sup> The theory of a non-empirical materiality, which is not merely that of meanings or relations, is a cornerstone of post-Nietzschean genealogical method. The phrase "un matérialisme de l'incorporel" is Michel Foucault's (L'Ordre du discours, p.60), the theory of events and incorporeals in general is elaborated by Foucault in The Archaeology of Knowledge (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), by Deleuze in Logique du sens, by Foucault on Deleuze in "Theatrum Philosophicum" and by Deleuze on Foucault in his Foucault (Paris: Minuit, 1988) chs. 1 and 2.

Tactics embraces emergences, irruptions, changes--the continually individuating flow of stochastic durations. It is herein that tactics intervenes not in space but in time, and in this sense it may be said always to produce its adversarial effects within the domain of power yet without actually opposing, or confronting it as such. There are two reasons for this. First, tactics does not have a form separate from a content (such as the pair State/Army), a performance separate from a competence; tactics is both given and actualized only in its own movements. Furthermore, tactics proceeds not by global oppositions but by local interventions, for it is effectively immanent not only to itself but also to the general medium of strategic (institutional) power in whose interstices it plays. Tactics does not give itself distinct objects (oppositions) or totalized schemas, it relies on its very "homelessness," its indistinction, and its "weakness" as a screen for a perpetual mobilization: it embraces the ceaseless individuation of forces and in turn recognizes only the proliferation--and instability--of singular moments.

This then introduces the second reason: tactics are never autonomous but always contingent. They depend on the very conditions--power--that they both lack and seek to subvert. They mine it blindly, provisionally, and always at intimate proximity from within. Tactics proceeds, one might say, by redistributing the macro effects of power into a micrological "space" that strategy itself, precisely because it is strong (and bound to territory/propre) cannot enter. Consider the advice Bürgel gives to K. in The Castle:

When one is new here, the obstacles appear quite insurmountable. . .but take note, now and again opportunities do indeed arise, which scarcely conform to the general

scheme of things, opportunities in which, through a glance or a sign of trust, more can be achieved than through the exhaustive efforts of a lifetime. <sup>32</sup>

Tactics is based on mobility and the capacity to redeploy relations of the fixed. It thus favors the "weak" by reconfiguring the theater of contact and establishing a new scale of thresholds and effects. This finally is why tactics cannot be oriented to a triumph--after all over what?--only to perpetuating its own movement and effects. First of all tactics, being the political modality of the disenfranchised, cannot "store" its triumphs (spatialization), only renew them, make them proliferate (in time). This implies an entirely different ethic from the strategic. Because its mode is to atomize and break down monolithic formations, because it is oriented less to a victory than to "a next move," one might say of it that it is primarily analytic.

And Kafka's was indeed an art, or an "analytics," of the weak operating within, and against, the strong.<sup>33</sup> Strategic (strong, totalizing) forces are everywhere and make their appearance in the figures of the Law, the Father, the social conspiracies of Matrimony, Work, Family, all carving out and projecting a certain milieu (un propre) to which access is effectively--though never literally--

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. The Castle, p.337. Translation given is that of Christian Gooden in "Positive Existential Alternative," The Kafka Debate, p. 106.

<sup>33</sup> Adorno: "Kafka seeks salvation in the incorporation of the powers of the adversary." Prisms, p.270.

blocked. Yet if there is anything in Kafka as acute as the obsessive desire for access to the Law<sup>34</sup> (le propre), it is the intolerable fear and horror of subjection that such access would entail. For here, both transcendence (to a beyond and to the interior of the Law) and subjection (the strategic formation of subjectivity--husband, son, citizen, subject<sup>35</sup>) go hand in hand. Kafka's tactical war then is two-tiered. It entails the piecemeal, even if only provisional construction of a universe freely navigable and unobstructed by transcendent, totalizing forces, as well as the liberation of personal, corporal forces from the constraining forms of social subjection.<sup>36</sup> These

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. "Before the Law," but also "In the Penal Colony," "The Great Wall of China," "The Judgment," The Trial, and The Castle.

<sup>35</sup> Adorno's felicitous, if tendentious formulation of this idea: "Kafka's figures are instructed to leave their soul at the door at the moment of the social struggle in which the one chance of the bourgeois individual lies in negating his own composition and that of the class situation which has condemned him to be what he is." Adorno, Prisms, p. 270.

<sup>36</sup> I follow here the double notion of subjection developed by Foucault: "There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to." Michel Foucault, "Why Study Power: The Question of the Subject," in H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Chicago: The U. of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 212.

two aspects constitute respectively, the cosmological (theological), and the political side of Kafka's work.<sup>37</sup>

Both of these levels of research help explain the peculiarly unrounded, even random quality of a typical Kafka novel or story when taken as a whole. The economy of these works does not resemble the slow buildup-crisis-denouement pattern of traditional fiction.<sup>38</sup> Nor, however, does it reproduce the merely fractured economy of much Modernist fiction, alternately atomized, compressed or evenly distributed across the entire surface of the narrative. These latter works tend to displace the problem of a "unity" either to the realm of consciousness as in the interior monologue (Woolf), or to a prior or ultimate state that the work has either fallen from (Eliot), or is in the process of restoring (Joyce). In Kafka, one might say, the "unity" is elided, perhaps abolished; it is the very "propre" itself, whose existence, all too complicit with the Law (the beyond), must a priori be disavowed. This is not done by means of fragmentation per se, as this too often implies

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<sup>37</sup> An exemplary study here is "The Report to an Academy." The deliberate self-transformation from ape to human is portrayed by the protagonist as a mere (tactical) search for a "way out," not a hubristic and human-all-too-human quest for freedom: "There was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason." Cf. also Kafka's discussion of Flaubert in Gustav Janouch, Conversations with Kafka (New York: New Directions, 1968) and Canetti's reflections on Kafka's systematic will to disappearance in Kafka's Other Trial (New York: Schocken, 1974).

<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding Kafka's claims regarding his novel Amerika of trying to write a Dickens-style work, one cannot deny the extreme nomadic and arbitrary nature of the various and loosely concatenated segments that make up this unfinished, and almost by nature unfinishable, work.

the existence of an even more encompassing unity at another level. It is achieved by means of an assembly or combination process similar to the one that Kafka himself describes in The Great Wall of China,

[the] principle of piecemeal construction...was done in this way: gangs...were formed who had to accomplish a length, say, of five hundred yards of wall, while a similar gang built another stretch of the same length to meet the first. But after the junction had been made the construction of the wall was not carried on from the point, let us say, where this thousand yards ended; instead the two groups of workers were transferred to begin building again in quite different neighborhoods. Naturally in this way many great gaps were left, which were only filled in gradually and bit by bit... In fact it is said that there are gaps which have never been filled in at all, an assertion, however, that is probably merely one of the many legends to which the building of the wall gave rise, and which cannot be verified, at least by any single man with his own eyes and judgment, on account of the extent of the structure...

Here then is a construction process devoid of overview, at least from the vantage point of the laborers. For the question that this story poses is none other than the question of wholeness, totality and closure. In what space and in what time does the unity of the wall exist--in its idea, in its origin/decree, in its ever-deferred state of completion? The wall is of course only a series of disconnected linear segments, but the existence of an Emperor (here a cover term for Law, Center, Inside, community, "propre"), if only one possessed some evidence of his existence, would assure Unity, if only even a future or possible one, at every level. But the absent Emperor is also the center, or center-function, of the Story, at once the spurious source of its unity and the

principle of its integrality and closure. But like the message in the parable<sup>39</sup> that has no hope of ever reaching the "periphery"--that typically murky, indeterminate region where both the story and the Wall are assembled--narrative becomes a lawless, marauding object unfixed from any center, beginning or end. Like the nomads of the North against whom the Wall is being built (the "propre" of the Tower of Babel is opposed here more than just allegorically to the tactical non-lieu of the steppe) information, that is, knowledge, is constantly grounded in a form of circulation directly opposed to the centralized, emanative model of transmission. For nearly all knowledge in Kafka arrives in the form of rumor.

To understand the appropriateness of this theme consider what one might call the rumor's threefold structure. The rumor propagates 1. by means of immediate and localized interactions (one to one contact between units, segments or cells) 2. its project is not to saturate or consolidate a territory (space), but in a certain sense rather to invade it by producing its effects slowly and gradually over time, and 3. a rumor is indeterminate, especially with regards to its source: it seems never to have a fixable origin. All of these factors help explain, not only the constant use of the rumor refrain in Kafka, and the relativizing and almost exclusive reliance on free indirect speech, but also the structure of his entire narrative machine: its sequential, centerless, proliferative yet a-developmental nature.\*

Because Kafkan narrative is able to tolerate both discontinuity (of space, time and character) and heterogeneity, without imposing on these the epistemological status of "contradictions" or

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<sup>39</sup> An Imperial Message. This parable was published separately but is also contained in The Great Wall of China.

\* Cf. fn. 139, Ch. 4

"problems" of representation, each individual scenario takes on rather the full ontological status of a "possible world," and the bizarre laws that determine the passage from one of these worlds to the other may best be understood as a process of practical experimentation. The works in general, like the Great Wall itself, must not be judged from an exterior (mythic) viewpoint and as totalized structures, but rather from within, from the relative blindness of an immanent viewpoint:<sup>40</sup> "The nomads, rendered apprehensive by the building operations, kept changing

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<sup>40</sup> "A distinction must be made between two types of science, or scientific procedures: one consists in 'reproducing,' the other in 'following.' The first has to do with reproduction, iteration and reiteration; the other, having to do with itineration, is the sum of the itinerant, ambulant sciences. [. . .] Reproducing implies the permanence of a fixed point of view that is external to what is reproduced: watching the flow from the bank. But following is something different from the ideal of reproduction. Not better, just different. One is obliged to follow when one is in search of the 'singularities' of a matter, or rather of a material, and not out to discover a form; when one escapes the force of gravity to enter a field of celerity; when one ceases to contemplate the course of a laminar flow in a determinate direction, to be carried away by a vortical flow; when one is involved with the continuous variation of variables, instead of extracting constants from them, etc. And it involves a completely different sense of the Earth [the world]: with the [first] legal model, one is constantly reterritorializing around a point of view, on a domain, according to a set of constant relations; but with the ambulant model, the process of deterritorialization constitutes and extends the territory itself."

What I'm calling the "immanent model" is of course the ambulant, "following" one. Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, pp.460-61. Compare Bergson:

"Take, for example, the movement of an object in space. I perceive it differently according to the point of view from which I look at it, whether from that of mobility or of immobility. I express it differently, furthermore as I relate it to the system of axes or reference points, that is to say, according to the symbols by which I translate it. And I call it relative for this double reason: in either

their encampments with incredible rapidity, like locusts, and so perhaps had a better general view of the progress of the wall than we, the builders."<sup>41</sup>

It is in this sense that "story" may finally be seen to assume a literal and concrete function as map or diagram of the real. The work is a "working out," a working out of the real, in the real. One may look at a Kafka story as a set of random hypotheses, but on condition that one take everything literally. Kafka's literary oeuvre is not founded within signification (metaphor), any more than within expression (Existenz) or reference (realism). It is founded rather in the illocutionary realm of the speech act (pragmatics):

<< IF...

"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from unsettling dreams he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin,"

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case, I place myself outside the object itself. When I speak of an absolute movement, it means that I attribute to the mobile an inner being and, as it were, states of soul; it also means that I am in harmony with these states and enter into them by an effort of imagination. Therefore according to whether the object is mobile or immobile, whether it adopts one movement or another, I shall not have the same feeling about it. And what I feel will depend neither on the point of view I adopt toward the object, since I am in the object itself, nor on the symbols by which I translate it, since I have renounced all translation in order to possess the original. In short, the movement will not be grasped from without and, as it were, from where I am, but from within, inside it, in what it is in itself." Henri Bergson, Introduction to Metaphysics (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961) pp.2-3.

<sup>41</sup> Franz Kafka, "The Great Wall of China," Complete Stories (New York: Schocken Books, 1946) pp.235-36.

THEN... >>.42

Here narrative is less a medium for the telling of events than a procedure for developing the practical consequences of events and their imbrication in material reality.<sup>43</sup> What this means

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<sup>42</sup> Though this is functionally the case of all of Kafka's work, it is literally the case for his story "Up in the Gallery," Complete Stories, p.401.

<sup>43</sup> Adorno, Gunther Anders, Walter Sokel, and Malcolm Pasley are among the many critics who have argued that Kafka's works generally and The Metamorphosis particularly is the literal extension of a figure of speech. For Adorno it is the phrase "These travelling salesmen are like bedbugs," for Anders it is a literalization of Samsa's desire to live as ein Luftmensch though he will be considered a dreckiger Käfer by the respectable world. Adorno goes even further to suggest that the story is a trial run of a type of dehumanization. For Sokel the tendency toward the enactment of metaphor, cliché or idiom determines to some extent all of Kafka's work. It is Pasley however who has provided what are certainly the most rigorously argued examples as well as the most extravagantly categorical claims in this vein: "Kafka's images. . . almost always spring from literature, or at least from words. They grow mainly out of metaphor or hyperbole, and they remain in some degree attached to their origin." Malcolm Pasley, "Semi-Private Games," The Kafka Debate: New Perspectives for our Time, ed. Angel Flores (New York: Gordian,1977) p.189. Cf. also his "The Burrow," The Kafka Debate, and "Two Kafka Enigmas: 'Elf Sohne' and 'Die Sorge des Hausvaters'," Modern Language Review LIX (1964) 40-46, as well as Adorno, Prisms, Gunther Anders, Franz Kafka, Ch.2, Walter Sokel, Franz Kafka (New York: Columbia, 1966) and finally, fn. 24 above. That this process actually takes place in the work seems undeniable and undoubtedly significant though none of these critics has attempted to show why it should be significant. One need only consider the work of Kafka's

however, is that every gesture, utterance, or accident, no matter how small or insignificant, is raised to the stature of an "event," that is, given functional ontological status. Everything is always, and everywhere, at stake. This is, in fact, but another formulation of the peculiar sort of pantheism that I had already begun to identify in Kafka when I characterized his universe as an infinite complicatio of crossroads and hypotheses.<sup>44</sup> If there are no grand, dominant meanings or privileged events this is because significance, and by extension, Being itself, is no longer ordered in graduated or hierarchical fashion. Being (and significance) is distributed equally everywhere, at

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related contemporary Raymond Rousset to begin to appreciate the massive impact that such incipient textual practices had on Modernist redefinitions of the relation of world and text. On the pragmatic and "evenmental" character of textuality in Modernism generally and Kafka in particular see fn. 57.

<sup>44</sup> I have already referred to Cusan and Brunian cosmologies. But in what sense do I here make use of the word pantheism? Pantheism is a doctrine or theory of Being that is opposed to theism on two fundamental levels. First, theism belongs to a metaphysical tradition of transcendence integral to which is the doctrine of two worlds: a finite, temporal and imperfect world under which (or beyond which) lies the perfect eternal and true one that serves as its ultimate ground. According to pantheism there is only one world, and God, to the extent that one exists, is indistinguishable from Nature or the created world. There is no external or transcendent schema; in pantheism God (or Cause) is said to be immanent so that Being need not refer to anything beyond or outside itself as its cause or ground. Immanence has been called a "pure ontology" for it implies a complete equality of Being unfolding on a single plane. Thus the second characteristic of pantheism: it implies a field of pure virtuality whose principal (God), and potential cause, is given equally everywhere. Cf. Karl Jaspers, Spinoza, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Harcourt, 1966) ch. III.

every level, and is equally present even in the smallest details. This is the only true sense in which one can speak of the radicality of Modernist "flatness," indeed an important aspect of Kafka's legacy to modern literature.<sup>45</sup> For if Being is univocal it has no peaks, troughs, deserts or oases, and may best be reflected on a flat surface. "Flat" of course, does not mean a diminished or impoverished dimensionality. Quite the contrary, for what we have here belongs more than anywhere else to the world of fractal geometry, a world whose singularity lies in its ability to maintain a prodigious, but constant level of complexity at every scale. A fractal object is complicated because it contains the principle and rule of its being at every point; it contains an infinity of stages or cycles, and, instead of occupying new unitary dimensions, it inhabits the infinitely variable space between dimensions (fractions of dimensions, thus "fractal dimensions").<sup>46</sup> Flat spaces with n- dimensions have for a long time been commonplaces in topology; there is no reason why they should not be so also in literature, metaphysics or politics.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See fn. 13 above.

<sup>46</sup> See Benoit Mandelbrot, "How Long is the Coastline of Britain," in Fractals: Form, Chance, and Dimension (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1977).

<sup>47</sup> The concept of the n-dimensional Manifold is Bernhard Riemann's and dates from his 1854 paper, "On the Hypotheses Which Lie at the Foundations of Geometry" in A Source Book in Mathematics, ed. David Eugene Smith (New York: Dover, 1959). T. E. Hulme's concept of "intensive manifolds" is meant to elaborate a similar concept in Bergsonian philosophy just as Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "plan d'immanence (n-1)" is an extension of a similar concept to the realm of politics and metaphysics. cf. T. E.

One of the accompanying effects of flat Being as I said, is the intensification and the increased importance given to individual details. Yet before considering the implications of this, one must first take into full account the difference in worldview that this different system entails. It is not simply that the scenographic lights are suddenly brighter, as if the illumination were now sustained to the very depths of narrative space to reveal an even more subtle, rich, and refined play of motives and details. But one does not see more, one sees less. The perspectival effects, the telescoping into depths, the instant apprehension of rational (visual) spatial relations between elements, the "fraughtness" of what is present with invisible (because absent, or merely distant) influences and forces, in a word, backgrounding, is sacrificed to an unsettling new proximity, one which is expressed often as a certain blindness, as the inability to grasp a total picture.

Kafka land-surveyor, like K. of The Castle, maps without producing images, maps with his body proper by merging this latter as completely as possible into the body of the world.<sup>48</sup> From this new, pragmatic perspective what is sought is not an image or reflection of the world as it appears, but an unpacking, an explicatio of the world implied and complicated in every one of its elements and gestures. The coherence of a world formed and totalized by an external agency (the Law, the

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Hulme, "The Philosophy of Intensive Manifolds," in Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art (New York: Routledge, 1965), Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus. Cf. also fn. 56 on the 18th and 19th century origins of the term.

<sup>48</sup> On the use of the Pundits in Tibet to covertly penetrate and map a closed geographical space with their own bodies cf. Peter Hoptark, Trespassers on the Roof of the World, Los Angeles, J.P. Tarcher, 1982. Cited in Manuel Delanda, "Policing the Spectrum," ZONE 1/2 (New York: Zone Books, 1986).

propre), is replaced by a new, internal and concrete multiplicity that contains, not only the residue and trace of this mythic, totalized world but also the random, irreducible profusion of vectors and windows that each open onto alternate worlds.

To navigate such a universe is plainly to renounce all constancy of Being:

"As someone said to me--I can't remember who it was--it is really remarkable that when you wake up in the morning you nearly always find everything in exactly the same place as the evening before. For when asleep and dreaming you are, apparently at least, in an essentially different state from that of wakefulness; and therefore, as that man truly said, it requires enormous presence of mind or rather quickness of wit, when opening your eyes to seize hold as it were of everything in the room at exactly the same place where you had let it go on the previous evening. That was why, he said, the moment of waking up was the riskiest moment of the day."<sup>49</sup>

And this is not only a metaphysical but also a political imperative,

"There was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason."<sup>50</sup>

This does not mean however, that one is to replace the terms "order" and "stability" with an ethics of disorder, fragmentation, irrationality, etc. One must at all costs go beyond the platitudes of Modernist millenarian rhetoric. In Kafka we find not a mere epistemological opportunism, the pillaging of the ruins of the Humanist era, but something approaching the positivity and fullness of

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<sup>49</sup> The Trial, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) deleted passage, pp. 257-58.

<sup>50</sup> "A Report to an Academy," Complete Stories, p.257

a "praxis;" the deployment of velleities, gestures, hypotheses and the elaboration (explication) of these in something eminently concrete: what one could call, borrowing from Foucault, their "espace correlatif."<sup>51</sup> This method explains why nowhere in Kafka's works are the trials, unions and metamorphoses ever depicted as interior events. These "events" always embrace, and are

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<sup>51</sup> Michel Foucault's detailed elaboration of the mechanics of language (discourse) as a system of material effects operating within an equally material medium of institutions, practices and objects relies heavily on the anglo-american pragmatic theory of language. The "illocutionary" act (from the earlier "performative") had the virtue not only of restoring to the study of language its character as an "event" but served to embed it concretely within an unlimited complex of dependent extra-linguistic relations and acts. Foucault developed these insights, and especially the illocutionary act's capacity to form an effective hinge between discursive and non-discursive phenomena, throughout the work of his middle period (Archaeology of Knowledge through Discipline and Punish). The concept of "collateral space" belongs to his attempt to flesh out a rich but abstract field of adjacency which would supplant the traditional or merely empirical space-time of "transcendental" historiography, with the material-evenmental continuum of an "archaeology." All here depends on the definition of the "statement" which, as he shows, is defined not by any singularity as a new or intermediary linguistic unit--its linguistic level is demonstrably unfixable and shifting--but by its peculiarly dense domain of interaction and mutual implication, by the plane across which it interacts with other statements and other phenomena, by its complex field of play. There can, at any rate, be no statement without a material, worldly support, and no "collateral space" or material support without statements that actualize it. Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, pp. 80-106, 40-50, 118-122.

structured by, an outside:<sup>52</sup> the ensembles that events may be said to inhabit and deploy. They have a logic much closer to the Lucretian notion of clinamen, or swerve.

The clinamen (principle of immanent and causeless cause) is always a minimal deviation from a given trajectory or course. It is produced randomly (any place and any moment in the universe is capable of "supporting" it), and the "world" is nothing more and nothing less than the direct physical set of consequences that derive from it. The clinamen interacts with a milieu; the real is nothing more than the product of this interaction without being reducible to either one. The principle of Kafka's fiction can be seen here quite clearly. A change or distortion is introduced into the world. This change is usually quite circumscribed at first,<sup>\*</sup> and may be either corporeal (The Metamorphosis) or not ("The Burrow," "The Hunger Artist," The Trial). What follows is a rigorous plotting of all the subsequent and consequential transformations, again both corporeal and non-corporeal, that ensue. I have already identified one type of subtle, non-corporeal transformation, the change of state.<sup>53</sup> For now it is sufficient to note that in the Kafkan universe, states, or

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<sup>52</sup> The outside is not only the domain of pure Materiality, Desire and Force, but also that of the Law.

See Michel Foucault, "Thought from Outside", Foucault/Blanchot (New York: Zone Books, 1987) pp. 7-58.

<sup>\*</sup> Cf. fn. 85, Ch. 4.

<sup>53</sup> The problem of the "change of state" is inseparable from the problem of individuation in Kafka's work, and a central theme of the next chapter. As an example of how changes of state are everything, consider Kafka's discussion in The Castle of Klamms "two bodies," the one civil, the other official, as well as the distinctions between real contact vs. illusory contact and, in The Trial, of the constitutive distinction between ostensible acquittal and real acquittal.

essences, are determined in relation to an exterior domain,<sup>54</sup> to the milieu that they simultaneously produce and affect. They derive from the configurations (of ensembles), assignations (of elements to positions within these ensembles) and tensions (problems, paradoxes) that follow in the wake of these deviations/events.

What one finds at the heart of the static, finite and airless Kafkan universe then, is a remarkably labile, shifting, ever-mobile domain. But this dynamo which seems ceaselessly to generate deviations (difference), transformations and changes of state, is not a principle of motion or space-time as we saw it to be in Einstein/Boccioni/Sant'Elia, but belongs even more absolutely to the realm of qualities, that is, to an intensive manifold.<sup>55</sup> The term manifold or "multiplicity"<sup>56</sup> is the

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<sup>54</sup> Exteriority is characterized by a field of dispersion, or a material multiplicity; it reverses the centered space of an initiating subjectivity upon which traditional hermeneutical systems are based. For these latter merely reconstruct, "in the opposite direction, the work of expression: it goes back from statements preserved through time and dispersed in space towards that interior secret that preceded them, and (in every sense of the term) is betrayed by them. . . it is always the historico-transcendental theme that is reinvested." Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, p. 121.

<sup>55</sup> See fn. 47.

<sup>56</sup> The original term is probably the Kantian <<Mannigfaltigkeit>>, which refers to the sum of elements present to the senses before they are ordered and synthesized in the understanding. This does not refer to sense data, only to the preformed, presignificant particulars of the world as such. The same term belonged to 19th century geometry and was used by Riemann (1847) to refer to a topological space capable of being extended in n dimensions. The French, it seems, translated the mathematical term first as variété

term which best describes the milieu of Kafka's fiction. It is in every way analogous to the world-substance of the Futurist-Minkowskian universe of extension developed in the previous chapter. The primary role of events is not as a vehicle of signification, but much more simply, and literally, to shape or carve out paths and ensembles within such a manifold, initiating elaborate series of consequences from even minute shifts and transformations. All the so-called movements are tactical, and they are all aimed at carving out a terrain, or passing from one level terrain to another.<sup>57</sup> Hence the cartographic element of Kafka's enterprise.<sup>58</sup>

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and then multiplicité though the Kantian term is typically referred to as le divers. Nonetheless, Bergson's multiplicités may have been equally derived from these two sources.

