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Chapter 5

Dreams and Power in Kafka's *The Castle*

Introduction

“Deeply lost in the night,” begins Kafka’s prose fragment “At Night” (1920). This sense of being lost points in at least two directions—it is a loss of one’s bearings or one’s notion of place in a physical space or territory, and it is a loss of one’s self or identity. “Just as one lowers one’s head to reflect, thus to be utterly lost in the night” (Kafka, *The Complete Stories* 436). This lowered head does not seem to be the submissive gesture that Deleuze and Guattari discuss in the opening pages of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. There, Deleuze and Guattari form a contrast between two pairs or “equations” that they find in Kafka’s work. The first equation is “bent head” over “portrait/photo,” which they claim equals “a blocked, oppressed or oppressing, neutralized desire, with a minimum of connection, childhood memory, territoriality or reterritorialization.” This contrasts with the equation “straightened head” over “musical sound,” which equals “a desire that straightens up or moves forward, and opens up to new connections, childhood block or animal block, deterritorialization” (5).⁶⁹ Reading the bent head in “At Night” as a movement into a dreamscape subverts this dichotomy. I propose that the bent head is not necessarily a submissive gesture in Kafka—one that, as Deleuze and Guattari maintain, results in “neutralization of experimental desire” (*Kafka* 4). The bent head, rather, can be the creative pose or an act that propels the opening of a kind of transformative capacity of imagination.⁷⁰ The state of the writer bent over the desk at night (when Kafka did most of his writing) and the state of sleep during which the state of wakefulness gives way to dream are blended, entangled in this

⁶⁹ Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of *territory* proposes that practices—bodily/physical, intellectual, and psychological—are embedded in a system or order that hosts their meaning. In *Anti-Oedipus*, the clearest example of such a territory is Freud’s Oedipal construct, which itself is embedded in the capitalist order (304-316). For Deleuze and Guattari, *deterritorialization* is the uprooting of a practice from this system or order, thereby abolishing its determined meaning and its support of the broader territorial construct. This uprooting could be, but does not have to be, radical and emancipating. *Reterritorialization* refers to the process by which a practice becomes part of another territorial system, in which the practice’s meaning is fixed by a new set of constructs and relationships (*A Thousand Plateaus* 174-175). For a discussion of the evolution of territorial terminology in Deleuze and Guattari, see Holland.

⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari also point to the breakdown of their own binary (bent head/straightened head), though in different terms from those I use here. They write: “...the firmest and most resistant formulations—for example, those on the order of the portrait or the bent head—will themselves lose their rigidity in order to proliferate or prepare an upheaval in which they fall into new lines of intensity...” (*Kafka* 6).

image (Schwenger 74-76). This confluence can be seen in one of Kafka's iconic notebook drawings (fig. 4.1).



Fig. 4.1 Vitalis Verlag: Kafka als Zeichner

<https://www.vitalis-verlag.com/en/topics/kafkas-world/kafka-als-zeichner/>

The tension of the blurred boundary between writer and dreamer persists in the fragment “At Night,” “All around people are asleep. It’s just play acting, an innocent self-deception, that they sleep in houses, in safe beds, under a safe roof, stretched out or curled up on mattresses, in sheets, under blankets...” (*The Complete Stories* 436) In this nighttime scene, borders and boundaries are fluid, illusory; it is a kind of theater, the same type of theater that reveals itself in one of Kafka’s earlier dreams that I will describe later in this chapter in which the divisions between audience and actors have disappeared or are constantly shifting. “At Night” continues:

...in reality, they have flocked together, as they had once upon a time and again later in a deserted region, a camp in the open, a countless number of men, an army, a people, under a cold sky on cold earth, collapsed where once they had stood, forehead pressed on the arm, face to the ground, breathing quietly. (*The Complete Stories* 436)

The text has entered a new space—that of the dreamscape, a “deserted region,” one that conjures images of a different social organization and way of life, perhaps tribal, nomadic, certainly more intense, more exposed to the elements.

Peter Schwenger places his analysis of “At Night” in his chapter “Sleepless,” and reads the fragment as an insomnia text rather than as a dream-text. For Schwenger, Kafka’s piece expresses the following: “For if the insomniac writer has the terrible privilege of access to a knowledge that is fundamentally other, along with that comes an equally terrible responsibility: to write it” (74). While Schwenger presents an impressive and thoughtful analysis of “At Night,” and while I agree with him when he characterizes the “homelessness” of the piece and its “vaguely delineated primitivism,” I do not think he accounts for the movement of subjectivity in the fragment. The displacement into the “deserted region” is not symbolic but real—and such a shift of place indicates that this is not a metaphorical piece about insomnia but rather a piece about the disorienting experience of moving from the borders of sleep into the dreamscape.