<sup>57</sup> I must insist here on what is unquestionably a sticky point of methodological contention. For who, it may be asked, is the subject of the acts that carve out the Kafkan universe? Is it Kafka himself (subject of the enunciation) or merely his protagonists (subjects of the statements)? Yet the particular level at which the present analysis is aimed must render such a distinction senseless. For the attempt here is to isolate within a body of literature--Kafka's serves as the example--a new kind of (writing) practice or a new type of discourse and to do this from the point of view of its conditions of possibility. It is a commonplace that language in the Modernist era had increasingly become a concrete milieu in its own right, a dense and problematic matière in no need of a represented lying beyond or outside of it as its principle or ground. But this means very little before one has actually accounted theoretically and intrinsically for its capacity to generate and transmit effects. The concept of ideology for example falls well short of meeting such a demand, not least for its failure to break with even the most traditional notions of expression, repression and signification. The very question "Who is speaking?" is rarely separable from the perennial tendency to recover a (the?) subject as an indispensable and founding function of discourse. This tendency is necessarily not just antithetical to, but simply incompatible with a type of analysis that would seek to restore to language its quality as act or practice, that is, as forming the fabric of events themselves and not just the trace of events that occur elsewhere. In this sense language would no longer have an interior, there would be no signified that could be peeled away from a signifier, no privileged subject behind it under whose heading all its properly dispersed effects could be regrouped and attributed. Kafka was indeed a central

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figure among modern writers for whom writing itself was no less than a perilous encounter with real forces, a risked submergence into a field of language that contained real obstacles, real powers and dangers to be either mastered or not. The awesome consistency of this new field of language is unquestionably the legacy of the classic triumvirate of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Yet Kafkan discourse, as I have presented it here, is oriented principally toward that of Nietzsche, for only in Nietzsche it may be said, does the relation of language and force (Nietzsche's world-substance) become that of an absolute identity and no longer that of container to contained.

<sup>58</sup> Gilles Deleuze has made the same claims for the work of Michel Foucault whose works arguably bear important similarities, in style and method as well as in content, to those of Kafka. Here Discipline and Punish would serve as the richest and most obvious example of any such comparison. Isolating Foucault's use of the concept of the "diagram" as a principle that both supplies a continuous link between discursive and non-discursive (institutional) formations, while at the same time permitting a topographical mapping of their dual articulations, Deleuze develops the idea of a cartographic versus a signifying method:

Pourquoi pas le capitalisme ailleurs ou à un autre moment, puisque les formations précédentes ou extérieures en contiennent déjà tant de séquences? Il est difficile de renoncer à ces questions de raison, et de penser le diagramme animé de pures mutations. Pourtant un diagramme ne fonctionne jamais pour représenter un monde objectif; au contraire il organise un nouveau type de réalité. Le diagramme n'est pas une science, il est toujours affaire de politique. Il n'est pas un sujet de l'histoire, ni qui surplombe l'histoire. Il fait de l'histoire en défaisant les réalités et les significations précédentes, constituant autant de points d'émergence ou de créationnisme, de conjonctions inattendues, de continuums improbables. On ne renonce à rien quand on abandonne les raisons. Une nouvelle pensée, positive et positiviste, le diagrammatisme, la cartographie.

And Foucault himself:

A la logique de l'inconscient, doit se substituer une logique de la stratégie; au privilège accordé a présent au signifiant et a ses chaînes, il faut substituer les tactiques avec leurs dispositifs.

Now Kafka's work is inseparable from the historical formation of the concept manifold/milieu, and it is to this conjuncture, so important an aspect of Modernist physical theory, to which I would now like to turn. As I have already shown in the first chapter of this study, certain aspects of Lucretian physics already played an important role in the Einsteinian concept of the "field." The chemist Ilya Prigogine, in his work on the history of thermodynamics, has also placed great emphasis on stochastic space and indeterminacy in quantum dynamics, especially the reliance on statistical functions (probabilities) as defining criteria of "objects" in quantum field theory.<sup>59</sup> These developments in the first three decades of the 20th century were however by no means limited to physics. In biology, 19th century Darwinism had already contaminated the once static classification systems of morphology and physiology through the unprecedented and quite radical introduction of the factor of time. In Matter and Memory and Creative Evolution Bergson addressed with great success in biology what he managed to do with only limited results in physics. He establishes the essential inseparability of the trajectories of living matter and the "dead" world into which it is

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Gilles Deleuze, "Ecrivain non: un nouveau cartographe," in Critique, No.343, Vol. XXXI, Paris (Dec. 1975) p. 1223. Michel Foucault, Interview Le Monde, Feb. 21, 1975.

<sup>59</sup> Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, La Nouvelle Alliance, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) I. Prigogine, From Being to Becoming: Time and Complexity in the Physical Sciences, San Francisco, W.H. Freeman, 1980. The crucial work in this field remains Thomas Kuhn's Black-Body Theory and the Quantum Discontinuity, 1894-1912 (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1978).

projected, by submerging them both in a single and same flow of a continually creative and ever-generating duration.<sup>60</sup>

The German theoretical biologist, Jakob von Uexküll formulated one of the most concise and explicit attacks on pre-modern biology (as he saw it, that of empirical description and undisciplined speculation) and in so doing introduced, by way of an alternative model, the concept of the Umwelt. Now an Umwelt, according to von Uexküll, is comprised of two functionally distinct worlds: the world-as-sensed and the world of action. Both of these worlds are made up of signs or indications, which are such only in relation to a biological apparatus--receptors or effectors--capable of recognizing, that is, being triggered by them. The specific organs at play are here only of secondary importance. What counts are the functions, or function-circles that organs, and parts of organs, as well as external indications (parts of the surroundings) constitute as a sort of feedback circuit or semiotic chain. The sum of these function-circles together comprise the Umwelt of a given organism. Now the organism does not properly speaking exist outside of this manifold function-nexus. Von Uexküll thus distinguishes between the animal conceived as an "object" which it isn't, and as a "framework," which it is. For the framework refers to the animal's capacities to organize and dispose functions (select indications) or, more simply, it's capacities to impart and receive affects, to and from its surroundings. (In very advanced animals the body is capable of imparting and receiving signs from itself, thus embedding it simultaneously in both environments, world-as-sensed and world of action.) The Umwelt then is a part semiotic, part affective space; it contains no pre-existing biological unities, only fragments built up into chains and gathered under a function ("function-rules"). Once again what we have here is a quite radical

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<sup>60</sup> Bergson, L'Evolution Créatrice.

new distribution, what may be called a biology of events. For in this distribution it is the event which is central and determinant: it alone selects what is necessary in the subject (organism) and the object (surroundings, including other organisms) to complete a communication (function) cycle (which incidentally is not unrelated to an illocutionary act!). "Function acts like a magnet which attracts toward it now some qualities and now others." For von Uexküll there was no such thing as evolution in the Darwinian sense, for the biological continuum, considered from the point of view of function (-circles), never contains anything but already perfect organisms (perfectly fulfilling their function-rules or organism-events) regardless of the level of complexity. An organ(ism) must not be related to a different--higher or lower, more or less "evolved"--organ(ism) but always, and only to its function-circle, and the elements with which it is there brought into relation. "We may assume that where there is a foot, there is also a path; where there is a mouth, there is also food; where there is a weapon, there is also an enemy."

Though von Uexküll's work rose explicitly out of, and remained embedded within, a strictly neo-Kantian framework--the Umwelt was technically a phenomenal world corresponding to an a priori schema and only filled in with data acquired through the senses--it does not betray the integrity of his thought to have insisted here on the system and field qualities of his epistemology at the expense of the classical subject-object doublet that is supposed to be the ground of its inspiration. If von Uexküll's work is generally disparaged today by biologists for its naive anti-evolutionism this has been at least partly compensated for by the prestige it has gained in the fields of systems theory and semiotics eg. in the work of René Thom.<sup>61</sup> Indeed von Uexküll's

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<sup>61</sup> René Thom, Structural Stability and Morphogenesis: An Outline of a General Theory of Models (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975).

oeuvre fell nothing short of a fully developed mechanics of the biosphere in which the most basic irreducible elements ("moment signs" and "local signs") agglomerate into increasingly complex chains that in turn gravitate into "meaningful" unities: the functions. Functions do not correspond to organs or material forms, but describe a milieu of pure exteriority, a site of selection and interconnection of informational codes and energies. In a sense it was by pushing Kantian doctrine so far that von Uexküll eventually found himself on the other side of it. For the Kantian division of experience into a "material" and a "formal" component, in which "material" refers to sense-qualities on the side of the object (the manifold or Mannigfaltigkeit), and "form" refers to the a priori organization introduced from the side of the subject (mind), is in von Uexküll exploded: the subject becomes increasingly material (a multiplicity) and the object increasingly schematized. Though the two terms of each pair were already wedded in Kant (it was impossible to have one without the other without reducing reality either to a hollow abstraction or else a senseless kaleidoscopic scattering) it was von Uexküll's achievement to have topologized the field of their encounter. He endowed this field with a precise system of rules which would bear on a new concrete "body" or plane of exteriority. Herein lies both von Uexküll's biological "modernity" as well as his potential (and more than chronological) kinship with the new novelistic space and organization of "character" as it had begun to emerge in modern writing in general and in Kafka in particular.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Jakob Johann von Uexküll, Theoretical Biology, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925), Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen (1934) and Bedeutungslehre (1940), (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1970).

Now finally, what is perhaps the most essential feature of the "Kafkaesque" has to do with the way the narrative embraces its underlying dynamo, the dynamo that precludes the formation and appearance of grand Events by generating little "micro" events everywhere as a perpetual flow of deviations or difference.<sup>63</sup> We have already suggested the way in which all events and all details seem to have the same status in Kafka; there is no hierarchy of Being, no particular foreground and background, no particular second order significations that would sift data into piles or wholes graded according to importance, in short, there is nothing behind phenomena. Certainly this is an integral aspect of any immanentist (pantheistic) worldview. It also endows "flatness" with a richness that would not normally be its due. For this flatness is the result of a contraction (complicatio) rather than a reduction, and this new contracted space obeys a different set of principles than the space of visual perception. Contiguity for example, no longer presupposes

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<sup>63</sup> For example, there are always more files, more offices in The Castle. Titorelli always has more nearly identical versions of the same paintings in The Trial, and there are always more chambers and passages to be built in "The Burrow," etc. In the first case the files and corridors prevent K. from ever attaining access or even an integral image of the castle. In Titorelli's attic one is treated to a vertiginous image of the "Summit" of Being; squalor, license and the infinite proliferation of counterfeit images, whose function however was never to represent but rather to render indefinite (through multiplication), and to postpone (through perpetual substitution) the arrival of the finite and whole (the Law, the Sentence). Finally, in "The Burrow," the Threat, whatever it may be, also never arrives thanks to another kind of proliferation whose strategy seems perfectly adequate to Titorelli's third form of acquittal, "indefinite postponement." On this last point, see Franz Kafka, The Trial, pp. 152-163.

proximity.<sup>64</sup> Things no longer combine into ensembles strictly according to naturalist criteria such as cause/effect or in the rhythm of two events following one after another. This is due partly to the "aggravated" present of Kafka's fiction, a characteristic whose tendency is to render every instant autonomous and isolated from every other.<sup>65</sup> Any instant and any element can potentially connect or segue into any other, or else may suddenly discover an untraversable distance wedged between itself and what at first seemed closest at hand. Thus the constant, sudden and inexplicable shifts of tone and scene, the changes of place and character--these are all endemic to the labile Kafkan universe. One might say that the principle of this universe, like the Heraclitean one, is "everything flows (becomes)," for one must at least recognize that in Kafka everything is in flight. Every element, every instant seeks its tangent, so that a story can be measured practically in quantifiable terms: for here, meaning has begun to give way to gradient.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, in their Kafka actually oppose these two terms. The most acute treatment of this theme however is in Kafka's own story "A Common Confusion," Complete Stories, p. 429.

<sup>65</sup> This effect is so generalized it is almost difficult to give a single sufficient example. Consider though how in the corridors outside the assembly hall of The Trial, or the antechambers/bar of The Castle the narrator slips unproblematically from utter detachment and indifference to sexual frenzy and back again with not even the blink of an eye.

<sup>66</sup> Clearly I am here again referring to the land-surveyor or cartographic motif. It is clear that in the novel The Castle particularly, but in all the works generally, a central and structuring theme is the non-architectonic (ie. non-classical, non-visual) conditions of knowing the world. This is why when talking about "measuring" it is necessarily always in relation to "gradients," not autonomous spatial quantities. A gradient,

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such as a temperature gradient, always implies a differential between two points or states, and a rate of exchange, with a particular direction, etc. It measures a change in value of one quantity in relation to other variables--in a word, changes within an intensive field, not extensive space. It describes movements which are definitive, essential though not visible. Cf. discussion of Clerk-Maxwell and Einstein, Ch. 1.

#### 4. Some Elements of Kafkan Immanence

Nothing then characterizes the surface of a Kafka story more than its continuous marquetry of story fragments each embedded beside the other as if it were the most natural thing in the world that such abrupt and disjunctive blocks of narrative should meld seamlessly across a single plane. Concrete, empirical propositions are systematically offered up only to be withdrawn or modified by recasting them on a psychological, speculative, or other, plane, or just as commonly it is the reverse: events are introduced in the most diffuse, conjectural fashion only to be granted an incontrovertible reality in the very next breath:

It was summer, a hot day. With my sister I was passing the gate of a great house on our way home. I cannot tell now whether she knocked on the gate out of mischief or out of absence of mind, or merely threatened it with her fist and did not knock at all. A hundred paces further on along the road, which here turned to the left, began the village. We did not know it very well, but no sooner had we passed the first house when people appeared and made friendly or warning signs to us; they were themselves apparently terrified, bowed down with terror. They pointed toward the

manor house that we had passed and reminded us of the knock on the gate.  
The proprietor of the manor would charge us with it...<sup>1</sup>(my emphasis)

What principle allows one to move from the weightless series of <or>s of the third sentence, already threatening to proliferate in a delirium of uncontrollable speculation, to the metaphysical absolutism of guilt and its entire correlative universe into which the protagonist is inexorably installed with the last two sentences? There are in fact two questions here, one on the level of form: How to account for the nonchalant, unprepared passage from the mundane ("It was summer, a hot day. . .") to the incomprehensible but profoundly organized world of the grotesque ("they were bowed down with terror", "The proprietor would charge us with it", plus the inexplicable complicity of these two statements); and one on the level of content: How could news of the knock have been transmitted so immediately and so thoroughly, by what means or mechanism? Or do these two questions perhaps really resolve into just one: what conditions need apply for an entire world suddenly to spring up tout fait, inaugurated with little more than a single gesture--as if it had been preparing silently and always to meet only this gesture when, and if, its time had come--drawing it fully formed from a state of pure virtuality? How, we may ask, does a gesture organize a world, and how does such a world, by agency of a gesture, arise out of another world?

Yet a Kafka story is less a picture of a world than a progression of world fragments, aspects, images, sections. And as a literature of the fragment Kafka's is undoubtedly more unsettling, more radical, even if less spectacular, than those of other early Modernists such as Eliot, Joyce, or Djuna Barnes whose principle of "consistency," or

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<sup>1</sup> "The Knock at the Manor Gate," Complete Stories, p.418.

"holding together" is, at least arguably, one of "spatial form." In these latter works the individual fragments find their unity, harmony and place within an overall architectonic that can be perceived only, but all the more surely, after the entire work has been read, set apart from its inherent processes of unfolding, and projected as an integral, richly woven but still structure.<sup>2</sup> In Kafka the fragment does not belong to a whole from which all temporal order has been sundered yet which nonetheless persists at the level of its spatial relations. Here fragments resemble, more properly, uncompleted movements or fragments of time; they are fleeing tones, qualities and moods, that is, these fragments are oriented much more to punctual and intensive states than to uniquely extensive or spatial structures. But much more importantly, the essence of what we have been describing as "the Kafkaesque" is found not in the mere fact of a disjunctive narrative, but precisely the contrary, in the bizarre and uncanny properties of the fabric which so completely weaves and weds its elements together. The space of Kafka's literature is not architectonic (Joyce's Dublin, Eliot's encyclopaedia), it has no boundaries, fixed positions or places, or even a definable ground--it is made up entirely of relations, movements, passages. Kafka's work does not present an image of a total or even partial world but rather concerns itself with carving trajectories, vectors, transverse movements which touch, penetrate, and filiate through an always indeterminate number of worlds. It is then, necessarily, a literature of shifts and tangents (in the deep sense as well as figuratively), flights from level to level, world to world, tone to tone; its principle, understandably, is one of opening, connection and link. These openings and

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," The Widening Gyre, pp.3-62.

This is but the purest, most developed, and most intransigent of the spatialist readings of modern literature. Cf. Ch. 1 of the present study.

linkage points are constantly provided by objects--which contract gestures--and gestures themselves. Behind every object a gesture, and within every gesture a virtual world.<sup>3</sup>

### METAMORPHOSIS

#### I. The Break with "Time"

When the sage says: "Go over," he does not mean that we should cross to some actual place, which we could do anyhow if the labor were worth it; he means some fabulous yonder, something unknown to us,

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<sup>3</sup> The meaning and significance of the gesture is certainly among both the most delicate and the most insistent of problems in Kafka. It seems to me however that only for Walter Benjamin did the gesture come to take on its full ontological and heuristic importance. For the gesture, he shows, belongs truly only to the animal world, sharing with this world what he describes as its "utmost mysteriousness" and "utmost simplicity." Kafka, he says, proceeds methodologically by "divesting the gesture of its human supports and then has a subject for reflection without end." The gesture functions both as a bridge and a break, in any case a crossover point, the place where one world erupts, or injects its raw data, into another. These are the tear points, the breaks in Being that produce, however infinitesimally, radical, unstable moments of freedom. Benjamin, Illuminations, pp. 121-22. Cf. sections "Corporality and Communication. . .," and "Pure Form" below.

something that he cannot designate more precisely either. . .<sup>4</sup>

"When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin."<sup>5</sup> So begins The Metamorphosis, the first of the several "animal stories" that Kafka wrote between 1912 and 1924.<sup>6</sup> It is the first

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<sup>4</sup> "On Parables," Complete Stories, p.457.

<sup>5</sup> All references to The Metamorphosis will be to the Stanley Corngold translation published by Bantam Books, New York, 1972, except where the original German is used.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term "animal stories" here only in quotation marks and with a measure of caution. This category is at best a vague, and at worst a false one since the specific phenomena, affects and effects it is supposed to cover appear almost universally throughout the works, even where animal characters are not explicitly animals, and even in those in which they are, their modes of appearance are quite varied: they are sometimes main protagonists ("The Burrow," "Josephine," The Metamorphosis) sometimes secondary or incidental characters ("Jackals and Arabs" for the former, the various horses, snakes, martens, etc. for the latter) and sometimes the central, but absent theme ("The Village Schoolteacher," "Blumfeld. . .," "Cares of a Family Man") etc. In any case, the animal theme derives its intelligibility always in relation to that of the human, or human world into which it erupts and which, in a certain sense as well, it molests. As I have argued below, "animality" constitutes perhaps the central ontological theme in Kafka's universe characterizing as it does the irreducible, undivided, ineffable "other" world that is contracted in, and interpenetrated with our own.

major story written after the so-called "breakthrough" of September 22, 1912, the night in which Kafka composed the entire story "The Judgment," the result of a single, protracted convulsion that delivered not only this story, one of the few for which Kafka would maintain a degree of satisfaction and enthusiasm, but also the mature, simplified and personal style that characterized all of the work that would follow.<sup>7</sup> No better example of the power and versatility of this discovery, this technique, can be found than in the opening of "The Metamorphosis." The abruptness of the overture, its humorous but terrifying revelation, is marked not only by a sudden transformation, or passage, of a body from the human to the insect world, but the passage also of this same body from a state of sleep to one of wakefulness. The sleep state, perhaps in its analogical relation to the human world from which the Verwandlung has simultaneously delivered this body, is characterized as one of "unsettling dreams."<sup>8</sup> What are we to understand by this? Is the state into which Gregor has suddenly found himself transformed little more than a reflection or realization of an image previously formed and prepared in sleep? Certainly the Verwandlung belongs to a much more chaotic process than this for we have already

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<sup>7</sup> Klaus Wagenbach, Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend 1883-1912 (Bern: Francke, 1958) p.9.

<sup>8</sup> For Kafka sleep was always associated with the possibility of death--thus his almost chronic insomnia and, one ventures to speculate, his morbid fear of sex (la petite mort). cf. Gustav Janouch, Conversations with Kafka (New York: New Directions, 1971) p.143, and Ernst Pawel, The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka (New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1984) pp. 426-7, 82, 83.

learned that "the moment of waking up is the riskiest moment of the day"<sup>9</sup> After all doesn't this moment of waking already imply an abrupt passage or transformation from the world of sleeping or dreaming, that is, a passage from a world characterized by a flow of images embedded in a duration from which the spatially extended world is excluded, to a world comprised of distinct and stable things that in fact only magically (though we are accustomed to say "scientifically") persist in being? This is an example of those peculiarly important moments in Kafka, the moments when all virtuality is forced up very close to the surface, when everything suddenly is at stake, and the most likely moment for something to "happen" or to go wrong.<sup>10</sup> Thus in an almost symmetrical fashion, the first sentences of The Trial describe K. visited while still in

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<sup>9</sup> The Trial, section quoted in Ch. 3, pp. 132-3. The precariousness and volatility of things and the inconstancy of being is a universal theme in Kafka. To give this phenomenon its positive formulation will be the principle task of this study. Several additional examples will be supplied throughout the ensuing arguments.

<sup>10</sup> For example in the story "The Married Couple" the salesman/protagonist reflects: "in the present unstable state of affairs often a mere nothing, a mood, will turn the scale, and in the same way, a mere nothing, a word can put things right again." This state of affairs is harrowingly demonstrated in the story that follows. Hovering at the brink of sleep, the father/husband N. suddenly passes into the realm of death only to be miraculously resummoned to life a few minutes later by his wife who attends, with infinite faith and innocence, to his re-awakening (return). The interface between sleep and wakefulness developed as a chaotic hinge between alternate worlds is developed as well in "Description of a Struggle." Cf. fn. 38 below and example at Ch. 3, pp.132-3. "The Married Couple," Complete Stories, pp. 451-56.

bed one morning by strangers whose absurd dress and nonsensical and indeterminate pronouncements, though these have the effect neither of explaining anything nor of introducing anything new, somehow effect a fundamental change that radiates outward and contaminates everything, makes everything equally indeterminate, unclear, fluid, and above all, connected.<sup>11</sup> These bifurcation points are all the more paradoxical because the world of objects itself need not change in the slightest, only the meanings of the objects and the relations between them.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Waking but also drunkenness, inattention, etc. See analyses of "Blumfeld," "Knock on the Manor Gate," "Description of a Struggle," "The Hunter Gracchus," "The Little Woman," and "The Married Couple."

<sup>12</sup> What we are dealing with here is not, of course, "meaning" in any classical sense, but rather an "expressive" capacity that belongs materially to objects like a skin (ie. neither signification, reference nor intention), and which groups them together within some larger global element or tissue--this could be either a becoming or a transcendent and globalizing code. What an object "expresses" is quite different from what it means, signifies or intends--for what it expresses are always supra-objective qualities which derive either from the events (becomings) which affect or alter them, or else the "order" in which they hold a place. All of Kafka resides in the conflict between these two modes of "expression."

Similar effects have often been noted with respects to more classical literature and in relation to different affects, notably love, and especially jealousy. In post-Kafkan literature these effects become almost common conventions with "paranoia" furnishing the historically most significant trope. Proust's A la Recherche du temps perdu could serve as a model study of the former with Pynchon's Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow, the work of Robbe-Grillet and

Such "break-with-time" overtures are hardly rare in Kafka's fiction. They determine, for example, such effects as the maddening inscrutability of the motives of action as when the protagonists of The Castle, "Before the Law," etc. arrive in their predicaments with seemingly no capacity whatever, nor even a need, to relate events to a personal past, that is, a life, which, by virtue of its traditionally sovereign extension through a linear past and future, ought indeed to transcend or encompass the events at hand. In Kafka however the opposite is always the case: events are the bearers of their own sovereign law and their own temporality. The proper tendency of this temporality is to encompass, indeed in a certain sense to demolish, the unity of the "life."<sup>13</sup> Out of this

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F.Scott Fitzgerald's "The Crack Up" as prime examples of the latter. It goes without saying that the transfer of the locus of such powers from subjectivity to a transpersonal characteristic of the field is a defining characteristic of this latter type of literature and indeed of modernity as well.

<sup>13</sup> As Gunther Anders has argued in his Franz Kafka, the work of Rilke and especially Kafka mark a crucial reversal of classical (Kantian, Schillerian) aesthetics. For here, renunciation, once the province of a beholder (man) in relation to an object beheld, has now become associated, through a kind of reverse projection or animism, with the external world itself. It is now rather the abstract figure of power itself which "looks," and which alone is in a position to renounce, and man who is now merely the "seen." The phenomenological marriage of terror with beauty transforms the world into a transfixing gorgon's mask. Thus, it may be said, the flow of influence now travels from the outside in, no longer from the inside out. This reversal of subject/object relations explains much of the vertiginous but diffuse anxiety that characterizes both Kafka's works and the reader's or critic's reception of them. What we have

inescapable fact the peculiar Kafkan landscape arises, with its oppressively contracted horizons and perceived (though illusory) static nature. Thus the break with time is often also inseparable from a negation of world and a collapsing of space. "The Hunger Artist" and "First Sorrow" as well as The Metamorphosis are clear examples in which the cage, the trapeze and the filial chambers become emblems of a radical exclusion separating the protagonist from that modality of time in which his past is lodged, and with it the very essence of what he is, and wishes no longer to be.<sup>14</sup>

Thus the moment of waking reproduces--though in a much more complex way since it belongs wholly to the individuating continuum of instants and need not undergo a translation into space--these same border or limit conditions. As the narrative begins it becomes clear that nothing can explain what is happening just as nothing could have predicted it. One world continues indifferently, unmoved and unchanged while another spills into it, filling all the cracks and chinks between objects with the swirling

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here is a peculiar, but deeply modern, anti-humanism in which forces are increasingly seen as determinant but also as transpersonal and indeterminate. In other words, narrative increasingly dissociates itself from "character" to adhere ever more intimately to events. (Musil here is perhaps the most important example.) Worth noting as well here is Anders's inadvertent "facializing" treatment of the world which bears important resonance with my later treatment of the theme of the "double turning away" (below, section on "Animality").  
 Gunther Anders, Franz Kafka, pp. 55-70.

<sup>14</sup> Roman Karst has argued, in relation to these and other works, that on the contrary, the cancelling of the past gives way to a fully immobile and endless present that cannot pass. Cf. "Franz Kafka: Word-Space-Time," Mosaic III, No.4 (Summer 1970) pp.1-13.

indefiniteness of a wanton becoming. For somehow, though the dream-time of sleep has come quietly to an end that pure virtuality that animates it has burst its barrier and invaded the real, depositing there precisely what had always been anathema to it: the so-called "untimely," or the irreducible, absolute and incontrovertibly new. We are assured now that this grotesque immixing (and this is developed in the narrative as a befouling and as a pollution in every possible sense) is in every manner real: "this was no dream." The very phrase "in his bed" further underscores this: a simple, objective observation, yet made from a vantage point external to any hallucination or merely psychological delusion. Again nothing in the objective landscape has apparently changed; bed, apartment, family, job, etc. remain entirely and maddeningly intact.

The dynamism of this transformation is complex, and it is established from the opening sentence with the use of the deliberately imprecise, double "un-" of "ungeheures Ungeziefer"(translated "monstrous vermin").<sup>15</sup> Gregor's passage to the animal world is not a transformation from one steady state to another, but of course from formal fixity itself to something by nature unfixable and therefore un-imageable and in continuous (potential) variation. Kafkan narration typically employs such techniques as diffuse and

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<sup>15</sup> I rely here on Stanley Corngold's discussion of these terms in the notes to his translation of The Metamorphosis, pp. 66-7. Corngold cites the arguments of three German critics--Kurt Weinberg, Walter Pong and Heinz Politzer--regarding the negative linguistic and semantic characteristics of the double "un-." Wilhelm Emrich also calls attention to the earth-negating "un-" of "unirdischen Pferden" in "The Country Doctor," Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka: A Critical Study of his Writings, trans. S. Zeben Buehne (New York: Frederick Ungar,1968) p.159.

continually deferred descriptions, extreme parsimony of details, and the embedding of knowledge in a webwork of tentative statements, confused facts and spiralling entanglements, all to draw narrative away from pure representation and into a miasmatic domain of uncertainty and illegibility. Vagueness then is less an effect than a precondition of Kafka's narratives. Their ground is comprised of murmurs, rumours, and always questionable and indeterminate evidence. Only what is immediately at hand has any real plasticity. For here as elsewhere, the important thing is not what is potentially to be seen nor even what is--for the bug is many things, and critics have not tired in pointing to its inconsistencies and speculating on its "reality" and "true nature"<sup>16</sup>--rather, what is fundamental to the story is the trans-formation, the movement of becoming something other, the (intensive) dis-placement across the interface separating realms, in short what is at stake is not what the bug is, but the processes that have seized and transformed a body and which are enabling, or causing, its effective migration of realms. Witness Kafka's adamant refusal to allow any concrete illustration of the vermin for the book's dustjacket,

It struck me the [the illustrator] might want to draw the insect itself. Not that, please not that! The insect itself cannot be depicted. It cannot even be shown from a distance. (. . .) If I were to offer suggestions for an illustration, I would choose. . . [a] room that lies in darkness.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, William Empson's essay "A Family Monster," The Nation CLXII, Dec. 7, 1946, pp. 652-3.

<sup>17</sup> Kafka's letter to his editor Kurt Wolff on Oct. 25, 1915, in Letters to Friends, Family and Editors (New York: Schocken Books, 1977) pp. 114-15.

Thus the "un-" prefix, by its sheer abjection, violence and compound negation expresses this mysterious force of displacement and migration, the de-forming or the blunting of the boundaries of Form and the reorientation of a static world of solids toward the fluid, and visually imprecise, one of force.

Later, the second section of the story will open by recapitulating in almost identical fashion the events that introduced the first: "It was already dusk when Gregor awoke from his deep, comalike sleep." It is still only the first day of his ordeal yet Gregor's situation has already begun seriously to deteriorate. He has incurred a wound and what's more, his sleep, no longer merely troubled by dreams, is now characterized as comalike, thus offering a premonitory sign, not only of death, but more generally of the subtractive, evacuating, and "negative" method of this story. A salient feature of this part of the narrative is the steady progression of Gregor's anomie especially with respects to time--Gregor's second awakening takes place this time in the late afternoon. Now in the story's first section the protagonist's obsession is clearly never with the transformation itself but rather only with lateness: lateness for work, lateness for the train, lateness to rise; the narrative is punctuated by reports of clocktime shouted out to Gregor by family members through the closed doors of his room; his reflections regarding his hateful job fix primarily on the constraints of schedules--early rising, train connections, meals taken at wrong hours, and relationships continually cut off before they can begin; the invasion into his life of organization and numerical time has him so overwrought that his even nights are now given over to "studying timetables"; and finally, it is the presence of a single iconic object, the alarm clock, against which, it

may said, the metamorphosis, in the first instance was directed.<sup>18</sup> Yet it is not just one object but rather two that dominate the first section: besides the alarm clock it is the strange portrait of the lady in furs which receives an inexplicably weighted significance (this significance as we will see is developed later and throughout the story). There can however be no mistake; these two objects, and the worlds they express, are in systematic opposition to one another. The portrait, the frame and the fretsaw belong to a temporal order distinctly different from the alarm clock: Gregor's mother articulates this while defending her son against an implicit charge of laziness,

That boy has nothing on his mind but the business. Its almost begun to rile me that he never goes out nights. . . He sits there with us at the table, quietly reading the paper or studying timetables. Its already a distraction for him when he's working with his fretsaw. For instance, in the span of two or three evenings he [once] carved a little frame. You'll be amazed how pretty it is. . .  
(p. 10)

We shall see in the next part of this study how the alarm clock's absence in the story's second section is only apparent, for its function remains incarnated in other domestic objects, namely Gregor's furniture.

Thus Gregor's late awakening and the explicit but never explained absence of the alarm clock in section II are signs not only of the encroaching temporal miasma, but equally of

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<sup>18</sup> The opposition is expressed in phrases as simple as ". . . Then I'm going to make the break [from work]. But for the time being I'd better get up, since my train leaves at five."

the steady regression of the exterior world<sup>19</sup>, and of all external determinations that go along with it, in other words, that of measure, and the rationalized institutional relations of the commercial and social world from which Gregor is gladly, and we now see successfully, liberated. But clearly it is not enough to reduce the dimension of The Metamorphosis's temporal conflict to such a simple one as that between a spatialized numerical-rational time vs. a qualitative-intensive one of pure actualization (creation). For the alarm clock is associated not only with schedules, appointments, management but most importantly with the accumulation of money and especially debts. The office manager's visit to the Samsa apartment so early in the morning--he had practically to have intuited Gregor's lateness before the fact in order to have arrived as promptly as he did--underscores the utter pervasiveness of the specter of the family debts (whose responsibility Gregor had fully taken on) that adheres to everything in the story like a miasma that cannot be blown away. Now there are several factors at play here. First, there is, undeniably, the mode of time associated with accumulation; this again is represented by the clock and the debts (and later by the discovery of a stock of

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<sup>19</sup> In the first section, Gregor, upon awakening, can still see outside the window though his vision is limited by heavy fog. At the start of the second section his perceptual contact with the outside is limited to the passive reception of a shadow-play on the ceiling. Later in the section the window assumes a purely symbolic, nostalgic role, as the waning of Gregor's vision allows him to discern in the world outside his window only a "desert where the gray sky and the gray earth were indistinguishably fused." After Gregor's death the windows are immediately opened and the Samsa family gather in front of one of these, holding each other and gazing outward. On the systematic role of windows in Kafka cf. John M. Grandin, "Defenestrations," in The Kafka Debate, pp. 216-222.

family savings). At the other pole one finds developed in a very elaborate way an entire cosmos constellated around the opposing object of the bed: obvious emblem of a different modality of time, that of a pure dissipation, a relation which is established by the single self-reproach: "Just don't stay in bed being useless,' Gregor said to himself."<sup>20</sup>

Secondly there is the temporality of a certain kind of transitivity--an irreversible time associated with patrilineal filiation and according to which the transmission of debts (Schulden) from one generation to another both affirms and concretizes a hierarchical bond and serves as an instance of a double accumulation. The Metamorphosis, and "metamorphosis" per se, constitute a complex response to, and a systematic attempt to break with, these different aspects of a single monolithic time.

As the horizon of Gregor's world continues steadily to contract around him, the exteriority of the socius, still prominent even if negatively in the first section, soon gives way in the second to an exteriority of the body.

## 2. Corporality/Communication and the Two Modes of Traffic

The remainder of The Metamorphosis's first paragraph--beyond the introductory sentence which supplies the story's premise--is devoted to a neutral and exact examination of Samsa's new body, devoid of both horror and psychology. Rather, it tends to the wistful consideration of practical questions: "His many legs [were] pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him." Attention is then turned to the room in which the strange transformation has taken place, but this now, compared to the treatment of

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<sup>20</sup> The Metamorphosis, p.7.

his body, is only cursorily described--the narration veers this way only to note the presence of fabric samples fixing Samsa for the reader as a travelling salesman with sufficient reason not to be where, and in the condition, in which he presently is, a table on which the fabric samples lie, and a strange portrait hanging above it--and furthermore assumes a clearly secondary importance compared with the latter portrait to whose comparatively lavish description the remainder of the paragraph is devoted. The portrait consists of a cutting from a "glossy magazine"--presumably a photograph--depicting a woman done up entirely in furs: hat, boa and muff. The woman is suspended in the midst of a strange gesture, "sitting upright and raising up against the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her whole forearm had disappeared." This completes the curious beginning of The Metamorphosis: two paragraphs, one describing the body of a man become insect, the second describing an image behind glass of a woman swathed in animal skins, caught in a strange act of address while simultaneously retreating more deeply still into her own animal mantle. What connection exists between these two bodies seized in the throes of a "going over," their bodily surfaces bearing the chitin and fur of an incomprehensible animal being? Though it would be difficult to establish anything definitive at the outset--without considering for example, as I shall presently, how this particular pairing returns again later to play out the central and most intense moments of each of the succeeding sections of the story--a number of observations may already be made. To begin with, the body clearly is the site within and upon which The Metamorphosis is played out. But this body concerns much more than simply the anatomical bodies that correspond to characters, it is also a collective or social body, a body constantly mutating and multiplying its surfaces. In a very deep sense then it concerns the traffic of bodies: their movements, interactions and above all their capacity to affect other bodies (or partial bodies) as if across a common tissue or membrane.

Within such a system of bodies--and this is true for all aspects of Kafka's work-- everything comes to be linked in a system of mutual, even symbiotic, implication, that is, in a webwork of relations of exchange, but these relations are purely material and vital and generally have neither interior nor content. This helps explain the strange role of gestures in Kafka's work; they are at once a supremely important element of expression though at the same time always apparently at odds with what ostensibly is taking place in the narrative.<sup>21</sup> The traffic in words and forms belongs to the realm of discontinuous and divided Being--the spaces between them cannot be traversed, messages of this nature cannot, and do not, arrive.<sup>22</sup> Indeed entities of this nature do

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<sup>21</sup> On the subject of gestures see, besides Benjamin (cited fn. 3): Walter Sokel, Franz Kafka, Tragik und Ironie: zur Struktur seine Kunst (Munich: Langen, 1964) pp. 227 ff.; Karl J. Kuepper, "Gesture and Posture as Elemental Symbolism in Kafka's The Trial," in Mosaic, III, No. 4, Summer 1970, pp. 143-52; Gesine Frey, Der Raum und die Figuren in Franz Kafkas Roman "Der Prozess" (Marburg: Elwert, 1965); Heinz Hillman, Franz Kafka, Dichtungstheorie und Dichtungsgestalt (Bonn: Bouvier, 1964) pp. 130-36; Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka; Gustav Janouch, Conversations with Kafka, p.14.

<sup>22</sup> Direct examples of this phenomenon in Kafka's work are far too obvious to merit listing here. But the preceding comments offer a somewhat convincing explanation for why it is, both in Kafka's oeuvre generally and in the short piece "On Parables" specifically, that it may be said that "in parable. . . one always loses." For in parable, that is, in all traffic in words, one can never get beyond the limit of a sterile tautology: "that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already." For in the story in question, parable--all linguistic or narrative presentation of Truth--is understood in opposition to "reality," that is,

have an interior, that is, a meaning, but this meaning can never be transmitted. But there remains another modality or organization of reality that might be described as a kind of glaci of pure continuity and exteriority which is populated by, indeed itself constitutes, a kind of full body. In a certain sense it may be characterized as a domain of sheer immediacy, that is, of real and perpetual contact, though this contact is always "meaningless" as such, or "empty." In fact, it is possible to say that a body is "full" precisely because it is empty, that is, because it forms a continuous, even if folded surface and not an interior, signifying space. Moreover, it is continuous in two senses: first, because it bears a capacity for continuous variation (continuity in time) and second, because it is continuous with--and immanent to-- all other bodies (continuity in space).

Now the first and most prominent way in which this continuity comes to be inscribed in the text is in the traffic of, and many discussions about, nourishment in general and food in particular. The second section particularly, is shot through with such discussions of nourishment, both that of Gregor and of his family; for food is the medium and plane on

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to "the cares we have to struggle with every day." The aporia explicitly entertained in the story, every bit as much as the question of whether narrative/language can form a bridge to the real, to undivided truth, is the inverse one: Can we cross over into parable, transcend the empirical and everyday? The unequivocal answer is no. But then again this lesson too (ours) is given only in language/narrative (parable). See Complete Stories, p. 457. It is worth noting that once again the actual site of Kafkan narration is the hinge or the interface between two (potentially communicating) nested worlds.

which the social bond (here of the family) is so often articulated in Kafka<sup>23</sup>. It is also arguably the story's central leitmotif; for Samsa's final revelation, which after all may be taken for the story's climax, arrives in no other form than the discovery of music as a new and "unknown nourishment."

Food is both that which sustains the body, giving it weight, gravity and stature and, in its more sublimated, rarified forms (of which music is one, but also philosophy--the inquiry into first causes, mysterious origins), that which weaves the very web that links all bodies together.<sup>24</sup> Food in fact, becomes a kind of language in Kafka<sup>25</sup>, where

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<sup>23</sup> "The Hunger Artist," and "Investigations of a Dog" are but two of the most obvious examples. On the ambivalence toward food as connective substance and as world see Kafka's reflexions on his thinness and vegetarianism in Letters to Felice, trans. James Stern and Elizabeth Duckworth (New York: Schocken, 1973)(cf. fn. 25) and Gustav Janouch, Conversations with Kafka, and especially the commentaries by Elias Cannetti, Kafka's Other Trial: The Letters to Felice (New York: Schocken Books, 1974) pp. 22-29; and Ernst Pawel, The Nightmare of Reason.

<sup>24</sup> The correlation between music and food will be established presently. On this form of nourishment and the connection with non-individuated, social fabric, "Josephine the Singer" and "Investigations of a Dog" are perhaps the two most explicit examples, though the whistling sounds that emanate from The Castle's telephone networks, the paper-rustling sounds of the adjuvants own body movements, the droning in "The Burrow," the clicking sounds of the balls in "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor," as well as the persistent rumor motif throughout the works, etc. are all unquestionably related to the same ambivalence toward continuity and communication.

language in its pre- and non-individuating forms--mute corporality, gesture, music,

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<sup>25</sup> If food became a kind of language, language undoubtedly also became a kind of food, the more rarified form of nourishment--writing--coming more and more to replace the more earthly one of meat. Again Kafka's anti-carnivorous habits articulated another social relation: "For months on end [. . .] my father had to hide his face behind the newspaper while I ate my supper." Kafka's vegetarianism did not have to be self-conscious or aggressive for it to have constituted nevertheless an "outsideness" vis-a-vis his family lineage. Kafka's father, himself the son of a butcher, had little tolerance for Kafka's meatless diet. Letters to Felice, p.30 and passim. On another occasion Kafka turns his vegetarianism into a weapon against Felice: "One night at dinner with your sister, I ate almost nothing but meat. Had you been there, I would probably have ordered a dish of almonds."

What else, one is forced to ask, is the art of hunger in "The Hunger Artist"? The refusal of a certain kind of food constitutes a rejection of a certain complex of social relations, and often provides access to another. Food is both the pivot point to sustain a "going over" or a change of state (often towards some form of enlightenment) and the material stand-in for language in Negative Theology's "negative path" (*via negativa*) to the Absolute. The apophatic "not" of the mystics ("He is not soul or intelligence, not imagination or conjecture, not reason or understanding, not word, not intellection, not said, not thought...") becomes anorexia and abstinence. Language's inability to express the infinite is a preoccupation common to Kafka and the Christian mystics. Pseudo-Dionysius, Areopatica in Elmer O'Brien, Varieties of Mystic Experience: An Anthology and Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1964) pp. 86-88.

On the apophatic theme in relation to Kafka see also sections from the Diaries quoted in Jean Wahl, "Kierkegaard and Kafka," The Kafka Problem, ed. Angel Flores (New York: New Directions, 1946). Wahl's argument is to show that Kafka's tendency to affirm through negation actually opposes Kierkegaard's "transcendental mysticism with an immanent mysticism." Wahl goes even further to thereby discover in Kafka a certain (anti-Christian) "Nietzscheism." Cf. especially pp. 271-2, 268. A related argument is put forward by Maurice Blanchot in his Espace littéraire (Paris: Gallimard, 1955) pp. 75-79, as well as by Malcolm Pasley regarding a putative reverse transcendence through the construction of a "negative edifice" in "The Burrow." Cf. his essay "The Burrow" in The Kafka Debate, p.419.

rumor and finally food<sup>26</sup>--is a principle of inhering, connection and radical immanence; while in its individuated forms--messages, letters, pronouncements, sentences, science etc.<sup>27</sup> and especially fasting<sup>28</sup>--it is little more than a principle of

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<sup>26</sup> These latter are nearly always linked, as we will see, with animality (ie. Leni, Josephine, etc.)

<sup>27</sup> Any inventory here would be endless. Let a few of the most salient examples serve: "An Imperial Message," The letters to Felice, The Castle, "The Penal Colony," "A Common Occurrence."

<sup>28</sup> Fasting is a special case ("The Hunger Artist," "Investigations of a Dog," etc.). Though not really a language as such, it is nonetheless an explicit negation of food and worldly corporality, an extension of the apophatic method to a silent incantation. (Thus in the story, "The Silence of the Sirens" silence is described as a "still more fatal weapon" than even the Sirens' treacherous song.) It also renders even more acute corporal individuation, closing the body off from its milieu, while literally hardening its boundaries. This is, of course, in every possible way but one, in opposition to music whose role is to gather, merge and consolidate. What they have in common is the capacity to elevate and deliver, though in one case (music, non-individuation) it is to a state of pre-individuated immanence, in the other (fasting) to a (false) transcendence (ostensible acquittal); Kafka: "one must throw away life to conquer it" (Gustav Janouch, Gespräche mit Kafka (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1968) p. 250. The appearance at the end of "A Hunger Artist" of the lithe panther, and at the end of The Metamorphosis of Gregor's sister's "stretching young body"--two images of a healthy unselfconscious animality--is the reaffirmation of what I have called a "mute corporality" in the face of the false

distance, division and exclusion, a bad infinity. Thus the theme of communication, bound up as it is with that of food, dominates this section. The communications in question are those between Gregor and his family, communications in which his sister stands in, not at all the incest object as which she is conventionally seen, but rather as go-between and keeper of the code, or rather, in collaboration with food itself, as the corporal vehicle of communication. Gregor's sister seems to straddle both worlds, her comings and goings from Gregor's room, her daily reports to the family, her special and almost too insightful understanding of Gregor's situation--here given full play in the void left by Gregor's own loss of (individuated, human-all-too-human) language. This is further underscored by her role as the sole entitled bearer of food, for she of course is everywhere identifiable with it, from the initial maternal offering of a bowl of fresh milk and soaked bread<sup>29</sup> to the final ecstasy in which his hunger is both sublimated and satisfied by the music his sister produces with her violin, an excitement so intense that it must be extended in a fantasy of incorporating her entirely and consummated with an

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transcendence proposed by Gregor's and the Hunger Artist's apophatic withering away and consequent "enlightenment."

<sup>29</sup> Let us skirt the obvious Freudian cliché merely to underscore the food/body conflation. Note as well the inedibility of this offering as an unambiguous if trivial gesture signifying a refusal of maternity and oedipal worldliness in the same sense that the Hunger artist himself renounces not food itself but only the wrong type of nourishment. "The Hunger Artist," Complete Stories, pp.268-277.

extraordinary, vampirous kiss to her soon to be uncollared neck (p.49).<sup>30</sup> Indeed Gregor's sister is indistinguishable from relations of food: she is the one who prepares

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<sup>30</sup> The motif of necks rightfully has received an immense amount of attention in Kafka studies. Most however has focused on the symbolism of the downward bowed or upward cocked postures, and occasionally with the covered/uncovered duality. What both these characteristics bring equally into evidence however is a peculiar but typically Kafkan elasticity; the neck here becomes a zone in perpetual plastic variation and this seems to express some inherent (either potential or realized as in the case of certain "animal" characters) freedom of the body as a proliferation of mute but purely affective (uncoded) or intensive states. Indeed the peculiar lability, slipperiness and flexibility of this body part tends to induce it almost to separate off from the rest of the body (except of course when other body parts are equally seized by incomprehensible gestures, at which time they too approximate a certain elastic "neckness") giving it an almost self-animated, autonomous, and for this reason, highly eroticized quality. The plasticity and slipperiness also lends the neck a certain quality of nakedness which is in no way diminished--quite the contrary--by being covered up. Here it is only the encounter with a garment that is crucial, whether this be a loose, open one or a tight fitting one does not matter for it is here that the body in Kafka seems always to be caught slipping, decomposing or falling while at the same time opening up obscenely into a kind of continuity and nakedness. Kafka's short description of Titorelli as he appears to K. on first meeting bears each of these themes out very clearly: "'Oh those brats!' said the painter, trying unsuccessfully to button his nightshirt at the neck. He was barefooted and besides the nightshirt had on only a pair of wide-legged yellow linen trousers girt by a belt with a long end flapping to and fro. . ." Thus the relation to nakedness--here of a decidedly genital nature--links necks in no uncertain way to the peculiarly erotic, even obscene animal and object world (Odradek and

meals, not only for Gregor but also the family, now that the cook, unable to tolerate the recent developments in the household, has resigned; she is also the one who feeds Gregor, yet within the same activity also communicates with him both by deploying his food and interpreting it like so many mute alimentary signs,

His sister noticed at once, to her astonishment, that the bowl was still full, only a little milk was spilled around it; she picked it up immediately--not with her hands of course, but with a rag--and carried it out. Gregor was extremely curious to know what she would bring him instead, and he racked his brains on the subject. But he would never have been able to guess what his sister, in the goodness of her heart, actually did. To find out his likes and dislikes she brought him a wide assortment of things, all spread out on an old newspaper: old, half-rotten vegetables; bones left over from the evening meal, caked with congealed white sauce; some raisins and almonds; a piece of cheese, which two days before Gregor had declared inedible; a plain slice of bread, a slice of bread and butter, and one with butter and salt. In addition to all this she put down some water in the bowl apparently permanently earmarked for Gregor's use. And out of a sense of delicacy, since she knew that Gregor would not eat in front of her, she left hurriedly and even turned the key, just so that Gregor should know that he might make himself as comfortable as he wanted. (24)

Gregor's relations with his family are increasingly reduced to this axis: the reception, or rejection of their food. Since Gregor has not managed to produce even the semblance of human speech since the first pages of the story they wrongly imagine that he is also incapable of understanding their speech. For this ostensible reason, and this is

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the philosopher's top are clear denizens of this elastic, neck/genital, animal realm, just as is Titorelli who is filthy, and fecund in the rodent sense of the term) whose characteristics are developed later in this study.

undoubtedly as much a purpose as a side effect of the metamorphosis, communications, at least linguistic ones, cease to be direct<sup>31</sup>, that is, they either pass over into other nonlinguistic--e.g. gestural, alimentary, etc.--mediums or simply become indirect--rumor, hearsay, inference. The family's time and activities now, as if perceived through the focus of a one-track animal consciousness, are wholly oriented, even defined, in relation to meals: "there were family consultations at every mealtime about how they should cope; this was also the topic of discussion between meals. . .," etc. All news of Gregor as well is transmitted through perfunctory accounts of his eating habits, verbal exchanges from which he himself in turn is able to infer the state of his family's morale, yet in doing so must endure hearing himself addressed only in the third person,

It was only later . . . that Gregor sometimes caught a remark which was meant to be friendly or could be interpreted as such. "Oh, he liked what he had today," she would say when Gregor had tucked away a good helping, and in the opposite case, which gradually occurred more and more frequently, she used to say, almost sadly, "He's left everything again." (25)

Gregor's hunger, which from the first page on is described as ravenous, is soon oriented less and less to food, more to news or communications,

But if Gregor could not get any news directly, he overheard a great deal from the neighboring rooms, and as soon as he heard voices, he would immediately run to the door concerned and press his whole body against it.