Schwenger, again, reads the following passage metaphorically: “Are you watching? Are you one of the watchmen,” the text continues, “you find the next one by brandishing a burning stick from the brushwood pile beside you. Why are you watching? Someone must watch, it is said. Someone must be there” (Kafka, *The Complete Stories* 436). For Schwenger, the writer is the watchman, a rare breed of observer who confronts what the masses cannot see and cannot handle seeing. He writes:

Only in the watchers of the night, when anodyne sleep has failed us, do we glimpse something of the impersonal existence that bears up what we like to think of as “our” existence. This nocturnal revelation comes notably to the writer—or writers, since the speaker here is only one of a number of watchmen, scattered at distant intervals in the dark. For Kafka, his fellow watchmen would have been authors such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal or Robert Walser. Their lights are few and far between, and are unheeded by the sleepers. (75-76)

There are a number of errors in this description. First, if the “watcher” is the “writer” then the “nocturnal revelation” does not, in fact, come to him but to the narrator. While the watchman is being identified by the narrative voice as a watchman (indirectly through a question!), he does

not necessarily seem to understand himself as one. In addition, the “speaker” of the piece is not a watchman, but a voice questioning the figure of the watchman—the “you.” The identification of the watchmen with writers—Kafka, Hoffmannsthal, Walser—could be right, but if it is, these writers are not heroic observers of the human condition, but rather lost subjectivities in the wilderness, groping for contact with each other by the most inauspicious means. In contrast to this interesting but ultimately limited metaphorical reading of the fragment as being about the nocturnal revelations of the insomniac writer, I propose that it would be more productive to read “At Night” as concerning the disruptive, disintegrating movement over the border of wakefulness into the dreamscape. It is this movement that creates the new space, the piece’s energy—and its openness to meaning. In this nomadic encampment of the dreamscape, the watchmen are nearly blinded by the darkness. They can only perceive whatever exists in the immediate surroundings of their homemade torches—all else blurs into the blackness. The watchmen, then, “watch” nothing—but at the same time “must watch,” as a dreamer cannot but experience the unfolding of a dream, cannot prevent being devoured by the dreamscape. The watchmen seem not to be looking out for an enemy. The “you” is not guarding the encampment. The “you” is, rather, trying to make contact with another watchman—most likely to establish his own existence and to understand where and who he is.

The worlds of Kafka’s stories operate as hermetic territories—even if they are defined by clashing and hierarchically arranged systems. “At Night” offers a kind of trapdoor in the system—an escape from what seems like a hermetically closed or sealed territory into a parallel zone. Deleuze and Guattari are right, it seems to me, when they consider “escape” to be a core element of Kafka’s politics. They write, “. . .it isn’t a question of liberty as against submission, but only a question of a line of escape or, rather, of a simple *way out*, ‘right, left, or in any direction,’ as long as it is as little signifying as possible” (*Kafka* 6). They place the idea of escape in their presentation of the Kafka-machine:

A Kafka machine is thus constituted by contents and expressions that have been formalized to diverse degrees by unformed materials that enter into it, and leave by passing through all possible states. To enter or leave a machine, to be in the machine, to walk around it, to approach it—these are all still components of the machine itself: these are states of desire, free of all interpretation. The line of escape is part of the machine.

Inside or outside, the animal is part of the burrow-machine. The problem is not that of being free but of finding a way out, or even a way in, another side, a hallway, an adjacency. (7-8)

These trapdoors are almost nonexistent in Kafka's work—the oppressive beauty and tragicomedy of which rely precisely on the seeming completeness of their enclosure. Yet the prose fragment points to a possible way out of sealed territories—through the dream and into the “adjacent” territory of the dreamscape. This movement into the dreamscape ruptures understandings of one's position in space, society, and culture—leaving identity in tatters. For Kafka, the movement into the dreamscape, precisely because it shatters the territoriality of the hermetic “real,” presents an opportunity to affirm freedom. Although this movement—which I have argued throughout this study is one into anarchic politics—is seldom realized in Kafka's work, one particularly rich example is K.'s dream in *The Castle*. By reading K.'s dream against Kafka's conception of power in *The Castle*, *The Trial*, and selected shorter works, in this chapter I argue that Kafka's most radical political expression, the expression of freedom in *The Castle*'s dream scene, relies on an understanding of dream experience that is grounded in notions of disintegration, intensity, and escape. The notion of escape through intensity that I identify in Kafka's presentation of dreams is echoed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka*: “Flight is challenged when it is useless movement in space, a movement of false liberty; but in contrast, flight is affirmed when it is a stationary flight, a flight of intensity” (13).