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<sup>31</sup> There are of course, two important exceptions as when Gregor is made to endure both his father's and the charwoman's direct insults. But in both these cases Gregor is treated not as an interlocutor but merely as an object.

Sequestered in his room, and seemingly at an infinite remove from the world, all sensual data--light, vibration, sound, duration--become, through interpretation, sources of knowledge. Every surface is now a sensible one--walls, doors, food--and as speech recedes in importance as a vehicle of information, it is the surface itself of Gregor's body that grows in subtlety, sensitivity and articulateness. Gregor, pressing himself against the door--the image is one of two membranes communicating across an interface--employs his entire body as if engaged in a total act of sensuous reception. Elsewhere one notes the many references to body heat--usually accompanying extreme negative agitation, as when overheard family discussions of money elicit the flush of guilt and shame--and coolness (the leather couch, the glass frame of a picture), which either calms and provides solace, or accompanies the passage from a negative intensity to a positive one (the abstract union with the furclad woman). Here the hardness of Gregor's carapace is but a figure of tragic irony, as when he wonders to himself, noticing his new if only temporary powers of robustness and quick healing, "Have I become less sensitive?," or later, when wounded by an apple that easily embeds itself in his back, he endures the "unbelievable pain" which forces him to stretch out his body "in a complete confusion of all his senses."

In addition to the communication and interaction through food, Gregor continues to communicate some residual human affect through the uses he makes of his body, especially through the means employed to keep it hidden. He expresses at least some degree of self-consciousness, humility, compassion, shame and even apology, by keeping himself pressed under the couch while his sister is present in the room and, when this is no longer sufficient, under a sheet which hides him entirely. Nor are the track marks that he leaves around his room signs lost on his sister, who immediately deduces from

them that Gregor is in need of more free space and less furniture. Later the father will prove less astute at reading this language, failing to interpret Gregor's gesture of pressing himself against the door of his room, as one of submission, good will and remorse at having broken out of confinement in the first place. Gregor's wound however will be the basis of an intersubjective relation of guilt that temporarily reunites him to the family sphere in the beginning of part III, a connection which is effected both literally and symbolically through the gesture of leaving open the door to Gregor's room. And last but not least, the psychological debilitation of his final days is deciphered by his sister at the story's end, upon examination of Gregor's emaciated and dessicated corpse<sup>32</sup>.

The many passages about money--the family finances, the debts, and the obsessive calculations--are also meditations on food (nourishment), or more exactly on social (familial) relations.<sup>33</sup> Gregor's success, and subsequent pride at sustaining the family after its financial disaster has lapsed now into failure and shame. What food and money have in common is the ability to contract and store quantities of force, they constitute a source and a reserve of vigor. Thus the father is early on characterized as ineffectual, slothful and parasitic, a result though, and not the cause of having been ruined financially. He is bereft of business, but also, correlatively, of youth and vigor. His

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<sup>32</sup> The demoralization of the Samsa family is expressed as well by the loss of appetite and the phrase often overheard at mealtimes "Thanks, I've had enough." (p.26)

<sup>33</sup> Here again the complex link between the sister's body, music, and the lessons Gregor was meaning to offer her by way of money also becomes an exchange for the "unknown nourishment".

seemingly hopeless physical bankruptcy is further inscribed in the form of his debts which, as has already been noted, are transitive, like an inherited guilt, the very reason why Gregor must continue to work and defer his yearning for freedom.<sup>34</sup> The demands made on Gregor's body for the most part serve the void left unfilled by the father's.<sup>35</sup> Yet with Gregor's metamorphosis--the sudden creation of a massive debt vis-à-vis himself--the balance swings in the opposite direction. The father's authority returns, as does his health, vigor and to a certain degree his wealth (his financial situation is revealed to have been far more favorable than previously understood), and, in symbiotic fashion, fills the familial "force-" gap evacuated this time by the debilitated and hungry Gregor.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps most important of all, though, is the manner in which these developments constitute a reversal of certain relations of exchange. Most significantly to

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<sup>34</sup> The profound kinship between debts and guilt (Schulden, Schuld) is here self-evident. It was of course Nietzsche's central theme in Book II of The Genealogy of Morals.

<sup>35</sup> The body as derelict continent from which all selfhood has been drained, and as a site of perpetual re-coding by social, transindividual forces are but two sides of the same perpetual theme in Kafka. The body offers itself at best as a "deputy self" for traffic in the individuated world or as the site and source of a pure inalienable gestural expressivity (animality). Cf. "Wedding Preparations in the Country" pp. 55-6.

<sup>36</sup> Once again this reciprocal economic (in fact thermodynamic) relation is underscored after Gregor's expiration at the story's end in the final image of his sister's new found physical and sexual vigor: "they watched their daughter getting livelier and livelier. . . she had blossomed into a good-looking, shapely girl. . . at the end of their ride their daughter got up first and stretched her young body."

be noted is the reversal of the patrilineal debt (guilt) which is passed back against the flow of patrilineal time to the father who must now assume the added burden of a son constituted as a pure economic and social liability. Later we will see how this process of "waste" constitutes the positive (at the level of relations) if doomed (at the level of subsistence of the organism) act of The Metamorphosis.

Gregor's earlier vigor as a "breadwinner," and his regular donation of money to the family established precisely a bond of warmth and exchange among them that, however, soon withered.<sup>37</sup> Only the bond between him and his sister remained strong, and this is inscribed, as every social bond must be, in a concrete exchange. Here it is the money for the music lessons that Gregor had hoped to provide for his sister, and this unrealized gesture grows into an extended reflection on Gregor's part which, because it also explicitly notes the parental opposition, and therefore the anti-familial nature of such a scheme, opens up definitively the axis or bond-line of the story's greatest affective intensity in the story. The exchange of money, food, music and gestures consolidates the individual levels or rather, concrete continuums respectively of force, vigor, sonority and corporality, across which power and desire are continually articulated. Every object embedded in this system necessarily bears a complex relation to all others. The sister's body enters deeply into this relation, for the time being linked to Gregor in an almost vital way on all levels, part deputy, part appendage, but also part host, for her body is also the vessel of the "unknown nourishment."

We move now to the scene in Part II in which Gregor's mother and sister begin, after serious deliberation and debate over the therapeutic benefits of such an act, to evacuate

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<sup>37</sup> The Metamorphosis, p.37.

his room of all its contents. Furniture too, will now play a role like that of nourishment. In this form however, it is a kind of food or nourishment which connects Gregor not so much to his family and human society per se, but rather to the past, to the temporal and historical human world. During her first visit to her afflicted son's room, a transgression attempted only on the sly during the father's momentary absence from the house and with the daughter's express permission, Gregor's mother hesitates, protests,

"doesn't it look as if by removing his furniture we were showing him that we have given up all hope of his getting better and are leaving him to his own devices without any consideration? I think the best thing would be to try to keep the room exactly the way it was before, so that when Gregor comes back to us again, he'll find everything unchanged and can forget all the more easily what's happened in the meantime."

The sudden, unexpected presence of the mother gives Gregor a temporary shock, touches him, and catching him off guard, redraws him into the familial (oedipal) and social world from which his transformation had provided a form of escape.

Had he really wanted to have his warm room, comfortably fitted with furniture that had always been in the family, changed into a cave, in which, of course, he would be able to crawl around unhampered in all directions but at the cost of simultaneously, rapidly, and totally forgetting his human past? Even now he had been on the verge of forgetting, and only his mother's voice, which he had not heard for so long, had shaken him up.

Kafka states specifically that it is the mother's voice more than anything else, compounded by the recent lack of any direct personal address, that shakes him out of his

state of forgetfulness.<sup>38</sup> Language characteristically is the element par excellence of the beyond (memory), that is, of a certain rootedness in Being. Clearly, forgetting is always a forgetting of the past. Now if the ontological stability of character is a function of what Thomas Pynchon once called its "temporal bandwidth," that is, the degree to which a character's being is extended and oriented to its past and future<sup>39</sup>, then

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<sup>38</sup> In "Description of a Struggle" the overhearing of the mother's voice by a child still submerged in the precarious drift of partial wakefulness is (mistakenly) taken as evidence of an inaccessible realm of stable being within which "even a little liqueur glass [manages to] stand on the table steady as a statue." The personality in question here, that of "the supplicant," is characterized by pure turbulence and dispersion; he suffers from a "seasickness on land" and all the elements of his world continually "sink away like fallen snow." He is described as if inhabiting a kind of aphasia:

"Don't you feel it's this very feverishness that is preventing you from being properly satisfied with the real names of things, and that now, in your frantic haste, you're just pelting them with any old names? You can't do it fast enough. But hardly have you run away from them when you've forgotten the names you gave them. The poplar in the fields, which you've called the 'Tower of Babel' because you didn't want to know it was a poplar, sways again without a name, so you have to call it 'Noah in his cups.'"

He interrupted me: "I'm glad I haven't understood a word you've been saying."

<sup>39</sup> Gravity's Rainbow is a work profoundly indebted to Kafka's, not the least for its development and refinement of a radical either/or: "either everything is connected [in a realm available to perception] or else nothing is." Both these alternatives however boil down perhaps to the same thing: the world involves an impossible ethical decision between a hyper-focused

forgetting is the prime characteristic of its lability, and an indispensable element of transformation, actualization or becoming. In relation to the present case, we see that Gregor's potential increase of mobility (freedom) is linked directly to an inverse, but corresponding loss of the past, ie. the removal of furniture.<sup>40</sup> The story's major theme is here articulated ever more deeply. For the actual metamorphosis which serves as its ostensible basis, or more specifically Gregor's animality, is, as has been noted, continually developed in opposition to a certain mode of time; the time of accumulation, rational measure and surplus (alarm clock, office manager, debts). It develops another form of time proper to a different system of exchange, a mode of time which may even be said on the whole, to characterize Kafkan animality. Here, is developed what one could only call the time of a pure expenditure or pure waste in the Batailleian sense.<sup>41</sup> From this perspective Gregor's body, through the sacralizing passage of metamorphosis, is extracted from one system, that of productive economic exchange and inserted into another in which it is transformed into a purely sumptuary object, a kind of potlatch or

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paranoia and a pure scattering. Slothrop is a direct descendant of the supplicant. See Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow (New York: Viking, 1973).

<sup>40</sup> In The Trial mobility is clearly associated with indefinite postponement, that is, with K.'s only chance of triumphing over his charges and his ordeal. He considers the following advice from Block: "let me remind you of the old maxim: people under suspicion are better moving than at rest, since at rest they may be sitting in the balance without knowing it, being weighed together with their sins." p.191.

<sup>41</sup> Georges Bataille, La Part Maudite (Paris: Minuit, 1949). See discussion below, pp. 182 *passim*.

sacrifice (literally, a making sacred) offered in a deliberate spectacle of destruction and waste.

The Metamorphosis recounts the insertion of a disruptive violence into a certain economic traffic of objects, power and desire (here represented by the system of the family, though this is but a model and micro unit of a greater, more ominous entity). But it is at the same time inseparable from a certain sacralizing process whereby corporality and animality may be seen as two aspects of a single movement of becoming that in shattering one order--that of numerical time, discrete forms and subjective essence--make possible the composition of, and access to, another--that of continuity, virtuality, catastrophe and the instant.<sup>42</sup> The connection between the religious and the economic dimensions of animality will be treated later. It is sufficient here to note the importance played by Gregor's body as the site of convergence and strife of different systems and forces, and its dual capacity--due to its profound implication and immanence within these systems and forces--to receive affects from bodies around it and to affect in its turn, through its own transformations and peripeties, those same bodies.

This is why the humiliation that ensues from Gregor's transformation into a bug is felt more strongly by the family than by Gregor himself. The dramatic staging of an unproductive expenditure, that is, an activity whose entire meaning derives from the possibility of personal loss, and as great a one as possible, also links it in no uncertain

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<sup>42</sup> Catastrophic is used here in the purely descriptive sense of open, metastable, sensitive, fluctuating systems as developed by Bataille and René Thom. Cf. René Thom, Structural Stability and Morphogenesis (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1975).

terms to those necessary activities in any culture not oriented to production and conservation: luxury, war, sex, play, art<sup>43</sup>. The conflict of the two economies was central to Kafka's life: on one hand the need to work, to earn a salary, and to belong to the responsible world of men, on the other, the desire to write, and to belong to the world of Luftmenschen, but a short semantic step from Ungeziefer and Untiere (vermin and beasts).<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Kafka's relationship with Felice focused this conflict as one between the eminently productive unit of the family, and the sacrificial, sumptuary life of solitude and literature.

At another level, closer to the details of the story, one is compelled to interpret Gregor's reaction in the scene with the mother only as a temporary faltering of resolve and as a regression, wholly at odds as it is with the general movement of the story. For no matter how The Metamorphosis may be interpreted, it must also be seen in its aspect as an escape from the hierarchical/political violence of the Oedipal family (the Law). Its positivity lies in constructing a field in which relations and forces (communications) are deployed horizontally (planometrically), which in the case at hand, means along the

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<sup>43</sup> It is no coincidence that the bed and the alarm clock are presented as opposing, rather than complementary, objects in Part I of The Metamorphosis. (Interestingly enough, both these objects vanish entirely, and inexplicably, after the opposition is established.) The role of the bed and the question of uselessness has already been established.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Maurice Blanchot's "L'Exigence de l'oeuvre" in L'Espace littéraire; Pawels' The Nightmare of Reason; Cannetti's Kafka's Other Trial; Heller's Franz Kafka (New York: Viking, 1974) ch. II; Emrich's Franz Kafka, pp. 136-151; Brod's Franz Kafka: A Biography; and on the Luftmensch trope, Anders's Franz Kafka, ch. II.

brother/sister plane.<sup>45</sup> At moments the narrator seems to develop the intense relationship between Gregor and his sister as a fantasy belonging entirely to her, a childish "romantic enthusiasm" that would aggravate Gregor's situation in order to guarantee an even greater exclusivity of her relations with him.<sup>46</sup> Her real power and authority over the situation is further established by allowing her to be the first to pronounce Gregor's death sentence. However, one need only recall the spectacular fantasy to which Gregor is given over at the story's end, in which he imagines himself shut up forever in a room with his sister (his own version of exclusivity) with nothing but the music of her violin to sustain them, to convince oneself of whose fantasy this really is. Moreover, in this piece, following as it does, right on the tail of Kafka's breakthrough story "The Judgment," one immediately notes the structural transformation: in the first story, two horizontal relations (engagement: Georg/fiancee; friendship: Georg/correspondent in Russia ) are interrupted by an order originating from above (the father) and the story consequently ends in the protagonist's death.<sup>47</sup> In the present

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<sup>45</sup> The locked doors of Gregor's room, though feebly masked as a "travelling salesman's habit" explicitly effect the preliminary "break"--here a spatial, architectural one--with the organization of the oedipal household, one which the metamorphosis extends to a more essential realm. On the onanistic theme in relation to this elaborate bachelor apparatus of locks, photos, glass panes, fur, exudations etc. cf. section below "An Isomorphism: The Bachelor Machine" and fn. 127.

<sup>46</sup> The Metamorphosis, pp. 31-4.

<sup>47</sup> This same structure in which a message, swathed simultaneously in death and enlightenment, is passed from above to below will make its most stark and unmitigated

story, the horizontal relation (brother/sister) supplants the hierarchical, vertical one, and never so strongly as in the daughter's pronouncement of the death sentence that finally and completely deprives the parents of their son.<sup>48</sup> "Justice" is no longer dispensed from above, nor is the death it brings a mere punishment for the sloth and incest that moralizing and Freudian interpreters of Kafka have read into it. Death, rather, is its reward.<sup>49</sup>

This scene then represents a strategic momentary recapture of Gregor's affective body by the institutional framework of the Law (le propre). In a most uncharacteristically affect-charged moment, Gregor develops a sudden neurotic attachment to his furniture (and his past--the [true] nightmare from which he is trying to awake). This simply

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appearance as a piece of political technology in "The Penal Colony." The "Letter to his Father" partly duplicates this same structure though in reverse. The missive originates with the son, ostensibly addresses the father, though never reaches him. For the son has enlisted the mother as medium of connection but simultaneously transforms her into the ultimate and alternate destinataire, establishing with her--at least on the level of pure form--the exclusive and horizontal bond that excludes the father. This demonstrates the typical Kafkan mode, as developed very clearly in The Trial and The Castle, of procedure by alliance and af-filiation in order to respond to and dismantle relations and forces of filiation (historical, temporal).

<sup>48</sup> The Metamorphosis, p.52.

<sup>49</sup> "The child's happy exuberance is recovered in death's expression of sovereign liberty." Georges Bataille, "Franz Kafka," in Literature and Evil, trans. Alastair Hamilton (New York: Urizen, 1973) pp.138.

makes of it a kind of "bad nourishment" like the fresh milk, bread and fruit from the human world that Gregor had found inedible earlier on,

They were clearing out his room; depriving him of everything that he loved; they had already carried away the chest of drawers, in which he kept the fretsaw and other tools; were now budging the desk firmly embedded in the floor, the desk he had done his homework on when he was a student at business college, in high school, yes, even in public school. . .

The invasion and pillaging of Gregor's room contains an undisguised attempt to conquer and reclaim; thus the mother's hesitation over the most expeditious use of the "territorializing" effects of the furniture.<sup>50</sup> The campaign is directed to an extensive domain--the space of Gregor's room--but the effects radiate throughout his entire temporal body; an assault aimed at intercepting him on the self-willed trajectory of his animal "becoming."

### 3. Milieu and Event

Indeed the most salient feature of this scene is the clash of two worlds, which like two regimes of meaning, struggle to gain control of the brute matter at their disposal. In the sister's eyes, ever sympathetic to Gregor's transformative adventure, furniture is but a useless sentimental obstacle to movement, and it is movement of a kind, that most deeply characterizes this animal world. But the furniture is caught up in another ensemble,

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<sup>50</sup> By "territorialization" one may understand 1. the process of capturing an element and drawing it into a new coherency or functioning ensemble, and 2. the secondary process of reinscription of this element with subjective essence based on the givens of process no.1.

takes on another meaning from the very moment that the (voice of the) mother is present (as part of the ensemble). It now reflects the shared historical processes of family life and economy, sedimentations of affectivity, living instruments inseparable from Gregor's Bildung as man, brother and son. However Bildung, or formation, is always a form-ing of finalities, that is, of a fixed and absolute Being. But the Verwandlung does not represent a changing, or a "going over" merely from one self-identical Form to another. Rather, it describes an uncanny passage or slippage from the world of stable, individuated Being where a man (form) is ever identical with himself, to a monstrously unstable world of becoming, a world populated by an infinity of infinitesimal differences produced inexhaustibly at the heart of things, differences which risk at any moment to "swerve" into adjacent but tangential ensembles and worlds.<sup>51</sup> These "swerves"--switchpoints for the sudden and indeterminate changes of state of Kafkan narrative--are rooted in the world of space (Being) but nevertheless represent anomalies, "singularities," that is, necessary departures from it. These swerves begin as microscopic events<sup>52</sup> which intervene in, and mobilize an inert world of fixed relations by projecting into everything the aleatory flow of time. But it is not the global time of a progress or development, which merely evolves and consolidates the identity of Forms in space (Being), but a time which destabilizes Forms, tearing them out of their fixed perches in Being and embedding them in the stochastic current of a (perpetual) Verwandlung, or Becoming. This is the Kafkaesque virtuality and the perpetual "flight" of things that was developed earlier. It is also the principle of the

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<sup>51</sup> On "slippage" and the *clinamen* cf. fn. 85 (aa)

<sup>52</sup> "A Little Woman" See analysis at fn. 85.

"explicatio" method which discovers in every object, moment or gesture a world to be unravelled, a road to be taken or not. The Kafkan universe reveals itself at this molecular level of bifurcations and events; in vain does one search for meanings, closure or signifying "spatial form" at the molar level of story, novel or oeuvre. Events are always tear points in the tissue of Being, qualitative transformations of matter or destabilized essences. They are pragmatic, experimental; one does not know in advance where they will lead. Their purpose is neither to produce, nor to arrive at, preordained ends but rather, blindly and without finality, to establish conduits and relays, as these nascent events domino outward pursuing their consequences back into the empirical and material world. The event does not reproduce, it burrows.<sup>53</sup>

The event then, to return to my earlier discussion of Umwelt theory, is thus both an embracing and an excavation of a milieu. The milieu in turn is carved by the event and bears its shape. Every event is defined and exhausted by the production of a new milieu;

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<sup>53</sup> Kafka's story "The Burrow" is paradigmatic of his method. The classic Kafkan situation: a threat is posed ostensibly from the outside (the Law), yet is resolved in terms of the "immediate givens" of the empirical world. The earth itself pantheistically embodies both the threat as well as the potential, though of course only partial, release from it. The animal ceaselessly excavates passages, exits, escape routes, gaps, cul de sacs, zones of invisibility, illegibility or problematic ontology, finding hope, or at least "indefinite postponement," within the very same substance that simultaneously contains, multiplies and expresses the threat (or "charges"). In this sense, the earth in "The Burrow," in Spinozist fashion, forms the infinite, expressive and univocal substance, while at the same time acts as a concrete image of what exists above ground as human society and destiny in The Trial.

it is a forcing to the surface of relations which were once virtual but have now become actual. Kafka's world is like a sea of indetermination on which float islands or clusters of determination unlinked among themselves, though no less coherent internally for that. This is because the event has two sides, depending to which level it is related. On the one hand it belongs to the undetermined, the chaotic and the temporal, that is, it is a singularity; on the other, it seizes and constellates as much material as possible, it is worldly, spatializing and persists in its being. One will immediately recognize in such a description the preconditions of the Kafkan universe with its floating, disjunctive islands of space and time. It shares these Riemannian conditions<sup>54</sup> with Einsteinian and Futurist space, for they alike derive their character and shape, not from any preexisting substratum, but rather from the actual material content that fills it and its accompanying field of force.

To conceive of the field of The Metamorphosis in globalizing or strategic terms is to accept the interpretation of the story as one of unrelenting negativity and failure. Gregor's Putsch against Being, World and Family would be seen as first contained, then repulsed and finally extinguished altogether. On its own level and in its own terms such an interpretation is at least justifiable and, despite its triviality, would have to be accepted were it not for the fact that Kafka's narratives, individually and as an overall body, by virtue of their incomplete, episodic, heterogeneous and open nature, belie, not so much this specific interpretation, but the underlying conditions that would make it follow inexorably. That is, the most important thing in Kafka is to give full recognition

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<sup>54</sup> On Riemannian space cf. Hermann Weyl, Space Time Matter (New York: Dover, 1952 orig. 1917) esp. p.98.

to the instant, to the role of the singular and to the isolated "problem." In Kafka it is never, as I have said, a question of a totalized and global triumph; all advantages are momentary, fleeting, limited to the specific conditions at hand. In this sense, the same type of conflict or tension that determines the form of the content of Kafka's work--the antinomy of the two worlds--is also reflected in its form of expression: the very movement of narrative is continually molested by the exigencies and materiality of the event.<sup>55</sup>

Now there is certainly an apparent paradox embedded here. For it is simply not possible to argue that "narrative," because it involves a succession from one point to the next, is for that somehow excessively and illegitimately spatial, while on the other hand, the "event," because it is always associated with a concrete spatial correlative--a "milieu"--is somehow powerfully and subversively temporal. And this most certainly is not what I am arguing.<sup>56</sup> To begin with, it is not a question of opposing, according to the familiar neo-classical formula, a spatial to a temporal order, form or regime. Rather, it is to oppose two different complex orders in which the same elements--spatial and temporal--are constellated in a different way, form a different mixture or aggregate and constitute an entirely different regime of effects. This is why it has been possible to oppose a classical or Euclidean "regime of narrative" in which time forms a substratum

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<sup>55</sup> See discussion in ch. III, pp. 112-14 (on "Description of a Struggle") and this chapter, fn.10.

<sup>56</sup> This does however seem to be the point argued by Worringer in his Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: International U. Press, 1980 orig. 1908). Cf. also Joseph Frank, The Widening Gyre, p.57.

distributing and developing forms in space to a modern<sup>57</sup> "regime of the event" which substitutes a consistent "space-time" in place of a substratum, yet which maintains the true and irreducible materiality of nature through the concept of the milieu.<sup>58</sup> The opposition between space and time is possible, in fact, only within the (neo-) classical model, whereas the opposition that I have tried to construct concerns precisely the essential attribute of time--its capacity to make possible, or introduce, change (ie. difference)-- and this in relation to its two irreconcilable modes of appearance: 1. on the one hand as a transcendent dimension determining through some magical medium, events which take place outside of itself (the classical, or substratum theory of time) or 2. on the other hand, as a principle immanent to phenomena which can account for variation, diversity and change from within. One might formulate this relation in the following way: the first regime knows duration through development in Time while the second, precisely because it is home to the "event," knows it only through the "untimely," that is, the sudden (catastrophic, singular, origin-less) and unexpected.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Riemannian, Einsteinian, Minkowskian, etc.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. the concept of the "field" in Chapter II.

<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche's concept of the "untimely" is such an example of an anti-historical temporality. Thought must act against time in order to act upon time, but as something arriving from outside of "time" itself . . . and thereby planting the seeds of a time to come. See Foreword to "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in Untimely Meditations, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 1983). For Nietzsche qualitative changes--eg. the rise of the state, the origin of bad conscience, etc.--do not arise gradually

Clearly an entirely new type of creature or being would be required fully and properly to inhabit such a world: creatures of pure unpredictability, creatures unable and uninclined to see themselves from outside the conditions of the haecceitas or point-moment (any point-moment whatever) in which their presence (individuality) is always fully given. Kafka's world indeed, as we shall now see, is one replete with beings of just this type.

c. Animality

As this first attack on his new-found autonomy grows, Gregor's reflections on his formative past give way to a desperation, a need to act, to affirm, in the tactical terms of

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through organic adaptations or social contracts but by breaks, leaps or compulsions that wantonly defy linear historical processes,

they come like fate (Schicksal), without Grund, reason, consideration or pretext, they appear as lightning appears, too terrible, too sudden, too convincing, too "different" even to be hated . . . wherever they appear something new soon arises, a ruling structure that lives, in which parts and functions are delimited and coordinated, in which nothing whatever finds a place that has not first been assigned a "meaning" in relation to the whole. They do not know what guilt, responsibility, or consideration are, these born organizers; they exemplify that terrible artists' egoism that has the look of bronze (die wie Erz blickt) and knows itself justified to all eternity in its "work". . .

This causeless cause which is the origin of all change, but which nonetheless always bears within it its own absolute inner necessity is the "untimely." The Genealogy of Morals, in Basic Writings of Nietzsche, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968) Bk.II, 17.

his new form of being, an intensive modality (cathexis, animality) over and against an extensive domain (the territoriality of the furniture). Of all the room's "furnishings" however, only one is explicitly non-historical, anti-familial and genuinely oriented to a true exteriority--and it is no coincidence that this object also represents a point of convergence (and bifurcation) of, among a great many other things, both the human and animal worlds. The object in question is the portrait of the woman in furs, which Gregor embraces now with a fervor and intensity unmatched in any other scene of the story.

How might this gesture be understood? Does the depicted woman, introduced as early as the story's second paragraph, represent from the very outset the seed and promise of a successful Verwandlung, embodied in the form of a creature with one foot in the netherworld, full, mysterious and eros-affirming, resplendent in her corporal and gestural animality? Now this woman most certainly comes from the same world as does, for example, Leni, the lawyer's nurse and cook in The Trial, whose webbed fingers and insatiable lust for accused men brand her with the necessary "defect" (singularity) and the univocity or singleness of affect that characterizes inhabitants of Kafka's animal world. To this world belongs also the never-ending procession of subalterns, those diminutive and almost paper-thin characters that appear so often (at least the men) in groups of two or three, nearly always as adjuvants, for they are in their deepest essences complementary beings, mirror images of themselves, isolated and purified fragments of a larger, more complex affectivity that never fully reveals its face.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Doubling is indeed among the most consistent but also the most significant and structural of Kafka's leitmotifs. For these characters, insofar as they are double ones and essentially hybridized, are actually reflections of a doubled and therefore hybrid world: a

These are beings steeped in play, they ask few questions--they have an infallible instinct for the simple and useful answer, so fully and completely do they inhabit their worlds--they have the bodies, the minds and the faith of children. These creatures owe their animality more than anything else to their perfect and radical immanence in the world. These figures always appear conjugated with, or ancillary to, the filthy figures of the Law, and they themselves are often sullied by this proximity. But the important

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world where two orders of being actually coexist and interpenetrate one another. For Lubomir Dolezel Kafka's world consists precisely in having transformed the premodern oppositional schema of a natural vs. a mythological world into the modern schema of a visible vs. an invisible world. What is important to understand here is that even though the relations between the invisible (institutional, organized) world and the visible one are maintained at best only tenuously by emissaries and messengers, these worlds are nonetheless entirely immanent to one another and no longer comprise separate domains as they did in the older mythological vs. natural schema. Now it is certainly only the creatures from this other world which are double--but they are necessarily so. They do not express formal or essential individuality as would any creature in the natural, visible world, but the indistinct, metastable complexity of mixtures of states and affects; they are virtual creatures, or as Benjamin wrote, incompletely formed. Their "individuality," insofar as they possess one, resides in an infinitesimal and probably illegible difference. Cf. on indifferenciability fn.4, Ch. 3 above and fn. 63, Ch. 3 on Titorelli's paintings, for Benjamin citation cf. following footnote, and Lubomir Dolezel, "Kafka's Fictional World," Canadian Review of Comparative Literature (Mar. 1984) pp. 61-83.

Ontologically these creatures concern us, and are important, first and foremost because it is their very similarity that testifies to their character as non-, or not entirely, individuated beings. (Adorno, Prisms, p.253)

thing is that these creatures, even when subjugated or brutalized, are the very embodiment of freedom, they are bodies first and foremost, almost without definitive form, innocent and pure like desire itself. Though they are at some level presented as subordinate to the figures of the Law, this only more strongly marks their abject peculiarity: they have wills and desires of their own which make them pathologically incapable of following orders properly. Thus their mischievousness and deviance is not due to any corruption in a moral sense, only to distractability, a chronic side-effect of their being as creatures of absolute immediacy. They are figures of disorder and chaos (even of death itself) though paradoxically they coexist side by side with, and sometimes even as, emissaries of the Law<sup>61</sup>. They wear bizarre bits of clothing--hats, aprons, bed clothes, tight shirts--and as often as not are in some minor state of dishevelment or undress--often a bare neck,<sup>62</sup> a tear, or a soiled spot in their clothing is a sufficient

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<sup>61</sup> That they are able, simultaneously to inhabit both worlds is of course, as we just saw, a necessary and constituent, rather than contradictory, factor of their being. I could not agree more with Walter Benjamin, who has compared them to the gandharvas of Indian mythology, celestial creatures in an unfinished state. This undoubtedly is what makes them free, or at the very least why "for them . . . there is hope." (Benjamin, Illuminations, pp.116-17) Martin Buber has similarly compared them to licentious demons which are Gnostic transformations of the archons in Pauline gospel. Martin Buber, Two Types of Faith, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (New York: Harper, 1961) pp.162-69.

<sup>62</sup> Bare necks as well as covered necks are of course, as I have already mentioned, a constant erotic leitmotif in Kafka. For example, the baring of Gregor's mother's neck after her fainting spell in "The Metamorphosis" is immediately followed by the obscene doffing of her

sign of their animal nature. Because they do not speak they are prone to extravagant and incomprehensible gestures and sounds.

It would not be possible to overestimate the importance of the woman in the portrait nor, more importantly, of the family of animal and doubled characters to which she belongs. It is to a deeper understanding of the ontological nature of this group of characters that we must now turn our attention, leaving a more detailed examination of the portrait until the following section. Now these characters are among the very strangest and perhaps least understood characters in modern fiction.<sup>63</sup> To begin with, one might well argue that their very historical possibility did not even exist until, on the one hand, the advent of a more and more fully rationalized bureaucratic society that reduced the culture of the individual to a limited number of definable, market-oriented (quantifiable, exchangeable, abstractable) and utilitarian functions, and on the other, the advent in (literary) aesthetics of that "flatness" already discussed (of which Kafka

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remaining garments and mounting her husband in an erotic embrace. On the role of the neck cf. fn. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Though an entire study would be in order, a number of salient examples may be mentioned here: the Lulu character in Pabst's Pandora's Box, the protagonists of Chaplin's early films, virtually any Beckett character, the transformation of Kit in the third section of Paul Bowles's The Sheltering Sky, and perhaps pre-eminently, the figure of Robin Vote in Djuna Barnes's Nightwood. Seen from this perspective, Nightwood's final scene, which so scandalized, repelled and perplexed its readers (including T. S. Eliot), appears logical by Kafkan standards, even overdetermined. Paul Bowles, The Sheltering Sky (New York: Ecco Press, 1978 [orig. 1949]), Djuna Barnes, Nightwood (New York: New Directions, 1937).

was the prime innovator), and which provided a kind of homecoming for those relatively indistinct, almost pre-individual but profoundly happy characters of early Greek literature.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, once the status of these characters is granted, one immediately

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<sup>64</sup> This is a question in itself of massive complexity and importance, for which an entire dissertation would be inadequate treatment. I justify raising it for the following reason: two of the most magisterial works of literary history written in this century, Erich Auerbach's Mimesis, and Georg Lukacs', The Theory of the Novel, both attempted to ground their studies of the novel form (then beginning to manifest irrefutable signs of moribundity) in Greek epic, which functioned as a model either of happy immanence (Lukacs) or at least of a literary form whose dazzlingly flat surface perfectly approximated a full and unproblematic world where delight in physical existence was everything (Auerbach). Both works extended their studies through to the Modernist period--Woolf for Auerbach, Dostoevsky for Lukacs--and then failed egregiously to account for the anomalous nature of these works with respects to their own machines d'analyse: witness: "In Tolstoy, intimations of a breakthrough into a new epoch are visible; but they remain polemical, nostalgic and abstract. It is in the words [sic?] of Dostoevsky that this new world, remote from any struggle against what actually exists, is drawn for the first time . . . Dostoevsky did not write novels . . ." (Lukacs, p.152) This observation is all the more striking when one considers that the precursors of Kafka's strange animal-like characters are unquestionably to be found in those inscrutable and perseverating characters of Dostoevsky, as much perhaps as in the most eccentric aspects--the tics--of those of Dickens.

The literature of Kafka is without any doubt a literature of homesickness, but to relegate it to yet another reflection of "the age of absolute sinfulness" would be an unjustified reduction and a willful refusal to consider its true dynamic and its other, more essential side. Returning, with the advantage of hindsight, to the fundamental analyses of Auerbach and Lukacs (and here one would certainly have to include Nietzsche's earlier study of the choral origins of character in his Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music) we must ask ourselves in all seriousness, whether in fact, with the reappearance of these strangely uncomplicated and labile characters whose being, unlike anything one finds in novels, is expressed in the fullness and immediacy of the instant, not to mention the peculiar narrative machine in which they find their home, we are

perceives to what extent all characters in Kafka are tainted to some degree with this kind of virtual animality. What character is free of the volatility of the children in "Children on a Country Road" or the protagonist of "Description of a Struggle," what figure of the Law does not either lapse periodically into strange fixed postures like Klammm's perpetually bowed head, Titorelli's related hunched back, the weirdly restless contortions of the judges in the portraits he paints of them, or have food stains on their clothes, read pornography, spend their days skulking around in attics or remain eternally in bed? And finally, what is "animality" after all, and what is its significance?<sup>65</sup>

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not witnesses to an important historical phenomenon: the emergence of a new kind of world and especially, of an entirely new kind of epic to express it.

If immanence is a primary quality of the epic, an immanence which emphasizes the physicality and instantaneity of existence while reducing the distinction and individuation of forms, then the problem of the epic might well be re-posed today in light of the emergence of so many of these related themes in the most serious productions of modern culture. And this is precisely what Auerbach and Lukacs fail to do.

<sup>65</sup> Nearly all of the most interesting discussions of Kafkan animality, for however much they differ, have in common the postulate that in Kafkan animality is posited a forgotten realm that is no longer accessible to man, though it exists right there alongside and within his world. The most powerful of these arguments would see animals as "receptacles of the forgotten," a category--first articulated by Benjamin but then taken up successively by Adorno, Emrich, Bataille, Stine, etc.--in which is included childhood and freedom itself in its most abstract form, and which is as well intimately and inextricably connected to the body as though this were "the most forgotten alien land" of all. Yet for Benjamin animals are still sometimes associated with the family circle, are sometimes positions to which one has retreated from the human form out of shame, or are linked to a real distortion, insofar as they take on "the form things assume in oblivion." This however seems not to preclude the fact that only in animality can there be any hope whatsoever. (Benjamin, Illuminations, pp. 132, 132,

Let us begin by summarizing some of the ground already covered. I have already argued that there is a type of multiplicity--not necessarily "human" but vital--that may be conceived not from a transcendent but from an immanent perspective, and that from this perspective we should not expect to find individuals corresponding to forms or essences, but rather blocs of matter-moments or even function-circles (von Uexküll). We saw that the role of time in these two ontologies was very different. In the first we were dealing with a monolithic, irreversible and cumulative time which corresponds perfectly to that mode of being which characterizes objects on this plane, that of

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116, 144, 133, 117.) Adorno sees animality as a possible salutary recollection or replacement for the bourgeois concept of human dignity. For Bataille it expresses an implicit defense of sovereignty: peurile exuberance over and a willful, even political, denial of efficient, rationalized activity.

Though Emrich's treatment is the most sustained of the lot (over 120 pages long) it suffers from a certain dilution and miscellaneity of concepts. He too however, associates animality both with childhood and with purposelessness in general, as if it were only in first de-instrumentalizing the world that any type of freedom could even be posited. Throughout Emrich's discussion animality is associated with a forgotten but recoverable totality (freedom, selfhood, etc.), it is opposed to work and rationality, and finally even defined as enigmatically embodying "man's true self" (pp. 206-7). Emrich furthermore seeks to identify animality with (positive) meaninglessness, and therefore with all strange and diminutive objects in Kafka, and with the entire mutinous, inaccessible object world in general. The Benjaminian theme of "the forgotten" is the central theme of Stine's study, though he Christianizes Kafka's animals, seeing them less as prelapsarian than as "fallen" (p.61), they are alternately ancestral and linked to what is both despicable and indestructible in us (p.64), and as well functions as a purely formal, heuristic element allowing Kafka an endless reflection on the modern present without ever presuming to grasp it" (p.79). Emrich, Franz Kafka, ch.3: Adorno, Prisms; Bataille, Literature and Evil; Peter Stine, "Franz Kafka and Animals," Contemporary Literature XXII 1 (Winter, 1981) pp. 58-80.

development. In the second we saw how time, ceasing to serve as a substratum for objects took on a full ontological materiality through its association with the aleatory, but continually generated event. The Kafkan narrator (not the protagonist--for there is always at least a subtle separation here and this difference provides the antinomial space through which Kafkan narrative unfolds) sees the world from the first perspective but the world he sees is nonetheless deeply rooted in the other.<sup>66</sup> Now the being of the animal differs from that of the human first and foremost because it is fully given in the instant and thus belongs to an undivided Being which to humans is lost forever. Thus Walter Benjamin was able to describe Kafka's animals as "receptacles of the forgotten".<sup>67</sup> the animal world would have offered Kafka a means of developing, or at least approaching, realities that humans and human language can never finally attain.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> In Kafka this is what structurally underlies and constitutes the thematic of exile. It is also the tragic given: this other reality cannot be given in language. "Perhaps they did not even understand him. . . or perhaps they did understand him and with great self control answered his questions, but he a mere puppy, unaccustomed to music could not distinguish the answer from the music." "Investigations of a Dog," Complete Stories, p.285.

<sup>67</sup> See fn. 65.

<sup>68</sup> This, to be sure, is a constant leitmotif in Kafka criticism. Among Kafka's own works, "The Report to an Academy" is quintessential: language is constructed as the opposite of animality, first in the linguistic circumstances of the original transformation then later when looking back: "what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent it." Complete Stories, p. 253.

I then developed the question of corporality, or more simply, of the body, as a term opposed to and potentially replacing that of subjective essence. The body was seen as a surface or site, partly appropriated and partly shared, across which were effected the multiple practices of social exchange, ie. of community. The body furthermore was developed not as a discrete and autonomous entity but as physically continuous with its field or milieu of interaction: it was first and foremost a cluster of affectivity, a membrane that received and imparted affects to its surroundings. We saw that gesture belonged to this world of immediacy and affectivity, and not to the divided world of language with which it is, in any case, always at odds. Corporality finally was linked to animality, as two related modalities of becoming, two inseparable forms of a radical immanence. What remains now is to understand precisely what the relation is that exists between animality and immanence?

A number of important approaches to this last question can be found in the philosophical anthropology of Georges Bataille, whose own career as writer and essayist began in the mid 1920s almost exactly where Kafka's ended. Like Kafka's however, Bataille's importance has grown since the second world war and for the same essential, if vague, reason: they are both seen as having been the first, each in his own way, to have articulated a certain kind of experience, even a new space of thought, that arose out of the ashes of the old world—be it the world of Hegelianism or the bourgeois novel--and to mark the beginnings of a modern one.

It is sometimes said that Bataille's great importance for 20th century thought was to have established the possibility of thinking outside of the Hegelian dialectic. Existence would no longer be conceived in terms of opposites resolving each other and overcoming themselves by means of a third term which would supplant them. For Bataille, opposites

coexisted on the same plane, they fed each other, produced one another incessantly, and never resolved themselves in a higher unity. For this reason Bataille, like Kafka, could never have been interested in organic metaphors like "development," and "depth," nor in the accompanying metaphysics of meaning, repression and revelation. Bataille's anti-Hegelianism is however most strong in his demonstrations of how the true basis of life is to be understood in the desire to destroy self-consciousness rather than to attain it. The true impulse at the basis of life is the impulse towards indistinction, continuity, unconsciousness (notably the philosophical un-self-consciousness) and death. Man, in the deepest parts of his being, Bataille affirmed, does not desire the acute atomized state of transcendence and individuation in which the meaning and goal of history would be deposited; he longs not to embody Geist but rather to be released from it by means of the violence which connects him to the night of his original "animality."

Bataille recovered the "negative" from its moral, psychological, aesthetic, even political exile within repressed modes of culture and restored it to the very heart of experience. The negative is now seen at once as the foundation of experience--it is the source of the sacred, of eroticism, of culture itself--and as the always proximate "other" which experience as such (experience as experience of self, as the mode of being of self-transcendent, individuated subjects) cannot contain or know.

It is here that the concept of animality finds in Bataille's work its first, and to my knowledge only, explicit philosophical elaboration. What is it then that an animal sees when it casts its erratic and slippery glance across the surface of the world? What this fluid and oblivious gesture fails to do--and this is the source both of man's fascination and horror--is to distinguish in the world anything resembling stable and distinct forms, it fails to separate even itself as distinct from this seamless continuity that it

apprehends. The animal, in accordance with Bataille's famous formulation, "exists in the world like water inside of water."<sup>69</sup> For animality is immediacy (l'immédiateté) and immanence.<sup>70</sup> The animal in other words inhabits its world in pure and perfect continuity, its glance is totally devoid of "intelligence" (science) and self-consciousness, and yet the animal is neither a mere object nor does it belong to the world of the human. For Bataille the universe is contained between two poles: the world of animality, of immanence, source of the sacred, the realm of indistinction (undividedness) and continuity; and the world of the discontinuous (the distinct and individuated), the objectified and the profane. If man eternally is fascinated by the animal's glance, this fascination amounts to little more than the simultaneous horror and ecstasy that he must experience in the presence of a being who is at once like him (that is, a non-object and biologically discontinuous) and yet continuous with the world. It is here, in the animal's promiscuous glance that man, in some fundamental way, experiences his own death, first as the loss of the (self-) consciousness of his own living, and secondarily as that all-encompassing night in which the animal bathes (continuity with the not-I) and which he now apprehends as surrounding himself too on every side. Animality (immanence) is an écoulement, or an uninterrupted flowing of the outside to the inside and the inside to the out,<sup>71</sup> it is the eclipse of all oppositions or, in Bataille's terms the absence of Negation.

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<sup>69</sup> Georges Bataille, Théorie de la religion, Oeuvres complètes, (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) Vol.VII, p.25.

<sup>70</sup> Théorie, (p.23).

<sup>71</sup> Théorie, p.27.

For Bataille, experience formed a quasi-infinite surface--2-dimensional yet oceanic--on which man and his activities (culture) form but an island whose solidity and stability is furnished solely by consciousness (ie. language). But this solidity, this exile from the continuous, even if necessary to man's existence, is nonetheless intolerable to him.<sup>72</sup>

And so, it is through religious experience that man has projected his longing for immanence into that realm which, for his discontinuous self, has become an outside, a quasi-beyond by means of which man re-establishes connection with his continuity.

There should be no mistake here, the "beyond" to which I refer is not the same beyond which distinguishes the realm of transcendent objects. Man, in so far as he is discontinuous, and self-conscious, is already a transcendent object, he is already torn from the pure immediacy of his original animality, that "time" before the world was divided into distinct objects and before he himself had become a self-conscious and acting subject committing operations upon them. Thus man is twice cleaved: first as a subject distinct from a world become an instrumental, exterior object; and then, once this exteriority has been introduced into his world, he is able to--and does--see himself from the outside as also distinct, that is, as an other. Now I have used the word "time" above in quotation marks, for to say that the world of animality or immanence is the world of immediacy (*immédiateté*) is to elicit a world entirely given, not in time at all, but in the instant. For the original and happy plenitude of the instant only gives way to the violations of time through the operation of another type of transcendence, one which Bataille situates in humanity's first invention of tools. When man extracts an object

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<sup>72</sup> Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986) p.15.

from the world in order to fashion it, this object becomes subordinate to man's will and desire--to man himself--a first but crucial step in the hierachization of Being. But more importantly, when a tool is fashioned, it becomes an object meant to act upon yet another, the tool itself is put into a relation of subordination in so far as it has become a means oriented toward an end that exists elsewhere or in another object. Transcendence is therefore introduced into man's being from the very moment that this split (discontinuity) between "means" and "ends" becomes conceivable. It is also in this means/end duality that one finds the definitive rupture of the instant (immédiateté) for it is in this relation that two events can for the first time be understood as simultaneously separate from one another but also linked. This eclipse of the instant means that events are no longer seen entirely from within--"like water inside of water"--but from the outside. Time and Man belong to this outside, and it is to this outside that they owe their irreducibly discontinuous beings.

From this discontinuity, from this outside, the underlying continuity of existence appears as a gulf, as the obliteration of the individual personality, in fact as a kind of non-being itself. Yet man longs to be continuous with something beyond himself, he longs to be connected with Existence, which is both deeper and broader than his own discontinuous, "random and ephemeral individuality."<sup>73</sup> Continuity is thus indissociable from death. But how can man approach this lost continuity, this "outside" which is really a pure insideness,<sup>74</sup> without inflicting a mortal wound to his biological being? There is

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<sup>73</sup> Erotism, p.15.