While gesturing toward the anarchist tradition of striving for freedom from dominant socio-cultural power structures, the type of anarchism that I identify in Kafka's work is non-systematic and seemingly ephemeral. Its very smallness in the text indicates its relationship to power. Mechanisms of control, hierarchies, and oppressive systems are large and complex (even convoluted) in Kafka's work, while the countertendencies toward freedom are minuscule. I propose, however, that this smallness is part of the design of Kafka's anarchistic impulse—as the smallest hole in a tire defines the entire tire as either functional or not, the “hole,” in a sense, becoming the “whole.” When looking at Kafka as an anarchist, it is more generative, it seems to me, to find such a political pinprick rather than to look for a systematic expression of anarchism or a fully developed political ideology. Perhaps anarchism itself would do better to create strategic “holes” rather than to reinvent the wheel. These holes would work to destabilize the

structures that systems of domination use to wield their power. Rancière's presupposition of equality, for example, punctures the naturalness of inequality, while Levinas's notion of responsibility for the other punctures the notion of the inviolable, atomistic (egoistic) individual. The act of making these punctures opens the space for freedom.

Power in "The Judgment," "In the Penal Colony," and *The Trial*

Interpretations of the way Kafka deals with issues of power have been central to the analysis of his work. The most common ways of understanding how power functions in Kafka's work link it to modern notions of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in politics, and to the bureaucratization of society.⁷¹ The seemingly all-encompassing nature of power in the texts is emphasized, as is the seemingly helpless plight of the individual caught in the maw of a great social, legal, or political machine. While I do not have any interest in overturning these interpretations or rejecting them, I would like to propose an alternative understanding of the way power functions in the novels *The Trial* and *The Castle* with reference to Kafka's short works, particularly the stories "The Judgment," "In the Penal Colony," and "The Burrow." My central argument in this section is that while power in Kafka's work tends to operate in seemingly hermetic zones, with nothing outside their system or reach, the structures of authority that wield power are deeply unstable and incredibly fragile—always on the verge of collapse. The drive for a fully hermetic system of authority appears as a symptom⁷² of this fragility and points to a kind of fatalism. Kafka's authorities are fading, weakening, vanishing—the power they have will soon be replaced by more dominant structures, which might be less overtly menacing but are nonetheless

⁷¹ Hannah Arendt makes this point already in 1944: "That *The Trial* implies a critique of the pre-war Austro-Hungarian bureaucratic regime, whose numerous and conflicting nationalities were dominated by a homogeneous hierarchy of officials, has been understood from the first appearance of the novel. Kafka, an employee of a workmen's insurance company and a loyal friend of many eastern European Jews for whom he had had to obtain permits to stay in the country, had a very intimate knowledge of the political conditions of his country. He knew that a man caught in the bureaucratic machinery is already condemned; and that no man can expect justice from judicial procedures where interpretation of the law is coupled with the administering of lawlessness, and where the chronic inaction of the interpreters is compensated by a bureaucratic machine whose senseless automatism has the privilege of ultimate decision" (Arendt 71). Brian Danoff argues that Arendt "found revealed in Kafka's fiction many of the crucial elements of totalitarianism that she wrote about in *Origins of Totalitarianism*" (211). On Kafka and bureaucracy see: Clegg, Stewart, et al.; Danoff; Hodson; Löwy, *Franz Kafka: Subversive Dreamer*; Stach, *Kafka: The Decisive Years*; Warner; and Wolf.

⁷² Without belaboring the point, I would suggest that power in this sense is the mirror image of Deleuze and Guattari's notion that "it's not Oedipus that produces neurosis; it is neurosis—that is, a desire that is already submissive and searching to communicate its own submission—that produces Oedipus" (10). The structures of power desire submission, just as the individual desires to submit. That being said, I prefer talk about Kafka's notions of power outside of psychoanalytic terminology.

threatening in indirect ways. The central protagonists of the two novels I will discuss here, Joseph K. in *The Trial* and K. in *The Castle*, are the targets of the authorities precisely because they make manifest the breakdown of a system of authority and its imminent replacement by a more powerful structure. The vigilance of the authorities in *The Trial* and *The Castle* is one of desperation, the last (though not insubstantial) gasp of a crumbling order. And yet, what will replace this order is nothing to celebrate—it is the hegemonic force of a new power: a type of rational, atomistic, rootless modernity that is present in *The Trial* and on the outskirts of *The Castle*.