<sup>74</sup> On the insideness of the outside, see Gilles Deleuze's concept of the fold in his Foucault, and his book on Leibniz, Le Plie (Paris: Minuit, 1988).

a particular experience that Bataille calls "transgression" that can carry us momentarily across the line that separates the two fundamental forms of Being. Both erotic and religious experience (in the primal, ecstatic sense) as well as certain economic practices of pure unproductive expenditure (waste, dépense), are modes of approaching momentary continuity, they are both forms of forgetting and oblivion, they articulate that space that Bataille called the "limit," the region where Man's most intense experiences take him, but beyond which there is necessarily no "experience," no "time" and no distinction. This is the realm of death (remember "death" exists only for spatialized, discontinuous, self-transcendent Man), the sacred, and of course, of animality.

In the light of such a perspective it is possible to arrive at a richer, more nuanced and most importantly, more systematic understanding of these characters (ie. the affects and processes that define them) that comprise Kafka's world. First and foremost is the possibility of reconciling the erotic and economic themes with the religious. I have already spoken of a negative ontology in Kafka, the negative, subtractive, or evacuating method of many of the stories as they proceed toward emptiness, an emptiness that is totally unworldly yet all the more full for that. I have likened it to the apophatic methods practiced by early Christian mystics whose belief in the capacity of language to embody totality or infinity was as skeptical and problematized as Kafka's own. And of course we must take seriously Kafka's own personal view of his literature as a form of prayer.<sup>75</sup> Kafka's exile, like that of his central protagonists was categorical and irredeemable:

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<sup>75</sup> Erich Heller, "Punishments and Playthings de Profundis," in his Franz Kafka.

"there is hope, plenty of hope. . . but not for us," he says on a number of occasions.<sup>76</sup> His protagonists, as has already been pointed out, are distinctly non-animal, at least to the extent that they are identified with the perspective of the narrator. For these protagonists are in fact suspended forever, tragically and Gracchus-like between two worlds--a transcendent one whose rule would radiate from above, though whose power as origin has now receded beyond retrieval; or a purely immanent one in which everything coheres by the agency of a purely formal (meaningless) law, of which the goal is less to comprehend than somehow to come to reside or inhere within--to which they attempt to gain entrance. For here literature is not only the last possibility--an incantation, a prayer--but this moment is also the last possibility for literature--to the night of animality belongs only the happy but silent--gestural, corporal, musical--plenitude of the instant. But it is also for this reason that deliverance, enlightenment and "death" (silence) are not only not incompatible, they are complementary. A strange and empty peace accompanied by a clear light attends the last seconds of Gregor's wordly being, a scene which has echoes and variants throughout Kafka's work.<sup>77</sup> But the obsessive themes of Kafka's work--the desire to gain admittance to the Law, to penetrate to its interior, or to establish at least some kind of material link with its otherworldly

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<sup>76</sup> Janouch and Brod.

<sup>77</sup> The deaths of the protagonists of "The Hunger Artist", the parable "Before the Law" and the hypothetical victims of the punishment apparatus in "The Penal Colony" are either preceded by an enlightenment, or function as a deliverance or passage into the embrace of a now immanent, maternally receptive and almost bodily Justice.

substance, to become one and continuous with even its most nefarious flows,<sup>78</sup> that is, to become willingly and profoundly guilty if only the Law would finally grant admittance and truly apply to him; plus the fundamental exile which Kafka and his characters would never overcome short of committing gestures of remarkable violence and self-destructive innovation--all this must now take on a new complexity and necessarily a new ambiguity. For the deaths which end, yet do not resolve, the narratives of "The Judgment," "In the Penal Colony," and The Trial, no different from that of Gregor in The Metamorphosis, are the hypothetical consequences of willed, positive, even happy solutions implicit in its narrative universe. This is not however to say that these death endings--with which Kafka, in the cases of The Trial and The Metamorphosis, was never satisfied anyway--are themselves merely, and unproblematically, affirmations of some felicitous and newly discovered mode of Being. But they are certainly , a release from the pressures of exile in the individuated world<sup>79</sup>; they are forms of artificial closure designed for narrative experiments which can never, on their own, embody the whole toward which they relentlessly move. These narratives are thus truncated by the violent and final resolution that gains--for however much else it loses--admittance to the Law. Such contrived solutions were by no means foreign to Kafka's narratives. Their very cartographic, tactical and piecemeal nature guaranteed that they would have the same nappe, flow and shape as the world, and for this reason their endings were at best

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<sup>78</sup> "In the Penal Colony" and the ending of The Trial are two examples where admittance to the Law means leaving one's wordly body behind.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. fn. 66 above.

artificially imposed and at worst insoluble (narrative and ontological) dilemmas.<sup>80</sup> In one of his most philosophically sustained works, "The Great Wall of China," Kafka meditates on the three principles or guarantors of the divinely ordered cosmos (and classic narrative form): ground, center and origin, and these in relation to an even more overriding question: What is it in fact that constitutes, for any given system, be it the world or a structure that would represent it, a principle of closure or totality? Now in the course of the narrative all of these "problems" ultimately ground in a single one: Does there exist (in this world) an Emperor or does there not? Now the enquiry/narrative pursues this question with such unrelenting speculative rigor that

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<sup>80</sup> In his essay "Kafka's Fictional World" Lubomir Dolezel remarks that it is structurally impossible to find an ending to the narrative of the haphazard, irregular hybrid world. Remarkably enough, he points to The Metamorphosis as the very exception to this rule, specifically for its "final suggestion that the bizarre event might possibly recur, that it might affect any of the human inhabitants of the hybrid world." Gunter Anders has argued that any true ending to the works would only have misrepresented Kafka's view of life as a complete impasse. Life is too entangled to progress, thus there is no plot, no development and no climax. (Anders, 56-7) Meanwhile for Adorno the novels could no more easily be ended than totalized for they were meant more than anything else, to approximate the serial adventure story (à la Dickens) that Kafka so admired. (Prisms, p. 65) I have already characterized a Kafka story as a marquetry of embedded story fragments. According to Brod they were often referred to by Kafka himself as patchworks (Alles was nicht in solcher Selbstvergessenheit und Hingabe geschaffen wurde [ie. The Judgment] heiss bei meinem Freunde 'Flickarbeit.'"), and it is this suggestion that is exploited so fruitfully by Malcolm Pasley. Cf. especially his "Two Kafka Enigmas. . ." and Max Brod, Franz Kafkas Glauben und Lehre (Munich: Mondial, 1948) p. 19.

soon the existence of the Emperor is brought so profoundly into doubt that "the very ground on which [the people] stand," in other words, the Empire itself, becomes threatened. The narrative is finally no longer able to conceal from itself the very ontological impossibility of closure, and with a suddenness which is almost dizzying, is not so much ended but is rather abandoned: "To set about establishing a fundamental defect here would mean undermining not only our consciences but, what is far worse our feet. And for that reason I shall not proceed any further at this stage with my inquiry into these questions." (247-48)

Only the most unnuanced and disingenuous reading of Kafka's works could see such impasse-points merely as finalities limited and determined by an all encompassing negativity. Such a view for example would need deny the two things that are most fundamental both to Kafka's work in general and to "The Great Wall of China" in particular: their segmentary nature as a linear "proceeding" of reprises, and their diagrammatic nature as a mapping of dynamic forces or regimes.

a. Death and the Double Turning Away

It may be said of "The Great Wall of China" that it exemplifies a fundamental movement underlying all of Kafka's work: that it dramatizes the movement of God turning away from man as man turns away from God. Taking an overview of the entire body of Kafka's work, one notes the progressive eclipsing of the central despot figure, so literally and materially prominent in the early works ("The Judgment," "The Metamorphosis," etc.) as he begins, almost from that time on, to recede into the vague and murky depths of narrative space never to emerge again distinctly as such but only embodied within a more massive, diffuse and immanent structure (The Trial, The Castle, "The Burrow," etc.). This movement or passage is recapitulated in "The Great Wall" by means of the

progressive descriptive obliteration of the Emperor's existence. Now this movement may be characterized qualitatively as that of a transformation of semiotic regimes. In A Thousand Plateaus Deleuze and Guattari set out a preliminary description of a number of different regimes of signs (reality): the pre-, the counter- and the post-signifying, as well as the signifying regimes.<sup>81</sup> In the following discussion we will be concerned primarily with relations between the latter two regimes.

The signifying regime is characterized as a despotic and paranoid regime; it is therefore organized into concentric circles of signifiace (tendency to produce and only to recognize signification or significance), it deploys its signs (and power) always in relation to the full and central "faciality" of a paranoid, and therefore interpreting, despot-god. This despot-god faciality has two primary functions then: to convert all substance into signing material and to organize these signs into simultaneous, signifying, concentric circles, and continually to interpret and to reimpart to this system new signifiace or signifier. Now it is the proper of the postsignifying--also called the passional and subjectifying regime--to break the concentricity, simultaneity and interpretance of the signifying regime by establishing within it its own characteristic if less global order. This order consists of establishing a single sign or cluster of signs which are detached or detachable from the irradiating apparatus of despotic signification, and which have the capacity to proliferate of their own force though no longer in circular fashion tangentially along a straight line (this is the byproduct of subjectification which establishes the passional singularity). The forces of proliferation here are no longer oriented to, nor susceptible of being caught by, the central, frontal

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<sup>81</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, pp. 111-148.

faciality of the despot (nor are they entirely free and indeterminate) but remain in relation to their point of bifurcation, their process of (passional) "subjectification" and the tangential flow that ensued. Now this subjectification is made possible by a transformation of the role of the face. Deleuze and Guattari argue that this postsignifying regime is strongly associated with the history of the Jewish people and for a variety of reasons of which only one can be treated here: it concerns the moment when god averts his face no longer to be seen by anyone, and man, in turn, either out of fear or an irrepressible need to betray the god who has betrayed him, averts his face as well. "The averted faces, in profile, replace the frontal view of the radiant face. It is this double turning away that draws the positive line of flight." What is important here is to understand the difference between the linear, Mosaic, authoritarian, proceeding, of one step or bloc following another, and the absorbing, irradiating centripetality of despotic signification.<sup>82</sup> The "positivity" derives from the tangential movement opened by the turning (the averted gaze)--a passional discharge in which a subject's or a people's ethical being is elaborated concretely and breaks with the conditions of despotic signification. The turning always opens an infinite, linear, asignifying series of blocs, even if these blocs themselves are finite, catastrophic and replete with betrayal (examples are Cain, Moses, Jonah and Jesus). Death it is true, belongs to the segment: "every consciousness pursues its own death, every love-passion its own end, attracted by a black hole, and all the black holes resonate together,"<sup>83</sup> but life and hope belong to

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<sup>82</sup> A Thousand Plateaus, pp. 122, 128.

<sup>83</sup> A Thousand Plateaus, p. 133.

the openness of the line: "the history of the Jews is punctuated by catastrophes after each of which there were just enough survivors to start a new proceeding. . ."

Any place, point, thing or moment may serve as a point of subjectification so long as it bears the three traits of the subjective (postsignifying) semiotic: the double turning away, betrayal, and existence under (indefinite) reprieve.<sup>84</sup> The passional--open and doomed--line may bifurcate from any sign or point--almost any of Kafka's characters may be defined in relation to such a singular point<sup>85</sup> and this condition characterizes

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<sup>84</sup> A Thousand Plateaus, p. 129.

<sup>85</sup> The present study has continually focused on the atomistic conditions of modernity in general and the theory of the clinamen or swerve in particular. That such infinitesimal deviations could produce holes in Being through which entire worlds may erupt, that one such minuscule or imperceptible detail could serve as a point of departure for a fully passional (e.g. delirious) proceeding is the very ontological firmament out of which Kafka's world unfolds. The event which is not an Event but only the site of an imperceptible slippage (based on a transformation of the relations of faciality) is the central (and not just the inaugural) theme of the story entitled "A Little Woman." Here, it is impossible to say where the slippage first occurs that imperceptibly transforms all the narrator's qualities into faults, just as the entire situation remains always beneath the threshold of Events, beneath the threshold of Formal, Essential individuation into culminating moments or decisive crises (pp. 322, 323). Though the narrator's predicament is universally known--everyone, it seems is aware of it--it remains nonetheless but "a small affair" and, if not invisible at least masterable: "if I keep my hand over it, even quite lightly, I shall quietly continue to live my own life for a long time to come." Complete Stories, pp. 323-4. It is this same principle of a tiny event punctuating and

both their exteriority and their ontological relation to a postulated signifying, despotic regime. Animality is also this passional turning and opening, just as destruction and death are inseparable from the possibility of a renewed "proceeding."

In this light it is possible to come to a more modulated understanding of the death-endings of Kafka's stories. "The Judgment" for example may be seen as an archetypal case, and none the less so for the fact that it is the full faciality of the father, brutally represented by the uncovering of the genitals and the intrusive, despotic absorption and redeployment of communicative substance into signifiante (epistolary utterances originally destined not to him but to a distant friend) that constitutes the dominant signifying regime through most of the story. The passional regime is no less present in all its aspects--turning, betrayal (marriage, friendship), reprieve (condemnation)--and though it is twice blocked--along the epistolary and conjugal lines--it manages to capitalize on the father's sentence (in the double sense of "utterance" and "judgment")

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inaugurating a totally transformative proceeding that is described by Benjamin in the story of a rabbi who, telling of the coming of the Messiah, explains that when finally he does arrive to save mankind, he will not proceed to recast the world in an entire new image but will rather make only a very small adjustment. We have already seen how the gestus served for Benjamin as the break point or bifurcation point allowing the interpenetration or communication between two worlds (fn. 3). For Benjamin this was possible only and precisely, because such gestures had "no symbolic meaning for the author from the outset; rather the author tried to derive such a meaning from them in everchanging contexts and experimental groupings"--in other words, they were implicitly post-signifying and virtually passional. Illuminations, p. 120. Cf. also the mistaken ringing of the night bell and the tiny maladjustment or discrepancy as founding events in "The Country Doctor" (p.225 ) and "Investigations of a Dog" (p.278), etc.

by transforming it into a pure illocutionary act, a point of postsignifying departure along a passional line or "proceeding." Thus the death it engenders has no particular finality about it but is associated with the superb ecstasy of flight and immersion in a new element:

"Out of the front door he rushed, across the roadway, driven toward the water. Already he was grasping at the railings as a starving man clutches food."

The appearance of the themes of water and food are by now, of course less than surprising, but the final mysterious line: "At that moment [of the plunge] an unending stream of traffic was just going over the bridge," had a powerful significance for Kafka. "Do you know," he wrote to Max Brod, "what the last phrase means? As I wrote it I thought of a violent ejaculation."<sup>86</sup> The same is true of the commander in the Penal Colony who similarly seeks, but does not actually find, a total orgasmic "immersion" of his own body into the no longer signifying apparatus of the political machine to which he has become hopelessly and passionately external. To this may be added the scene at the end of Part I of The Metamorphosis where Gregor, literally jammed at the threshold of two worlds receives from his father "einen jetzt wahrhaft erlösenden starken stoss" which sends him flying deep into his new existence and out of the family domain. (my emphasis)<sup>87</sup> In this sense, all characters in Kafka are already sentenced to "death by drowning," even though they continue to proceed under reprieve. Death exists for them

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<sup>86</sup> Michel Carrouges, Franz Kafka (Paris: Labergerie, 1949) cited in Georges Bataille, Literature and Evil, p.137.

<sup>87</sup> Franz Kafka, "Die Verwandlung" in Das Urteil (Frankfurt: Fischer,1977) p. 36.

at once as a compromise, a last resort, a spectacular and excessive fantasy of incorporation and continuity but also, as a turning and an opening and paradoxically as a reprieve. Kafka himself assiduously cultivated his cough into a fullblown tuberculosis, a cough whose advent was greeted with extraordinary elation and relief, for he intuited immediately that in it, he finally had his "way out," and he called this cough, appropriately, "the animal."<sup>88</sup>

d. Pure Form

To consider Kafka's work story by story, is to feel the weight of an apparent pessimism and a doom, the full immobility and horror of these impasses of death as they seem to spread back into the domain of the living. But when seen from a slightly greater distance the frivolity, humor and sanguinity of a certain "serio ludere" emerges.<sup>89</sup> Here it is in

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<sup>88</sup> Letters to Felice, p.545.

<sup>89</sup> The crucial aspect of Kafka's work as a form of "play" has received intelligent, convincing and rigorous elaboration, yet has been ignored--to my mind, with catastrophic consequences--by the majority of critics. Cf. especially Malcolm Pasley, "Semi-Private Games," The Kafka Debate, pp. 188-205; "Two Kafka Enigmas: "Elf Söhne" and Die Sorge des Hausvaters," Modern Language Review, LIX (1964) pp. 73-81; Michel Dentan, Humour et création littéraire dans l'oeuvre de Kafka (Geneva: Droz, 1961); Erich Heller, "Punishments

the relentless and stoic reprise of the death and animal themes--like so many test runs of another, utterly new Modernist machine, which, like the airplane itself, had all the science and physics of the ages pitted against it. This helps to explain in what sense Kafka's literature represents an entirely new mode of writing. For Kafka's stories are in fact essays in the deepest sense, they are attempts, trials, to find ways out (literally in) but in the process their task is first to attract and then force to the surface the relations of a certain (social, political and at the limit even historical) topography and make these palpable--in Kafka this often means to make them literal--and so produce, in however piecemeal and provisional a fashion, little diagrams of force. This, further, is why the stories must never have an intrinsic "form," they are meant to proceed in tentative, experimental and piecemeal fashion, spreading and multiplying at their edges like a crabgrass, absorbing more and more of the real as they insinuate themselves, by pursuing the logical consequences of every detail, ever more deeply into the same. Their only form is the form (-lessness) of the world--they are inseparable, both analytically and materially, from the actual terrain that they trace, so little do they actually empirically introduce into the world. In this sense Kafka's literary production is not really a "production" at all, but rather a redeployment of, an intervention in, a world of forces that already exist. Kafka's literary machine then, is already, at the level of its form of expression, in a relation of continuity and immanence with the world, even

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and Playthings De Profundus"; Georges Bataille, "Franz Kafka," Literature and Evil; Peter Hutchinson, "Red Herrings or Clues," The Kafka Debate, pp. 206-215.

if the form of its content<sup>90</sup> often seems to abort its mission--though this must be seen as nothing less than inevitable from the moment that one accepts that a story, no different from a life, continues its meander until a nonnegotiable impasse is reached--and terminates in a cul-de-sac or a compromise like death. Literature is, and always was, for Kafka the most dangerous, because absolutely real, game, a "way out" which was simultaneously a way into life, a mode of being in relation to life "like water inside of water."

I have proceeded to situate, however idiosyncratically, the center of gravity or "navel," to use Freud's term, of The Metamorphosis in an object--the portrait of the lady in furs--and through it developed and emphasized a theme central to Kafka's entire oeuvre. But the meaning, or rather the function of the woman's portrait is by no means exhausted by its association with animality. For a Kafka story or novel, as I have already argued in a variety of ways, does not have distinct boundaries that delineate a well-rounded and autonomous Form, but rather "spreads" in a provisional, even improvisatory manner with constant reprises, adjustments and variations. Even a brief glance at the table of contents of The Trial reveals the work's basic structure, and in this it is archetypal: a series of forays or proceedings, one after the other, into the "world," ostensibly in search of a hypothetical interior to the system (the search for a certain kind of sense, coherency or logic, the very type of legible system of which Kafka's oeuvre marks the historical impossibility)--an interior which was simultaneously a search for something "higher" (Higher judges, Higher Court). I say ostensibly, for there

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90 Louis Hjelmslev's refinement of Saussure's signifiant/signifié doublet in Prolégomènes à une théorie du langage (Paris: Minuit, 1968) pp. 65-80, taken up by Roland Barthes, "Elements de sémiologie," Communications 4 (Paris: Seuil, 1964) pp. 91-135.

is as much evidence showing that Joseph K. renounced any inquiry into the content of his charges, merely pursuing the concrete channels (affiliations, alliances, pacts, relays) that determined their form. This full acceptance of the exteriority of the Law, that is, the complete and abiding indifference to the problem of its inside (interiority), seems to belie, on a far more profound level, the sincerity of his ostensible search for a higher, that is, transcendent level of justice. In this respect one might note that Joseph K. opts for "indefinite postponement" (reprieve) not "ostensible acquittal"--a definitive sign that what he was searching for, and has perhaps now found, is a dwelling place--no matter how provisional or at how steep a price--inside of the Law. What Joseph K. discovers on these little visits and trips, is nothing more than the manifoldness and the ubiquity of the judiciary system.<sup>91</sup> It is thus entirely understandable--no explanations need be, nor are, demanded--that Joseph K.'s charges are delivered to him in his bed by a trio of confused strangers. What is in fact extraordinary is that from this point on justice itself is never explicitly sought, that is, no recourse or appeal is made outside of the realm in which the charges are made, everything is accepted at the level of pure form.

If animality characterizes the menagerie of strange duos, and erotic women, it is in part because they are pure form, that is, pure connective tissue (The Castle's Frieda is the extreme example here) without interiority, and because they inhabit pure form, for they constitute the very substance and body of the Law. If Leni in The Trial finds all

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<sup>91</sup> The offices and chambers of the court are not localized but exist virtually nunc hinc nunc illinc in every attic, broom closet, cathedral pulpit, or neighboring apartment. In Kafka, all secondary, auxiliary or derelict spaces--stairwells, ditches, empty lots--are reclaimed as the seedy, somewhat shameful ground of the social, and of the Law which founds it.

accused men attractive (just as the officials according to the decree are "drawn toward the guilty"), it is because their flesh too has become an expanded surface on which the collective desire (always impersonal and without content) has begun to propagate.<sup>92</sup> Her desire expresses, in the deep sense, this new conjugation. It is clear that if Kafka's books are replete with animals essentially free of interiority and in perfect continuity with the matter and forces of their worlds, almost none of the main protagonists can be said to belong fully to this species. But they do try, and this quite simply is the "becoming" that they all so tortuously attempt. To become immanent is also to become "pure form" and this specifically is the magisterial theme of The Castle. For the castle itself, in so far as the work's title has a referent, is a social and political institution of pure form and empty of all content--though it is all the more powerful, material, and nefarious for that.

This concept undoubtedly finds its original expression in the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma depicted in the last chapter of Amerika. This work is no exception to the structural rule governing all of Kafka's novels: it is little more than a series of reprises or renewed proceedings within a variable system in which the protagonist's movements are but an excuse to map the different configurations of power that each chapter represents. And each chapter is associated with an unfathomable and labyrinthine object whose global plan or diagram far exceeds the protagonist's powers of conceptualization: thus the labyrinth of corridors and the densely stratified bureaucratic structure of the ship in "The Stoker," the deliriously compartmentalized desk at the uncle's house, the vast

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<sup>92</sup> Both "attraction" and "negligence" are twin determinations that precipitate passage to the "outside" in the work of the preeminent philotypic Kafkan, Maurice Blanchot. See Michel Foucault, "Thought from Outside," Foucault/Blanchot, pp.27-32.

communications room that makes up his place of business, Pollunder's strangely porous and unnavigable house, the colossal Hotel Occidental with its panoply of elevators and army of information givers, even the bizarre quasi-familial and certainly animal grouping represented by the Robinson-Delamarche-Brunelda trio. The Nature Theatre is but a final, and uncharacteristically felicitous, response to all these political/institutional machines. The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma is the Law itself--the categories, sub-categories and bureaus--become absolutely continuous and coextensive with the world, and with no asperities, excess, or external parts. It is also an assemblage of pure form, there being no distinguishable theatre other than the world itself as it already exists. However, there is a place for everyone, even Karl Rossman. This image is the one closest to the classic, Christian form of Salvation that Kafka would ever produce.

The present study has everywhere tried to maintain, rather than compensate for, the imprecise boundaries that surround any of the given works,<sup>93</sup> proposing to see in Kafka's oeuvre no more unity, yet no less coherence, than pertains to any consistent though dynamic field of relations. This field draws its consistency not from a schema in which the individual story units would fit together as do parts in a jigsaw, but rather through the filiating series of elements and the relations, repetitions and resonances they set up while wending their way through the overall Work. These series seize the work like so many filaments woven into a continuous fabric, surfacing now here now

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<sup>93</sup> This imprecision is further confirmed and exacerbated by the fact that so many of the works and all of the novels remained unfinished, and that the letters and diaries have entered, justifiably, and in no secondary way, into the canon of Kafka's works.

there to release their effects. So in turning finally to the examination of the portrait, it follows that its full significance will be graspable not at the second order level of what it means--for its problem, precisely, is that it is meaningless--but at the formal level of associated elements or series to which it belongs, or in other words, with what else it is, or can be put, in relation.

The most natural and obvious step would be to situate the portrait within the series of photos and portraits that appear elsewhere throughout the works. This certainly includes the portraits in Titorelli's studio, the photo Kafka himself solicits and finally receives from Felice, the family portrait that Rossman carries with him through most of his travels in Amerika, those in Fraulein Bürstner's room and the obscene illustrations in the tribunal notebooks in The Trial, etc. We have already seen how the Titorelli portraits also form an entirely independent, proliferating, postsignifying series of their own. In addition to this, one must ask what relation this series of portraits and landscapes has to the series or pack of lascivious and squealing little girls that haunt Titorelli's studio and Titorelli's own relative state of dishevelment and undress. The inherent eroticism (animality) associated with the portrait/photo series is further attested to in the arrest chapter of The Trial where the three clerks hover like bees around Frau Bürstner's collection of photos. These photos too are clearly associated with an image of intimacy and undress: a white blouse dangling from the latch of an open window; as well as the general aggressive invasion of Fraulein Bürstner's privacy, a transgression for which Joseph K. is later moved to apologize, and an occasion that he does not fail to exploit in order to seize her, shower her with kisses "like some thirsty animal" and finally to plant a kiss on her neck and "keep his lips there for a very long time." It is easy to recognize in Fraulein Bürstner who lives in an immediately adjacent

room, at least a structural analogy with Gregor's sibling Grete in The Metamorphosis, and not least in the eroticism of the prolonged kiss on the neck.

Most importantly of all however, there is the other photograph in The Metamorphosis, the one "of Gregor in his army days, in a lieutenant's uniform, his hand on his sword, a carefree smile on his lips, demanding respect for his bearing and his rank."<sup>94</sup> Earlier I rejected the thesis of Deleuze and Guattari for whom the photographs in Kafka's work always constitute blockages of affect, reduction of connection, submissiveness and a cooptation through memories. On the contrary, photographs, like all else in the Kafkan universe, are commutation points, that is pure form first and foremost, and only later--through time and the trial of experimentation--might they take on regressive interiority and meaning, and this only in the worst of cases.<sup>95</sup> As instances of pure form, I characterized them as "comprising nothing less than a concrete plane of the real. . . site of a potential transformation of states" while affirming that "every image implies a world." Every photograph then is in fact a bifurcation point or crossroads: a door, a gateway, an opening outward or a regressive return; they are rather sites of high

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<sup>94</sup> The Metamorphosis, p.15.

<sup>95</sup> If photographs seem to play the same role as gestures (a la Benjamin) this is not altogether a coincidence for photographs and images in general seem to depict, however paradoxically, movements and gestures rather than fully subjectivated figures. Consider Titorelli's portraits of barely distinguishable figures of the Court who squirm and posture in their seat rather than dignifiedly pose or repose, not to mention the preeminent examples of the two photographic images under examination here, ie. with regard to their pronounced and remarkably similar gesturalty.

affectivity, potential connection and are just as likely to be anti-memories (the woman in furs) or anti-familial, anti-submissive memories of liberation and escape.<sup>96</sup> It may be said then that in Kafka the photograph bears the same relation to the real as rumor does to knowledge, animality to self-conscious man, and the gesture to individuated language--they are emblems and stations of hope because they are still connected to the fullness of their virtuality, they are as yet incompletely formed, and are the embodiment of pure expression, that is, an expression so fully realized that it is without content.<sup>97</sup> "Demanding respect for his bearing and his rank" then, plainly does not conjure up an image of subjugation, while such phrases as "army days" and "a carefree smile on his lips," unquestionably denote a highly charged memory of life outside the familial and conjugal circle. Jean Starobinski has written that no one in Kafka really has his own place to live,<sup>98</sup> though perhaps no character suffered from this condition so much as Kafka himself who, for reasons no biographer could even begin to unravel,

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<sup>96</sup> In the terminology developed in relation to the double turning away, one would say the photograph commonly functions as a point of detachment and subjectification giving birth to an openness and a potential linear proceeding. It must not be forgotten however that there is equally a signifying and a postsignifying regime of photographs.

<sup>97</sup> On the spontaneous unreflected gesture as pure expression (der reine Ausdruck), Jorgen Kobs, Kafka: Untersuchungen zu Bewusstsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten (Bad Homburg: Athenaum, 1970) p.412; and Stanley Corngold's discussion "Recent Kafka Criticism," The Kafka Debate, pp. 60-64.

<sup>98</sup> Jean Starobinski, "Le rêve architecte," Cahiers de la compagnie Madeleine Renaud - Jean Louis Barrault, no. 50, Paris (Feb. 1965).

never completely left the oedipal nest. The humiliation and submission that this situation engendered is unquestionably the central, manifest, though obvious and overhashed, theme of The Metamorphosis. From the original inherited debts to the intolerable physical abuse Gregor must endure at his hands, and the perverse symbiosis of strength and vigor that inextricably links him bodily and biologically to the older man, it is clear that Gregor has never not lived in the shadow of his father. Except, perhaps, in the idyllic time of the photograph in question, when the mythical brotherhood of the army might have replaced the subjection and petty indignities of familial and professional life. The "carefree smile" places the depicted scene on an affective register wholly outside of the world of "The Metamorphosis" which, itself, is utterly saturated with fretting and anxiety. Uniforms, too, appear throughout Kafka as signs--again purely material, formal ones--of being connected to the Law, or of being connected tout court.<sup>99</sup> Gregor's father, for example, doffs his bathrobe and now wears his renewed vigor and social standing as a tight suit of clothing with gold buttons and high stiff collar. Now the photo also depicts a gesture, perhaps finished, perhaps not yet begun: Gregor has "his hand on his sword." Can this gesture be read as a response to the woman in the corresponding photo who raises "up against the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her whole forearm had disappeared?" How much farther can we get beyond, without denying, the Freudian cliché that would see each figure in a ritual presentation and mutual offering of genitalia--the Father/Law forthright, invasive and sovereign, the Sister/Animal mysterious, dissembling and erotic? In what follows, the portrait's

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<sup>99</sup> These are as likely as not to be ridiculous or utterly inappropriate, like the tourist outfits of the warders in The Trial or the "close-fitting silken-gleaming jacket" that Barnabus wears in The Castle.

multiple participation in several series or systems of objects is developed with a view, less to reducing the portrait to a fixed system of textual meaning, than to embedding it, along with the story itself within a larger general economy or regime of desire. The particular "economy" I have in mind here is one whose explicit historical task it may be said was to forge a counterproduction and a counter memory designed to subvert every tendency to form out of the flux of the world, discrete totalities and stable meanings, while at the same time ceaselessly generating its own immanent web of proliferating relations.

a. An Isomorphism: The Bachelor Machine

The last decades of the 19th and especially the first of the 20th produced a plethora of works whose obsession with machine culture and fascination with the new possibilities and models it offered for the expression and diagramming of desire gave birth to a hybrid form of cultural object that has been called the "Bachelor Machine."<sup>100</sup> Foremost among those who produced these strange objects, and originator of the term itself, was the artist Marcel Duchamp. In 1911 he produced a series of paintings in a Cubo-Futurist style depicting the progressive stages of a woman--her unclothed body resolved into individual geometrical blocks and lines of force--making her way down the stairs in a blurring sweep of angles and lines. These paintings were called "Nude descending a staircase." Another painting executed in the same style and part of the same series, showed the same blur of geometrical components rendered with the same reduced palette (shades of brown with a few regions of greyish green) in which was depicted another figure, this time male, as he is projected forward by the movement of a train (he is also

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<sup>100</sup> See fn. 54 in Ch. 2.

moving down a corridor) but also jostled to a certain degree from side to side. The title of this painting is "Sad young man in a train." In the first painting, the woman arriving from above and behind a wall approaches the viewer,<sup>101</sup> in the second painting the young man is masturbating, his genitals in full view.<sup>102</sup> Nothing links these paintings together except their style, the time they were painted, and the strange mixture of eroticism, movement and the technical equipment (train, stairway) with which the figures are put in relation, and into whose bodies their respective rhythms are imposed. Yet a few years later Duchamp started work on his master oeuvre, "The Large Glass," conceived in a certain sense I suggest as a combination of these two images--the "Nude. . ." above, now transformed into "The Bride" and the "Sad young man. . ." below become the ejaculating Bachelor Apparatus. The entire work, officially known as "The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even" deploys both male and female elements, but keeps these radically apart--the bachelors never succeed in inseminating the Bride, the Bride never deigns to descend fully to the Bachelors' domain. The unconsummated sexual act is never seen as an absence or lack but as the positive production of incompleteness, as a metaphysical putting into place of an infinite delay. Duchamp even offered as an alternate title for the work "Delay in Glass." The work is born of, and continues to inhabit in the deepest possible way, this radical incompleteness. The work not only is deliberately unfinished, it also embraces both chance and the most invasive influences from the outside in a total and uncompromising way. When the work fell from a truck en route to

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<sup>101</sup> This is most apparent in the 1911 variant, "Nu descendant un Escalier no.1"

<sup>102</sup> This still undocumented observation, as far as I know, was first made by Joseph Masheck.

its owner in Philadelphia and was smashed to pieces Duchamp welcomed the "collaborative" intervention of hazard and chose to reconstruct the work, at an enormous cost of time and effort, and to display it, shatter marks and all. Even the use of transparent glass is "meant" to attract to itself, like a screen receiving centripetal momentary projections, the images of every object or event that may ever find its way into the work's vicinity. Onto its inscrutably rich and elaborated surface has also been projected a myriad of the most involved and complex meaning systems and cosmologies perhaps ever devoted to any single artificial object in history.<sup>103</sup> The work has found a point of convergence in so many discourses--it itself arose out of, and is indissociable from a discursive work, "The Green Box"--that its already tenuous and ethereal materiality is almost completely dissolved in them. The work has no intrinsic meaning of its own, its role rather is to multiply meaning and to produce through a kind of embouteillage a perpetual interference--cancellation, migration and hybridization--of meanings. For if all meaning is desire made manifest, then the Large Glass is nothing but a machine producing and tracing desire, accelerating it and making it circulate.

Duchamp's lifelong obsession with the pun is nothing else than an ontological generalization of this embouteillage or interference, that is , the extension of an epistemological category to the realm of Being. The Readymades--"puns in three dimensions" as he called them--are the prime examples. For the pun is nothing more than a vehicle or site--this may be a sign, an image, a word, an object--in which two or more "meanings" overlap or coincide. Yet for Duchamp "meaning" was no more than an

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<sup>103</sup> These include the cabalistic, the onanistic/erotic, the literal marriage rite, the alchemical, the violent, the demonic, the machinic, the social-economic.

artificially constructed effect reduceable to the circuit, series or assemblage in which a given element takes up its place. Thus the "pun" is quite simply just a place marker across which two or more systems are simultaneously articulated. By transferring the importance perennially associated with the object to the large-scale and often abstract systems of which it is a part, Duchamp effectively transformed, or marked the transformation of, 20th century metaphysics.<sup>104</sup> For this reason Duchamp did not so much create objects as displace them, he rarely intervened materially inside of an object but used objects to intervene within social, economic, cultural, etc. systems of articulation.<sup>105</sup> A urinal for example, combined with a signature explodes with "signifying" traffic: the signature draws it into the aesthetic realm of "authentic creation" just as surely as its flawless surface and geometric contours connect it to the social realm of "industrial mass production." The effect of this destabilizing undecideability is to force to the surface a manifold of other virtual relations (systems) which articulate it at the same spot: the hydraulic-conjunctive in which human biology--the urinary tract--is coupled with industrial engineering--plumbing, drainage; the conjugal-erotic which valorizes the receptacle as female (the male genitalia are ritually

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<sup>104</sup> I have already shown how Futurist thought was proceeding, by other means, in this same direction.

<sup>105</sup> Of course Duchamp often "assisted" his readymades--here a dab of paint, there a signature or heteroclite conjugation of forms--transforming them indeed into something else, but these transformations--and herein lies Duchamp's modernity--are incorporeal in essence and are due to the forced convergence of series or systems, they seize and address the object from outside--a kind of transvaluation through transmigration of milieux or realms.

placed inside it) but this also forges a union with the signature valorizing it as male-- and this by extension becomes true of writing generally--thus likening in its turn micturation/ejaculation with (sterile?) inscription; then on to the themes of hygiene, onanism, the laboratory (urinal as alembic), hermeticism (R. Mutt), vase painting, and so on. For Duchamp, and certainly for the rest of us since Duchamp, social (cultural) space could no longer be understood in terms of private or discrete realms of uncontaminated univocal articulation, that is, of individual and independent instances. For every instance is already multiple. Duchamp's work, like that of Kafka, demonstrates the central epistemological break in modern culture, that 1. systems are not parallel, they are immanent, and 2. systems are real even if abstract, not because they are actual but because they are virtual. Objects do not bear meanings but rather a shifting battery of thresholds that may be triggered by any act whatever, no more of art, than those of life.<sup>106</sup>

Let us now consider another work, a collaborative photograph made with Man Ray in 1921, more than six years after work on the Glass had begun, though at least two years before its completion. The photograph depicts Duchamp himself in drag, wearing a hat, wig and what seems to be a coat with a large fur collar. It is no longer Duchamp at all but a woman, an alter-ego, named Rrose Sélavy (eros, c'est la vie). Her ringed hands

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<sup>106</sup> Ihab Hassan has described the delirium of Kafkan multiplicity more succinctly than perhaps anyone else: "The rage for absurd analysis leaves no unity intact; all things multiply and are multiple." "Kafka: The Authority of Ambiguity," The Dismemberment of Orpheus (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) p. 119. See as well for example, The Metamorphosis, p. 19: "The voice behind Gregor did not sound like that of only a single father."

simultaneously clutch and offer coquettishly outward to the viewer something--exactly what is not clear, perhaps the collar or its wearer herself or perhaps it expresses a simple "me voila!" presenting the astonishing transformation of the artist into womanly eros. As in nearly all of Duchamp's work auto-erotic themes proliferate, their prodigality limited only by the reductiveness of psychoanalytic readings. Both male and female genitalia are continual presences in Duchamp's work, and the gesture of half drawing open half closing the fur collar is certainly consonant with this series of images (the hands incidentally belong to a female friend of Picabia).<sup>107</sup> What persists as complex and interesting in this photo however is the combination of address--Rose's glance is deliberately intent and arresting--and the utter self-sufficiency of an erotic creature who embodies both male and female "systems" in a single being.

It is possible to recognize in these Duchampian bachelor and bride figures certain hypersophisticated and sublimated versions or attributes of Kafka's own promiscuous animal creatures. In Kafka, bodies are never personal, intimate objects but always public property, they are the surfaces through which so much communication and therefore social bonds are articulated: they are there, by and large, for the mere taking. The indifference and impassivity that accompanies sexual acts in Kafka merely literalizes the fact that the most intense bonds of connection and conjugation have already, historically, begun to take place less at the expressive level of the human

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<sup>107</sup> In another, typically gender-paired work of Duchamp's, called "Couple de tabliers" (1959), a pair of his and her "aprons" are fashioned from fabric from pot holders modified to resemble crotches with open flies and with genitals exposed. The woman's genitalia are represented by a sewn-on patch of fur.

organism but to an ever greater degree at the level of the much more complex and global political and bureaucratic systems of which individual men and women are mere points or relays.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, eroticism is no longer limited (in conception) to an intrinsic quality of individual activity but is now a central aspect of the collective and extrinsic forces which constitute the impersonal and supraindividual machine of social exchange and communications.<sup>109</sup> To conceive in this way of the socius as an erotic mechanism englobing human relations, conditioning them and articulating them, is to conceive of the human organism too, in so far as it is a social entity--and in Kafka it is this above all that the human must strive to be--as a mechanism regulating and distributing flows that originate outside it (the Law, remember, like guilt itself, is fundamentally an attraction). Desire is no longer born from the depths of bodies but adheres rather to their promiscuous and highly valent surfaces and is translated there into a form of social communication and worn as signs--clothing, uniforms, gestures, deformities.<sup>110</sup> The

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<sup>108</sup> Sex acts, it may be noted, are no more easily nor satisfyingly consummated than telephone calls or dispatched messages.

<sup>109</sup> Among the great number of principal themes shared by Kafka's and Duchamp's work are the common preoccupation with temporal/spatial problems: distanciation, concealment, demultiplication, detotalization; substitution of allegorical signifiante by proliferative machinic and surface connections; desire developed in terms of frustration, (closed-) circuitry and continuous remapping on a cartographic/machinic model, and of course, the affirmation of exteriority as the element par excellence through which all meaning-effects are constituted. See also fn. 116.

so-called hollowness of Kafka's characters and the rhetorical sterility of those of Duchamp are but the negative formulation of what is in fact a radical--and radically modern--commitment to exploring phenomena in the element of their exteriority, the irreducible communicative medium of power and desire.<sup>111</sup>

Thus the two portraits of The Metamorphosis belong to a similar, complex relation of auto-erotic complementarity joining a Bride and a Bachelor, a kind of wedding which results not in the climax of a union, but in a machinic coupling of autonomous devices incessantly producing desire and turning it to an outside, rather than fulfilling or completing it. In a certain sense the story's two portraits may be said to stand at two opposite poles between which the universe of the story is suspended: on its near side, the dark animality of the the woman in furs, the night of chthonic continuity and nonindividuation, and on the far side the sovereign sword-bearing embodiment of the Law, the principium individuationis itself. But in another, more important sense, they are poles with an irrepressible attraction to one another: as soon as Gregor has extracted himself from his sticky perch against the cool glass that both weds and separates him

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<sup>110</sup> On the subject of the personality and eccentricity and clothes, cf. Georg Simmel "Die Grossstadte und das Geistesleben," Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung zu Dresden, vol. 9 (1903) and Walter Benjamin Charles Baudelaire, particularly the recurrent theme of the phantasmagoria.

<sup>111</sup> Kafka's protagonists in The Trial and The Castle, intent on establishing a maximum of affiliative (lateral) alliances and connections to help gain ground in their cases, are invariably and repeatedly drawn into "purely formal" sexual encounters.

from his bride, the filthy<sup>112</sup> and dreaded conjugal scene literally is enacted in front of him by proxy.

As the scene is left at this point--Gregor's sudden coupling with the photo-Bride--the mother has fainted leaving only Gregor and Grete to care for her. As I have already noted, the entire scene leading up to this point takes place in the conspicuous and explicitly noted absence of the father so that Gregor's bedroom has become accessible to the mother only for the first time. The fatherless world which this scene opens up is one populated by three women: mother, sister and quasi-Bride. The fact that they all congregate in Gregor's room, in explicit transgression of the decrees of the father's will (they are continually hurrying to finish before the father returns<sup>113</sup>) underscores the polarity that the photo itself introduces: that between conjugality (oedipal family)--love and sex under the sign of the Father/Law--and anti-conjugality--the erotics of the Bachelor

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<sup>112</sup> Kafka's obsessive anti-filiality manifested itself in a great many symptoms of which some have already been listed in these notes. Among them was his visceral revulsion when confronted with the evidence of his own conception, for he could not bear to see the disorder of sheets and bedclothes. Cf. below p. 219.

<sup>113</sup> The image of the mother and daughter ever so busily, naughtily and chaotically trifling around in Gregor's room is one that resonates powerfully with many similar erotic, animal- or child-like scenes throughout Kafka (the attics of the Court in *The Trial*, the hallways in *The Castle*, etc.) and this is all the more clearly underscored by its opposition to the story's final image of the neatly restored threesome family (triangle) after the rappel a l'ordre: the threeway embrace before the window.

Machine.<sup>114</sup> The essential difference when regarded from this perspective is that the former is rooted in reproduction and representation, that is, dynasty, while the latter is concerned with making desire function by channeling it and incarnating it in a mechanism which is necessarily "perverse" because unaffiliated with either history--the perpetuation of lineage; or genitality--the extremely limited biological gesture, that is, more simply, with the Law. Now the "bachelorhood" in "Bachelor Machine" denotes the principle of non-affiliation only in a very specific sense. The constant presence of a Bride is only a decoy (this is why she remains necessarily and forever in abeyance), for the Bachelor is a citizen, not of the world of institutions and Forms but of the continent of pure desire itself, a desire without an object. The Bachelor does not exist outside of the desire whose very organization gives him his "form," nor is he oriented to a beyond, that is, anything which transcends this desire itself. There are no objects of desire, only objects in desire. For desire is little more than an affective or intensive transmission, a

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<sup>114</sup> It seems that sex for Kafka was virtually impossible within the context of conjugal life. He continually warns fiancées that he has a terrible problem requiring medical attention and which, under ordinary circumstances, precludes the possibility of marriage, and certainly of any hope of ever having children. And yet there is no sign that Kafka lived anything less than a normally active sex life with a great enough variety of women not of the marriageable category (ie. prostitutes, singers, very young women, already married women, etc.). Kafka did not want a conjugal life, he only wanted to want it. The only truly happy periods in Kafka's life from this point of view, were the days spent in utter serenity at his sister Ottla's country house, and of course, his final days spent living common-law with his 19 year-old lover Dora Dymant. On the themes of conjugality and anti-conjugal eroticism and love in Kafka's life there is no better study than Ernst Pawel's biography, The Nightmare of Reason.

passing from one object to another in an openended circuit that links these objects together, incorporates them in a common function. The Bride does not complete the Bachelor's desire, nor does she receive it; she extends it, accelerates it, and attends it. She is not a counter-part but an integral part of the desire mechanism (even in abeyance).<sup>115</sup> The Bachelor's mode is non-affiliation because his desire does not posit a field or object external to himself which would in turn complete him. This radical non-affiliation places the bachelor in a field where everything is connectable in manifold ways on the same plane and in a common dimension, that of desire. Thus the bachelor's pure exteriority comes to replace both progeny and forbears.<sup>116</sup> The Bachelor Machine is always a socially non-sanctioned form of desire because it is non-productive and fundamentally outside of the Law.<sup>117</sup> The entire scene then concerns the triangle of the

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<sup>115</sup> For an excellent, but diametrically opposed argument see Octavio Paz's neo-Platonist reading of the "Glass" in Octavio Paz, "The Castle of Purity," Marcel Duchamp, trans. R. Philips and D. Gardner (New York: Viking, 1978).

<sup>116</sup> One can certainly see in such an arrangement a strong similarity to that of Kafka's own oeuvre--the flatness of Being, the infinite extendability of relations, the absence of signifying oppositions, the deferment of closure, in a word, the radical immanence of the act (event) in the substance to which it is oriented.

<sup>117</sup> There is no better example of this relation than the terrifying apparatus of "In the Penal Colony," which has become a Bachelor Machine only by virtue of its recent separation from the State apparatus to which it once belonged--connected now only in the most tenuous way by legend, by the unreadable script that constitutes its divine (or despotic) "program," etc.

Law--this includes but is not exhausted by the relations of the Oedipal triangle--and the potential, even if only fantastic, ways to subvert, dismantle or pass outside of it. Gregor, the travelling salesman bachelor--how Duchamp himself would have reveled in the onanistic possibilities of such a construction!<sup>118</sup>--after further dis-affiliating himself<sup>119</sup> from the "propre" domain of the Law by becoming an insect--an anti-progeny without forbears--conjugates himself with the photo-Bride as an act affirming perversity (non-reproductive, dissipative and polymorphous desire) over history (reproduction and patrilineal filiation). The embrace of the portrait is of course postsignifying and passionate, prelinguistic and gestural/corporal, but also machinic in that it constitutes an assembly of independent but mutually functioning mechanisms, and it is constructive in the deepest sense because it creates, or opens up, an entire alternate world.

This world however is no sooner posited than smashed by the arrival of the father-despot and the return of the Law. The father, splendid and formidable both in his renewed vigor and in the gold-buttoned uniform that clothes it, reestablishes the old order in a series of recuperative gestures, the first of which may be seen in the embrace of the sobbing Grete while reaffirming to her the eminent raison of his own privileged intuition or interpretation: "I kept telling you, but you women don't want to listen." Secondly, it is in the stalking and wounding of Gregor with an apple that becomes lodged in his back and then forcing him back into his room and to the periphery of the family domain. The third gesture is the enactment, before all present, of the (primal) conjugal

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. fn. 129.