The notion of a dominant yet fragile authority in Kafka's work can be traced back to the early story "The Judgment" (1912). The power dynamic in this story revolves around the relationship between Georg Bendemann, a young merchant, and his father. The father is the dominant force in the story, and Georg is attempting to break out of his father's sphere of control or, at least, his massive shadow.⁷³ The attempt proves futile. The father crushes Georg, who is driven to suicide by jumping from a bridge. Even as he is about to plummet to his death, Georg reaffirms his dedication to his father, "With weakening grip he was still holding on when he spied between the railings a motor-bus coming which would easily cover the noise of his fall, called in a low voice, 'Dear parents, I have always loved you, all the same'" (88). Georg's suicide indicates that the father exercises incredible power over him, a type of all-encompassing power or authoritarianism within the family. Despite this power, however, the father is not described in the story as a typical domineering patriarch. He is physically weak, bedridden, and dependent on Georg for care. When Georg starts to change his father's clothes, he takes full measure of the latter's infirmity—and it is precisely at the moment when Georg understands his father's dependency on him that the father strikes back with the vicious attack that precipitates Georg's suicide:

⁷³ David Pan frames "The Judgment" as a clash of systematic views related to tradition and modernity, but makes a mistake when he thinks that Kafka has chosen sides—the side of "patriarchy" or traditional social order. This is a similar argument to that which Walter Sokol makes in *The Problem of the Judgment* (ed. Flores). Pan and Sokol are mistaken, it seems to me, not only because they position Kafka as an anti-modern reactionary and conservative, but because their argument does not address the deeper tension evoked by the inability of the individual to escape the clash itself—to escape the choice between one or the other.

Meanwhile Georg had succeeded in lowering his father down again and carefully taking off the woolen drawers he wore over his linen underpants and socks. The not particularly clean appearance of the underwear made him reproach himself for having been neglectful. It should have certainly been his duty to see that his father had clean changes of underwear. He had not yet explicitly discussed with his bride-to-be what arrangements should be made for his father in the future, for they had both of them silently taken it for granted that the old man would go on living alone in the old house. But now he made a quick, firm decision to take him into his own future establishment. It almost looked, on closer inspection, as if the care he meant to lavish there on his father might come too late. (84)

Georg nurtures hope of breaking out of (or inverting) the father-son binary. The father knows this, and although he is deteriorating and does not have much time left (it seems), he understands how to destroy his son's psychological and emotional stability in order for his position of authority to continue—in this case by preventing Georg's marriage and the emergence of an independent nuclear family. On the other hand, the destruction of the son does not change the basic fact that the father is infirm, dependent, and likely dying. In fact, the destruction of Georg is as much a suicidal impulse of the father as a homicidal one. The father is not likely to thrive or even survive for long without the son. Thus, the father's destruction of Georg is the dying blow of a weakening patriarch; a combination of apparent total power (in Georg's eyes) and utter powerlessness defines the father.⁷⁴

"In the Penal Colony" contains a similarly fragile and fleeting authority. Like "The Judgment," "In the Penal Colony" presents two distinct loci of power—one represented by the officer and his method of execution by means of the old commandant's torture machine, and the other by the new commandant of the colony and his retinue. These loci of power contain whole systems of authority and philosophies of rule, including understandings of legality, individuality, and social organization.⁷⁵ Two elements of the story are critical as a foregrounding to my

⁷⁴ Commentaries on and interpretations of Kafka's story neglect to recognize the importance of this duality, a duality at the core of Kafka's conception of power. See Hiob 8.

⁷⁵ The issue of the relationship between these two systems of power in the island colony in the story has been the subject of a large amount of scholarly inquiry. Most relevant here are scholarly attempts to compare the evolution of power and punishment in Kafka's story with the phases of disciplinary authority in Foucault's thought. See, for example, Cumberland; Tulley.

discussion of power in *The Trial* and *The Castle*. First, the authority of the officer as the representative of the old commandant is positioned as fundamentally incompatible with the new system being constructed by the new commandant of the island. Though there is a period of tense coexistence, the implication is that at some point the struggle between the two systems needs to be resolved with one system triumphing over the other—and this seems to happen toward the end of the story. The character of the explorer or visitor to the penal colony is being used as a pawn in the contest between the officer and the new commandant. In the very presence of the explorer, who identifies almost totally with the new commandant's regime, the outcome of the struggle is clear—the officer's reign is coming to an end. Realizing this, the officer sacrifices himself in his own machine. In an inversion of "The Judgment," the "son" has killed the father.