<sup>119</sup> And incidentally dis-filiating himself as well. . . .

scene. It is this scene already alluded to--the final one of the section--that throws into greatest relief the earlier coupling act of Gregor with the portrait of the woman in furs. Here the mother, already partially unclothed especially at the neck--Grete has loosened her chemise and petticoats so that she might breathe more easily--precipitates herself toward and onto the father while her undergarments continue to fall from her body, "embracing him, in complete union with him. . . her hands clasping the father's neck." Kafka's own reaction to scenes of this nature as well as his acute awareness of its temporal implications was once described without ambiguity in a letter to Felice:

"Yet, I am my parents' progeny . . . Sometimes this too becomes the object of my hatred; at home the sight of the double bed, of sheets that have been slept in, of nightshirts carefully laid out, can bring me to the point of retching, can turn my stomach inside out; it is as though my birth had not been final, as though from this fusty life I keep being born again and again in this fusty room; as though I had to return there for confirmation, being--if not quite, at least in part--indissolubly connected with these distasteful things; something still clings to the feet as they try to break free, held fast as they are in the primeval slime"<sup>120</sup>

In the story itself the witnessing of the parental embrace is accompanied by a definitive dimming of Gregor's sight, a diminution of his powers and a demoralization from which he will never recover. This threefold return of the Law is a return with a vengeance, the Bachelor Machine is all but destroyed, though more by the brutal affirmation of

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<sup>120</sup> Letters to Felice, p. 525.

conjugality with the imposed constraints of lineage and progeny, than by the wound which marks, like a circumcision rite, the transmission of this legacy.<sup>121</sup>

There is yet another series with which the portrait still must be put in relation and it is here that we will see the Bachelor Machine make a final futile attempt to assemble itself. Both of these instances find their focus in the scene that furnishes the climax of the third and final section of the story. This is the scene in which Greta performs an impromptu violin concert for the three bearded roomers that the family has taken on. These men, it is worth noting, are unmistakably animal-like at once in their hirsuteness,<sup>122</sup> their childish movements, their huddling and synchronized gestures, their uncanny self-

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<sup>121</sup> This theme, which is Nietzsche's, is taken up explicitly by Pierre Clastres: "No one is meant to forget the severity of the law. Dura lex sed lex. Various means have been devised, depending on the epoch and the society, for keeping the memory of that severity ever fresh." One of the oldest and most common ways is in the tribal marking of the body. The mark says: "You are one of us and you will not forget it." in Society Against the State (New York: Zone Books, 1987) pp. 177, 184.

<sup>122</sup> Hirsuteness is a common theme among Kafka's court and animal characters. One of Titorelli's portraited judges is described: "a stout man with black bushy beard which reached far up on his cheeks on either side," (Trial, p.145) while thin, sparse beards either stroked pensively or twisted (the voyeur threesome across the courtyard from Burstner's room, that of the student Berthold, K's beard-pulling audience in the courtroom during his speech, that of Huld which is stroked while he contemplates the spot on the floor where K. had lain with Leni, that of Block, and so on) have been noted for their sexual and erotic overtones. Cf. Wilhelm Emrich, Franz Kafka, p. 331, and Karl Kuepper, "Gesture and Posture. . . ," pp.147-48.

resemblance, and their inscrutable laconic natures, while their absurd officiousness and obsession with cleanliness and order link them also to the Law, as does the most important thing of all, their existence as a shadowy threesome, yet another sinister sign of the Law's, and animality's consistently triangular nature.<sup>123</sup> In the same vein they

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<sup>123</sup> The crucial story in this context is "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor." Blumfeld's ontological Bachelorhood is here the story's dominant theme: he embodies the very principle of the "guilty singular" by being presented as in some way un-pairable for he has neither a child, a wife nor even an assistant. He thus literally considers buying an animal to compensate for this fundamental un-complementarity and un-unifiability of his being. What ensues in fact is a medley of encounters with doubleness: the two janitor's children that flank him on either side, the two attendants that flank the czar in the french magazine, the two assistants he is given in place of just one (that he may not be admitted to any communal pairing himself?) and of course the pair of enigmatic balls that follow him wherever he goes. The triangular, open and proliferative "1+2" replaces the closed, totalizing "1+1=2=1" of conjugal unity. Blumfeld is as exiled from this latter formula as he is from history and (patri-) lineage itself. His lack of biological offspring translates at work into the moribundity of his department, and the "lack of a younger generation to carry on." (p. 199) Instead his bachelor machine seems to spawn a proliferative horizontal series of children-animals-doubles which he consistently fails to recognize as spin-offs of his own being, so obsessed is he with efficiency, history and work.

It is also perhaps worth registering here that for Nabokov "threeness" is the dominant theme of The Metamorphosis as well, though he seems unwilling to produce a single reason or idea of why this should be so. Cf. Vladimir Nabokov, "Franz Kafka: 'The Metamorphosis'," Lectures on Literature, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980).

constitute a kind of anti-familial and anti-conjugal bachelor cell, for a certain time even displacing the Samsa family triangle itself to the apartment's antechambers.<sup>124</sup> They are however far too distractable and impatient to have much use for Grete's violin playing, which nonetheless has a powerful and mesmerizing effect on Gregor. So moved is he, in fact, that he forgets himself entirely,<sup>125</sup> and begins slowly to inch out of his room towards her in an extended--though mostly anticipated and fantasized--vertiginous embrace, one that is consummated with the prolonged kiss on her neck.<sup>126</sup> And here furthermore, it is impossible to ignore the startling isomorphism that this scene represents by means of the sheer contiguity and interchangeability of elements through which this gesture itself embodies and seizes the true "unknown nourishment." In other words it is no coincidence that the image of the sister's violin playing reproduces visually the very same gesture assumed by the woman in furs, both in the relationship to the covering up of the neck while applying a piece of seductive equipment to it, and in the outstretched gesture of the arm, it too employed simultaneously in an act of address and in an act of relation to a piece of erotic equipment.

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<sup>124</sup> Kimberly Sparks has argued that together they form an insectlike tripelganger counterpart to Gregor himself. "Drei Schwarze Kaninchen: Zu einer Deutung der Zimmerherren in Kafkas 'Die Verwandlung'," Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie, 84, Special Issue (1965) 73-82.

<sup>125</sup> Recall that according to Bataille this is the state that characterizes animal continuity and immanence.

<sup>126</sup> The Fraülein Bürstner-Grete analogy receives here, perhaps, its definitive expression.

Now there is still a third element belonging in this same series. This image occurs quite a bit earlier in the narrative and concerns that first and only gesture of address that Grete pays her brother after his metamorphosis. We must return now to the scene in Gregor's room just as Grete and her mother are re-entering it to find Gregor obscenely perched against the portrait. The mother proceeds immediately to faint, correctly intuiting perhaps the very level on which this gesture of Gregor's explicitly concerns and addresses her.<sup>127</sup> It is the sister's turn now to respond and we find her frozen once again in yet another version of this same gesture: "'You Gregor!' cried his sister with raised fist and piercing eyes."<sup>128</sup> That the sister is not herself scandalized by the action but only angry at the way it has upset their mother seems to betray some form of tacit understanding between them. When later she explodes hysterically upon discovering that her mother has trespassed on the terrain shared, however unequally, by her and Gregor, having without permission entered his room to clean it herself, the sense of a profound but concealed and now violated intimacy is undeniable. The anti-conjugal and perhaps

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<sup>127</sup> It is surprising that an interpretation of The Metamorphosis based on a shame and guilt fantasy for having been discovered masturbating (among the story's primary themes are violated privacy, self waste, and even blindness, not to mention the intimate metonymical association of the action of the fretsaw work and the sexy magazine clipping, Gregor's perpetual exudations, the themes of seediness, filth, etc.) seems never to have been suggested.

<sup>128</sup> This raised fist gesture is, by Kafka's own admission, one of the most common in his work.

even perverse love between a brother and a sister is certainly a central experiment/fantasy that it is this story's function to express.<sup>129</sup>

The violin scene is a clear re-enactment of the scene with the portrait. The momentary conjugation however, takes place this time not through the surface of the portrait but through the pure sonorous medium of the music<sup>130</sup> which in its own way brings the neck area again into prominent relief. Here again this imminent coupling is broken up by the intervention of the father, and the violent rappel à l'ordre that re-establishes normalized household relations. The ambiguous roomers, themselves forming a strange self-constituted and usurping bachelor mechanism (ie. a passional linear proceeding), are evicted so as to allow the family members once again to resume their rightful dominion over the apartment and its furniture. Gregor is relegated once and for all to his room, this time to die.

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<sup>129</sup> To call this an incest fantasy, and to put analysis to rest there, would be a hollow reduction of simple, straightforward facts to a secondary and at best speculative readymade schema. As Deleuze and Guattari's Kafka seems to imply, if Kafka's work is important it is not least for offering not so many examples but rather a systematic corrective to the essentially moralizing and normalizing Freudian theory of the family. Cf. the closing arguments of the present chapter.

<sup>130</sup> Just as in "Josephine the Singer" there is a powerful discrepancy between those who find the music beautiful and those, though they know that it is not, appreciate it all the more for its aspect as "pure form" and connectivity.

Yet this final death, as I have argued, cannot be a sign only of abjection and defeat. It is a defeat on one level, but it is also a compromise solution, a kind of petty triumph nonetheless.<sup>131</sup> The vector of becoming--here a becoming animal<sup>132</sup>--is also a

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<sup>131</sup> Even critics as conservative as Wilhelm Emrich have been unwilling to elide this aspect of Kafka's work. Emrich casts the death ending alternately as "abortive," "redemptive," or as liberatory breakthrough. Cf. Emrich, Franz Kafka, pp. 363-4, 132, 145, 163.

<sup>132</sup> Animality is itself a form of pre-being, non-being or pure becoming. Yet true becoming is not embodied in a thing becoming something else, but in forming a bloc with that other thing's "becoming":

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. . . . Becoming produces nothing other than itself. . . . What is real is the becoming itself, the bloc of becoming not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes. Becoming can and should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become. . . . This is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a bloc with the first. This is the principle according to which there is a reality specific to becoming (the Bergsonian idea of a coexistence of very different "durations," superior or inferior to "ours," all of them in communication).  
[emphasis mine]

The kitten -lamb in the story "A Crossbreed" is paradigmatic here: it too has no pedigree, no descendants or filiation, no particular forms that it must realize, yet it does continue incessantly, and unpredictably to metamorphose. Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, pp. 237-38; Kafka, Complete Stories, pp. 426-27.

becoming not-of-this-world, it implies the embrace of an immediacy and a continuity so profound that ideally it erases, not life itself, but all consciousness of life or consciousness tout court.<sup>133</sup> In this sense the music from the sister's violin, the mute gesturality of the portrait, were each in their own way, a passage toward a certain ecstatic form of "death." And in this we saw eroticism in its purest and most fundamental aspect: "the assenting to life even into death."<sup>134</sup>

The Metamorphosis is nothing if not an exploratory device, an experiment, an essay and at the limit a mechanism to dismantle the stultifying mega -architectures of family and Law. Now if it is this very positivity that I have sought to reclaim for Kafka's work, I have expressly avoided searching it out at the literal level of what appears to be the story's explicit content. For The Metamorphosis, it cannot be denied, both cosmologizes and topologizes the family as a universal field of relations. We know from Kafka's best biographers, both Klaus Wagenbach and Ernst Pawels, as well as Gustav Janouch,<sup>135</sup> to what extent the family in early 20th century Prague was considered by Kafka to be little better than yet another technological relay in a burgeoning system of bureaucratic

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<sup>133</sup> "The lament at the deathbed is actually a lament that dying in its true sense did not take place there." Hochzeitvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa auf dem Nachlass (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1953), pp. 122-23, cited in Emrich, p. 364.

<sup>134</sup> Bataille, Erotism, p. 11.

<sup>135</sup> Klaus Wagenbach, Franz Kafka, Eine Biographie, Ernst Pawels, The Nightmare of Reason, Gustav Janouch, Conversations with Kafka.

modernization.<sup>136</sup> Yet there were affects, even unspeakable ones, that exceeded such institutionalization and which Kafka sought to recover wherever he could find them--the eastern European Yiddish theater, Zionism, women--and which he sought to develop, or try out, if not always in the world of literal flesh then in that of literature. Kafka's analytic isolation of this unit--the family--from the historical continuum in which he lived was virtually overdetermined especially when one considers that in an almost identical context--bourgeois, Jewish, middle European society at the turn of the century--Freud himself was led to posit the psyche as a mirror of this same pseudo-universal group of relations. If in Kafka we find an attempt to violate these relations by rendering them perverse or casting them into experimental continuous variation, or merely rehearsing them in a grotesque mode as in a child's puppet theater, we have here nonetheless a positivity that humbles Freud's own sad pessimism as it is reflected in virtually all of his concepts and most notably in that of the "cure." To have oriented practice around something else than the "strategic" cure, is indeed, I am arguing, why Kafka is interesting. In Kafka, experimentation (positive) replaces reconciliation (negative).

What we share with Kafka--our shared modernity--is the predicament of inhabiting a world whose forces of coercion and evil have spun around us a web so tight and dense, that its totality has passed well beyond measure. There is no longer an outside to which one might escape or from which an attack might be launched nor even an enclave within or from which a clear image of this monstrous new reality might be forged. But then this

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<sup>136</sup> This did not to be sure, prevent him from being deeply fascinated by technological relays within the burgeoning system of bureaucratic modernization. Letters to Felice, pp.166-68.

is only a problem of optics. For life naturally must seek to discharge itself, must seek to engage, seize, and make terms with, the element that serves as its milieu. It is a fundamentally neurotic assumption (and much in our critical culture depends on such an assumption) that man cannot live without an image of Being.<sup>137</sup> (Not for nothing did philosophical modernity begin with Nietzsche, nor scientific and aesthetic modernity with a series of breaks from "optical naturalism.") As a man, Kafka was undeniably difficult and often morose, though by no means excessively so, certainly not for someone as reflective and deeply concerned as he about the tendencies of the age in which he lived. From the moment we move beyond the baseless clichés of his Olympian angst, dilapidated self and pathological imagination,<sup>138</sup> we discover a personality armed and endowed with an abundance of energy, irony and especially humor, one who chose to write--more as an everyday practice of living than as a fully self-conscious vocation--as a way of negotiating reality, testing and prodding its obstacles, counter-pressures and resistances, working out its arguments and counterarguments, modeling it and inserting hypotheses, test runs, and documenting--especially documenting--its various properties. What lies behind all of Kafka's work is the echo of an exhausted and no longer

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<sup>137</sup> All of Kafka's work, but The Castle especially, resides in the tension produced by a false equivalence: that between the Infinite and the Absolute. The Infinite is capable of producing an image, albeit a false one, and when this image is mistaken for the Absolute, man is plunged into a ancestral repetition of the curse of idolatry. On the unattainability of the image qua image and its relation to unity, cf. Blanchot, Espace Littéraire, pp. 96-98.

<sup>138</sup> Ernst Pawel's recent biographical study The Nightmare of Reason goes very far in dispelling such myths.

possible worldview: the clear image of a happy, apprehensible totality. What then is it that constitutes Kafka's reality in its direct and irreducible materiality? Relations, fragments, complex and impure mixtures--a peculiar lack of reassuring Zusammenhalt. Kafka's sentences and stories weave bits and pieces of this world-material together, producing occasional fits of vertiginous momentum, chains of astonishing musical assemblage, other times stalling to become mired in infelicitous combinations, wrong turns, lanes of gravity and immobility, dead ends. This does not make it sad literature. And if this alone is not enough to make it happy literature either, it does make it affirmative. This then is the positivity I have tried to describe. Just as it must be part of Kafka's optics--and that of any other modern, in the sense I am using the word, practitioner--to identify shards, pieces of world for experimental recombination, so too must we use the same lens to scrutinize these new objects and moments that make up his fiction. Indeed I have argued that its very structure begs us to do so, the effects exist at this micro level and no other, so that a critical method that recognizes only story units is certain to be humiliated by what is now the legendary recalcitrance of Kafka's oeuvre.<sup>139</sup> In other words, one must read the relations and the movements, not the image, the totalities.

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<sup>139</sup> I have shown, with a variety of examples and in relation to very disparate modes, how a Kafka story is constituted as a field of multiple, contradictory and centrifugal movements rather than as a unity of either dissonant or harmonious fragments. I have for the sake of exposition maintained the two-world theory which is a mainstay of at least one stream of traditional Kafka criticism, proposing to fix different objects and relations at different levels of actuality, or within different systems of distribution. There is no better example of the mechanics of Kafkan narrative (this example is a refinement of the story- and wall- and

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world-building technique referred to earlier on) than the following excerpt from the Fourth Octavo Notebook,

Foreign workers brought the blocks of marble, already hewn and ready to be fitted together. . . No building ever rose into being as easily as this temple did, or rather, this temple came into being in the true manner of temples. Only on every block--from what quarry did they come?--there were clumsy scribbings by senseless childish hands, or rather, engravings made by barbaric mountain-dwellers in order to annoy or to deface or to destroy completely, scratched into the stone with instruments that were obviously magnificently sharp, intended to endure for an eternity that would outlast the temple.

There can be no question that for Kafka writing was caught simultaneously in a futile attempt to erect temples from individuated pre-hewn bloc(k)s as well as a process of giving body to the incessant, undivided, and continuous murmuring or scribbles of barbaric (animal) or childlike being whose "magnificently sharp" instruments molest equally the mute surface of the stone as well as the hubristic vainglory of temple makers. The point here of course lies in the different relations of parts to wholes: the meaning of the blocks depends on the existence--past, future, mythic or possible--of the totalizing, signifying temple of which they are patient hopeful parts. whereas the "writing" is eternal and fully realized at every moment and at every level of cutting (découpage). Kafkan immanence is always bound to a movement toward this micrological field. The eminently binding and social nature of the asignifying inscriptions links them in no uncertain way to music, and the pre-lapsarian in general, in the "Investigations of a Dog" and "Josephine the Singer" but also to the delirious calligraphy of the blueprints in "The Penal Colony" and the cacophonous telephone transmissions of The Castle. Citation from the Fourth Octavo Notebook, quoted in E. Heller, Franz Kafka, pp. 100-01. For another critic who, in

Kafka most certainly did not turn away from life, even though he did turn away from God (the Law, the Father, signifiante). And as I have tried to show, this "turning" is the powerful central motor of the work, and can be understood either in its positivity or else not at all.

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attempting to explain the multiple and indeterminate movements in Kafka's narrative structure, has come all but to the point of positing a notion of field, cf. Michel Dentan, Humour et création.

## 5. Conclusion

Throughout the preceding arguments a single theme has remained constant albeit in a variety of forms: the theme of movement and its relation to the problem of time. Or perhaps one should say more explicitly that it is the theory of time which is here treated, in relation not just to space, as most conventional formulas would have it, but in relation to movement itself conceived as primordial and as creative, that is, as a principle of individuation. I have maintained moreover that it is just such a positive, materialist approach to time and movement that characterizes a central feature of modernity, one which for the most part continues to be overlooked. What is more I have not hid the fact that such an approach necessarily owes a certain debt to ancient materialist philosophy, especially for the concepts of immanent cause and univocal substance ( it matters not what this latter might be only that it be dynamic and embody infinite potentiality or virtuality), whose combination gives rise to what I have called an ontology of the "event."<sup>1</sup> I believe that different arrangements of these elements can be found at the heart of a great many of the most significant bodies of Modernist works, from Nietzsche through Foucault, from Medardo Rosso and Van Gogh through Robert

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<sup>1</sup> Especially the epicurean atomism most fully adumbrated in Lucretius's De Rerum Natura and the disputable legacy of these ideas in later thinkers such as Scotus, Cusanus, Bruno, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson. On univocity in Scotus see David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought (New York: Vintage, 1962).

Smithson and Robert Ryman, from Conrad to Pynchon. It is unusual, to say the least, to admit to have been inspired in one's approach to Modernist cultural artifacts by the spirit of physics treatises that have been considered "discredited" for over two millennia. On the one hand many historians have already called attention to the sudden renewal of interest ( and today's is but the most recent of a long periodic series of such renewals) in antique physics and cosmology<sup>2</sup> for practitioners in these and related fields today. As I pointed out earlier, this type of "return" is at any rate a common strategic feature of many modernizing philosophical movements.<sup>3</sup> But much more than this, such philosophical/cosmological systems which are essentially physical and concrete, provide what are probably the clearest examples of the type of analysis that I have attempted to undertake. This type of analysis proceeds by working back from the object toward the system of mutual implications, the system of regularities, and the coherent network of conditions of possibilities that give the object its body and its sense. But that such a method should have any success when applied to a literal solid body such as a sculpture or building seems unremarkable; that it should yield any result whatever when confronting a literary text such as one of Kafka's for example, is perhaps less obvious. Yet it may be said that any truly great body of work--literary or otherwise--derives its unique power (if this is not categorically true of the work in relation to the specific epoch in which it is created, it is certainly so of any subsequent epoch in which the work survives) from the global universe of relations that it expresses (actualizes, in the perpetual and dynamic sense) not the individual local meanings it manifests. The totality of these virtual relations--the universe expressed--determine, in a purely pragmatic sense, what one can call the capacities of a work, that is, what it is capable of

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<sup>2</sup> Prigginne and Stengers La Nouvelle alliance, Serres, Hermes IV: La Distribution.

<sup>3</sup> See fn. 6, Ch.1.

doing. It is this aspect that places a "work" on an equal footing with "world" [sic]--for what are either of these but flows of matter encountering one another and actualizing-- here and there--various aspects of their virtuality in singularities or haecceity-events. Indeed what is traditionally called "eternal" in a work is not its meaning--for this is necessarily contingent and historically bound--but rather everything else in it which overflows the meaning, an internal dynamism that engages the perpetual coming-to-be of the world with its own ceaseless, creative (because always oriented to an outside) coming-to-be. <sup>4</sup>

What this method has in its favor I believe, is an ability to describe, in identical terms, the effective nature of any cultural object, and ultimately even the relations between several of these objects, without recourse to metaphysical notions or discipline-specific concepts that immunize and isolate a work from its fundamentally conductive role and immanent position in the continuum of the world. Indeed if this is indeed a type of materialism it is one that I have tried not to let stray too far from those of Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals, Bergson's Matter and Memory, Foucault's Archaeology of Knowledge, and Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus.

As I stated in the introduction, my attempt in this study was to establish neither causal nor analogic relations between events clearly separated from one another either through time, space or the analytic divisions between disciplines. Rather, I sought to discover, and then to describe, a level of relations common to these disparate practices which

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<sup>4</sup> My thesis of course is not that all art or literature, any more than all instances of "the world", are equally dynamic, productive and disruptive of identity and fixity, merely that works--or real phenomena--in which these relations are either no longer, or are very incompletely dominated by transcendent codes are often deemed "modern."

shared at their empirical level perhaps nothing more than an iconoclastic or groundbreaking status with regards to the respective histories of their own disciplines. Yet, in addition to this, there was discovered in each case a clear and fundamental challenge not only to their own specific histories but to historical time per se. Out of this deeper, more complex rupture, was seen to evolve a whole series of secondary problems, some specific some general. Among the general ones, common to all of the phenomena examined was a new relation to the "outside"--the constitutive or worldly milieu--which became either a constitutive plenum or a mobile stratum in which all "individuals" were embedded or linked. "Actuality" emerged, or, let us say, became intelligible, only within complex ensembles that formed on and within individuating events. These "events" bore time along within themselves (and therefore all "effects") as singularities. This "immanent time" was seen as a principle of creation, novelty and becoming.

Fundamental transformations within Western scientific and cultural disciplines often embody returns or revivals of classical "heterodoxic" texts or ideas. Such works are deemed heterodoxic because at one point or another they are seen either to contradict or to be of no intelligible use to an orthodox religious-scientific regime. Though the Western tradition is far from homogeneous it is safe to say that its religious and scientific culture have seldom if ever wavered on two basic questions: in religion, on the existence of a transcendent cause and its accompanying independent world, and in science, on the discrete and timeless nature of phenomena. Undoubtedly these two affirmations have always been, and remain, deeply linked, yet frictions, even cataclysmic ones, have nonetheless resulted from momentary incompatibilities produced by the incessant shifts and fluctuations that afflict these two only partially distinct regimes. But do "paradigm shifts" or "epistemological breaks," etc., actually occur merely on the basis of colliding asperities originating in these two orthodox series? Or

do changes of this order only come, as Nietzsche has said, from elsewhere. . . from an outside? Clearly what is at stake here, I now realize, is a theory of phenomenal (social, historical?) change.<sup>5</sup>

What the present study has also suggested to me, at least as a preliminary hypothesis, is the possibility that there exist significant atomistic and Lucretian tendencies almost anywhere modernity in general, or Modernisms specifically, seem to erupt. Clearly these philosophies bear an intrinsically antagonistic relation to the late Greek and early Christian cosmologies which serve as the foundation of western religious/scientific orthodoxy<sup>6</sup>--a relation that might well merit further scrutiny especially in relation to its putative, continued transmission throughout western history. Already for example, in Giordano Bruno's proto-scientific and philosophical modernity it would be possible to trace the Lucretian (vs. the Christian and Platonic) themes. But is a similar relation to be discovered in Spinoza, Newton, Vico, and later in some of the most cataclysmic intellectual developments of our own century?<sup>7</sup> It seems clear in any case that 20th century Modernism is both exemplary and far from over, first because the revolution in intellectual models is still so dramatically incomplete, and secondly because it is just

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Michel Feher and Sanford Kwinter, "Foreword," ZONE 1/2 (New York: Zone Books, 1986) pp. 10-13.

<sup>6</sup> Discussed briefly in Chapter 1.

<sup>7</sup> Such relations for example could, and ought to, be compared to the phylum of technical modernizations--eg. the stirrup, the clock, double-entry bookkeeping, analytical geometry--whose progression clearly entails successive suppressions or conjurations of dynamic or fluid phenomena.

possible that from the customary (religio-scientific) epistemological viewpoint, the so-called "phenomena," for the first time ever, can simply no longer be saved.

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