Despite the apparent tidy history of one regime of power asserting itself over another, the social dynamics on the island at the end of the story are not as clear as they might seem. While the old commandant's power has been broken at the level of administrative authority, his power as a system of belief has not been eradicated from the colony. The ambiguity is reflected at the end of the story when the explorer finds himself in a teahouse where the old commandant is buried beneath the floor:

They led the explorer right up to the back wall, where guests were sitting at a few tables. They were apparently dock laborers, strong men with short, glistening, full black beards. None had a jacket, their shirts were torn, they were poor, humble creatures. As the explorer drew near, some of them got up, pressed close to the wall, and stared at him. "It's a foreigner," ran the whisper around him, "he wants to see the grave." They pushed one of the tables aside, and under it there was really a gravestone. It was a simple stone, low enough to be covered by a table. There was an inscription on it in very small letters, the explorer had to kneel down to read it. This was what is said: "Here rests the old Commandant. His adherents, who now must be nameless, have dug this grave and set up this stone. There is a prophecy that after a certain number of years the Commandant will rise again and lead his adherents from this house to recover the colony. Have faith and wait!" When the explorer had read this and risen to his feet he saw all the bystanders around him smiling, as if they too had read the inscription, had found it ridiculous, and were expecting him to agree with them. (167)

The implication of the explorer's discovery of the grave in the teahouse is that the apparent final defeat of the old commandant (represented by the self-sacrifice/suicide of the officer) is only one stage of the historical process envisioned by the former leader. The real, material power of the old commandant, which continued through the officer and his use of the old commandant's machine and punishment plans, has now transformed into the basis for a *potential* underground movement of dissent against the new authorities on the island, one based on messianic faith in the old commandant's future return and the ability of this faith to create and sustain a cohesive following. From primarily legal and political, the old commandant's authority has become social and cultural. The fact that the followers of the old commandant have to remain in the shadows indicates that they are a minority or perhaps a suppressed majority. The following's continued existence thus points to the tense relationship between subcultural forces and the political hegemony of the ruling class and its ideology. The two worldviews confront each other as inherent antagonists. Liberal notions of rights and a sense of historical progress toward reason and "justice" define the worldview of the new commandant. Traditional notions of community and a messianic understanding of time underpin the worldview of the old commandant. The explorer is caught between these paradigms of authority and while almost entirely of the new mode, he cannot rid himself of a nostalgic appreciation, a longing, perhaps a desire, for the old.⁷⁶ Paradoxically, he seems to be drawn closer to the machine and its operator, the officer, as he notices the ways in which it is breaking down by neglect.

The portrait of power becomes more complex and mysterious in the novel *The Trial*. Here, the antagonistic authorities previously represented by the father/son relationship or the relationship between the old and new commandants are translated into two systems or societies occupying the same landscape—the modern city. The two systems can be roughly defined as the

⁷⁶ My analysis calls into question Rutherford's notion that the story presents the possibility of subverting power: "I suggest that the alterity of power opens a space for its subversion. The inscrutable faces and illegible texts of Kafka's story do more than just register the Law's inconsistency; they also comprise an intersection between multiple points of view" (312). While subversion is possible, I would say it is subversion at the behest of another regime of power. Deleuze and Guatarri counter my reading, claiming that, "If the machine of the Penal Colony, as representative of the law, appears to be archaic and outmoded, this is not because, as people have often claimed, there is a new law that is much more modern but because the form of the law in general is inseparable from an abstract, self-destructive machine and cannot develop in a concrete way" (48). While Deleuze and Guatarri's reading can be asserted onto the text, it stands in opposition to the world of the story. The new commandant is pushing for a paradigm shift in how the law is understood and exercised. This new system of law and punishment is also authoritarian, but it is very different from the orientation of the old commandant and his officer.

system of the “bank,” meaning that which follows the rules of individualist, rights-bearing, contractual society based on clear legal processes and administrative operations, and the system of the “trial,” which is vague, mysterious, amorphous, clandestine, and depends on communal or interpersonal relationships—not processes. While the novel is fundamentally about the power of the second system, that of the “trial,” the more powerful position is occupied by the other, the world of the “bank.” The fragility or infirmity of the trial system goes a long way in explaining its vehemence and the intensity with which it tries and then executes the novel’s protagonist, Joseph K. But the execution of Joseph K. is a sign of weakness, of the trial’s inability to successfully integrate him into its system. The world of the trial is marginal—it strikes at the center, at the world of the bank, from the periphery. It is a challenge that is fated for failure, but not before it destroys Joseph K.

In his illuminating discussion of Kafka as anarchist in *The Trial*, David Tulley presents the nature of the trial as one emanating from, not against, the modern state. He writes, “In presenting the court as a totalising and pervasive force in society, which individualises itself in human subjects, Kafka suggests that ‘to live outside the trial’ would entail a wide-ranging social transformation, the successful subversion and dismantling of the subjectifying power of the state and all forms of hegemonic power” (26). This is precisely the opposite of what Kafka indicates in the novel. To “live” outside the trial, precisely, is to live in the modern state with its legal and economic logic. To live “in the trial” is to submit to the forces/hierarchies of the trial society. One might be able to straddle these two zones of subjection, to move from one to the other, but there is no possibility for escaping hegemonic power completely shown in the novel.

The ostensible setting for Kafka’s novel is the world of the bank. The story unfolds in a modern city, which operates (at least on the surface) by modern rules. In this bank world, clear hierarchical relationships exist between people. For example, Joseph K. holds a position in the bank hierarchy—he has subordinates and superiors, and understands quite well who is above and who below him. This bank world is governed by time, by the clock. The temporal divisions of the clock create the structure of daily life, built, of course, around the working hours. Space in the world of the bank is clean, airy, and orderly. Social relationships are governed by well-established norms of social etiquette (and deviance), including those of sexual and domestic life. The prevailing ethos of the bank world is rational and individualist—each member of society possesses rights and can exercise them in the face of challenges through clear and

rational/logical/legal arguments and procedures. The spirit of the bank world is atomistic. One gets what one deserves through one's own work and merit. In pursuit of individual goals and ambitions—or simply as a product of the general ethos of such a society—the individual becomes divorced from deeper community structures and traditions, even from the wider family or kinship network. Joseph K., it seems, is totally alone.

The articulation of the values and guiding notions of the bank world only arises in reaction to its confrontation with the trial—otherwise these values would remain in the realm of common sense, habit, and norm. The narrative voice seems to enter Joseph K.'s thoughts as he processes his “arrest” at the beginning of the novel: “What authority could they represent? K. lived in a country with a legal constitution, there was a universal peace, all the laws were in force; who dared seize him in his own dwelling...” (4). Soon after this, Joseph K. demands that the arresting authorities abide by the expected legal procedures. “But how can I be under arrest? And particularly in such a ridiculous fashion?” Faced with their refusal to answer, he continues, “Here are my papers, now show me yours, and first of all your warrant for arresting me” (5). When the arresting parties cannot fulfill Joseph K.'s demands for procedural clarity, he reasons that the affair cannot be of great importance—events gain meaning for Joseph K. through their relationship to the established norms:

...on the other hand, it can't be an affair of any great importance either. I argue this from the fact that though I am accused of something, I cannot recall the slightest offense that might be charged against me. But that even is of minor importance, the real question is, who accuses me? What authority is conducting these proceedings? Are you officers of the law? None of you has a uniform... (11)

Joseph's K.'s choice of concepts is telling here. He argues his position from “fact.” He talks about accusations, offenses, charges—all terms of the established legal system, in which there is always a clearly defined accuser, an authority issuing the accusation, and a set of “proceedings” through which the accused can anticipate the charge moving. In addition, officers of the legitimate authorities are clearly distinguishable from people on the street.

Joseph realizes that this “trial” stands in contrast to his experience, and when reflecting back on his arrest, compares it with his job at the bank. Bank and trial are two incommensurable

entities, though Joseph K., while recognizing this, is still unable to grasp that they are totally separate and competing systems:

... in short, if I had behaved sensibly, nothing further would have happened, all this would have been nipped in the bud. But one is so unprepared. In the Bank, for instance, I am always prepared, nothing of that kind could possibly happen to me there, I have my own attendant, the general telephone and the office telephone stand before me on my desk, people keep coming in to see me, clients and clerks, and above all, my mind is always on work and so kept on the alert, it would be an actual pleasure to me if a situation like that cropped up in the Bank.

When discussing the events with Ms. Bürstner, Joseph K. admits that he is applying a type of official language to them that might not fit. Tellingly, he has no other way of describing the situation. The language of the bank world has completely structured his thinking, despite inklings that it is inadequate to capture the deeper reality of what is going on. “I have already told you all I know,” Joseph tells Bürstner, continuing, “In fact more than I know, for it was not a real Court of Inquiry. I called it that because I didn’t know what else to call it. There was no interrogation at all, I was merely arrested, but it was done by a Commission.” Joseph K.’s move from “Court of Inquiry” to “Commission” underscores how fully the bureaucratic language has structured his interpretation of events. Once an arrest is declared, Joseph K. constructs his response in the only way he can—by applying the rules and structures of thinking from the bank world.

The arresting parties attempt to educate Joseph K. that the trial to which he has been called cannot be understood in the typical terms of the bank world—an attempt that fails miserably. Still, the reader of the novel is provided with ample evidence that this “trial” is not a bureaucratic operation and/or the result of the impersonal crushing of the individual by the state. The trial has no connection whatsoever to either an official bureaucracy or the state. It is extra-official—beyond the realm of officialdom completely and, in fact, directly opposed to it. “Our officials, so far as I know them, and I know only the lowest grades among them,” the warder who arrests Joseph K. tells him, “never go hunting for crime in the population, but, as the Law decrees, are drawn toward the guilty and must send out us wardens. That is the Law. How could

there be a mistake in that?' 'I don't know this Law,' said K. 'All the worse for you,' replied the warder. 'And it probably exists nowhere but in your own head,' said K.'" (6).

The trial takes place on the periphery of the bank world—it is peripheral in that it is excluded from the domain of hegemonic power. The interrogations are scheduled (by telephone—not by official letter) for Sunday when the bank, like the whole of the official world of work, is closed. The trial informs Joseph K. that if Sunday does not work, proceedings could be held at night—again outside of the regular working hours. The first trial event occurs at a location where Joseph K. has previously never been. It is physically separate from the official world, the world of the bank. “[Joseph K.] was given the number of the house where he had to go, it was a house in an outlying suburban street where he had never been before” (32). Interestingly, the representatives of the trial give Joseph K. no specific time for his Sunday appointment, indicating that the importance of exact time in the world of the bank does not hold in the world of the trial. Joseph K., still unable to see this distinction, reasons, “. . .what he was really thinking was that it would be best to go to the address at nine o'clock on Sunday morning, since that was the hour at which all the law courts started their business on weekdays” (33). The specific building to which Joseph K. has been summoned is the precise opposite of the bank building with its bank employees. The way the novel describes the scene Joseph K. encounters there is critical for establishing this dichotomy. The street, Juliusstrasse, consists of a string of identical “high gray tenements inhabited by poor people.” He sees windows “piled high with bedding,” “men in shirtsleeves,” “the disheveled head of a woman,” “women . . . thronging” and “gossiping,” “a barefooted man . . . sitting on a crate,” a “sickly young girl . . . standing at a pump,” “children . . . playing on the stairs” of the building, etc. (34-35).⁷⁷ As Joseph K. continues to search for the specific room (this information has not been given to him), he takes in the full scope of the building's society:

. . .almost all the doors stood open, with children running out and in. Most of the flats, too, consisted of one small single-windowed room in which cooking was going on. Many of the women were holding babies in one arm and working over the stove with the arm that was left free. Half-grown girls who seemed to be dressed in nothing but an apron kept

⁷⁷ Walter Benjamin, while seeing the realms of power in Kafka as representations of officialdom, bureaucracy and the state, correctly describes the trial world when he claims, “Filth is the element of the officials” (114).

busily rushing about. In all the rooms the beds were still occupied, sick people were lying in them, or men who had not wakened yet, or others who were resting there in their clothes. (36)

Eventually, Joseph K. finds himself in a “meeting-hall,” not a legal courtroom or official’s chambers. It is full of a “crowd of the most variegated people...,” who can stand only with “bent posture.” The air is “too thick for him” (37). The room’s “fuggy atmosphere...prevented one from seeing the people at the other end” (44-45). Unlike the orderly proceedings of a court of law, the gathering seems to Joseph K. rather like the coming together of a “political meeting,” divided among itself into “factions.” The clothing, too, takes him aback; most of the people “were dressed in black, in old, long, and loosely hanging Sunday coats...” (38). Furthermore, “As far as one could make out in the dimness, dust, and reek, they seemed to be worse dressed than the people below” (39).

The situational irony is that despite all of these observations, which clearly indicate that this trial has nothing in common with the functioning of a state or bureaucratic operation, Joseph K. still approaches it with the same tools. He applies hegemonic notions of power to a system of power that is peripheral to and arrayed against those dominant structures. The trial’s first “interrogation” illustrates this clearly—and it should be said that even the term “interrogation,” and nearly all of the “legalistic” terms used to describe the “trial,” including the word “trial” itself, do not emanate from the “trial” but are projected on it from the outside. Indeed, the world of the “trial” as “trial” does not exist. Something is happening to Joseph K., power is being exercised over him, and to call it a “trial” in the ordinary sense of the term is almost as meaningless as naming it anything. In one of the novel’s key passages, Joseph K. recognizes this definitional opacity, though (building the ironic tragi-comedy) still discounting it:

This question of yours, Sir, about my being a house painter—or rather, not a question, you simply made a statement—is typical of the whole character of this trial that is being foisted on me. You may object that it is not a trial at all; you are quite right, for it is only a trial if I recognize it as such. But for the moment I do recognize it, on grounds of compassion, as it were. (40)

Despite his notion that the “trial” is pathetic and deserving of a certain type of “compassion,” Joseph K. projects onto it a kind of grandiosity more fitting for the modern state. His understanding of this should not be accepted—for though K. senses that his “trial” is no trial at all, he cannot break free of the implications of the very term:

...there can be no doubt that behind all the actions of this court of justice, that is to say in my case, behind my arrest and today’s interrogation, there is a great organization at work. An organization which not only employs corrupt warders, oafish Inspectors, and Examining Magistrates of whom the best that can be said is that they recognize their own limitations, but also has at its disposal a judiciary hierarchy of high, indeed of the highest rank, with an indispensable and numerous retinue of servants, clerks, police, and other assistants, perhaps even hangmen. I do not shrink from that word. And the significance of this great organization, gentlemen? It consists in this, that innocent persons are accused of guilt, and senseless proceedings are put in motion against them, mostly without effect, it is true, as in my own case. But considering the senselessness of the whole, how is it possible for the higher ranks to prevent gross corruption in their agents?

The “sense” Joseph K. is searching for is the “sense” of the hegemonic legal order. The structures of power he imagines are the mirror image of an imperial court system—with a clear hierarchy and the possibility of corruption trickling down the ladder of competence. He has not yet (and never will) become fully conscious of the two dueling and incompatible spheres of power.⁷⁸

The threat of hegemonic power to the subcultural world of the trial is revealed when Joseph K. returns to the scene of the first interrogation the following week and encounters the wife of the “usher.” The woman quickly reveals to Joseph K. her dissatisfaction with life in the realm of the trial’s society, foremost because she is being sexually harassed and repeatedly raped (this same sexual dynamic will reappear in *The Castle*). The woman entertains notions that Joseph K., coming as he does from the bank world, could free her from her horrid predicament.

⁷⁸ Despite offering an interesting political reading of *The Trial*, Graham Smith is unable to disentangle the trial from the state. He writes, “Produced at the beginning of the 20th century *The Trial* can be considered as both symptomatic and illustrative of the peculiar and terrible features of that century. It reflects the rise of bureaucracy, the power of law, and the atomization of the individual, and seems to prefigure the abuse of power, sinister regimes of detention and surveillance, state incompetence, and the institutionalization of sadism” (9).

“...I’ll go with you,” she tells him, “wherever you like, you can do with me what you please, I’ll be glad if I can only get out of here for a long time, and I wish it could be forever” (56). Joseph K. fantasizes about how taking this woman from the trial’s society would be a great act of revenge for its injustice to him:

And probably there could be no more fitting revenge on the Examining Magistrate and his henchmen than to wrest this woman from them and take her himself. Then some night the Examining Magistrate, after long and arduous labor on his lying reports about K., might come to the woman’s bed and find it empty. Empty because she had gone off with K., because the woman now standing in the window, that supple, voluptuous warm body under the coarse, heavy, dark dress, belonged to K. and to K. alone. (56)

This fantasy of possession illuminates the essential threat Joseph K. poses to the world of the trial. The woman’s situation highlights the internal power dynamics of the trial society (she is a plaything of male power) and represents fertility and thus the future health of the social entity. Though Joseph K. eventually loses this battle over the usher’s wife, the very fact that his presence brought into the open the woman’s longing exposes the fragility of the system. While Joseph K. might have lost,⁷⁹ eventually the world of the bank is bound to win as it encroaches and pushes the trial society further to the periphery of the city—and then out of it entirely. Sexual mixing will not harm the world of the bank, but it can utterly destroy the society of the trial—at least in the eyes of the trial’s members.

If the bank world is governed by clear temporal dimensions, procedural operations, legal norms, contracts, rights, etc., the world of the trial is ruled by what seem like a web of social relationships of the type impossible to untangle for a social outsider—a web that might or might not be organized by higher principles, whether legal, moral, or theological. This is demonstrated

⁷⁹ After the woman is summoned to the Examining Magistrate and submits to this demand, the novel states: “K. slowly walked after them [the woman and the student], he recognized that this was the first unequivocal defeat that he had received from these people. There was no reason, of course, for him to worry about that, he had received the defeat only because he had insisted on giving battle. While he stayed quietly at home and went about his ordinary vocations he remained superior to all these people and could kick any of them out of his path. And he pictured to himself the highly comic situation which would arise if, for instance, this wretched student, this puffed-up whippersnapper, this bandy-legged beaver, had to kneel by Elsa’s bed some day wringing his hands and begging for favors” (59).

most clearly by another “accused” man Joseph K. encounters in the “offices.” Joseph K. asks the man a seemingly clear or easy question, namely, “What are you waiting here for?”:

But this unexpected question confused the man, which was the more deeply embarrassing as he was obviously a man of the world who would have known how to comport himself anywhere else and would not lightly have renounced his natural superiority. Yet in this place he did not know even how to reply to a simple question and gazed at the others as if it were their duty to help him, as if no one could expect him to answer should help not be forthcoming. Then the usher stepped up and said, to reassure the man and encourage him, “This gentleman merely asked what you are waiting for. Come, give him an answer.” The familiar voice of the usher had its effect: “I’m waiting—” the man started to say, but could get out no more. (64)

Despite the trial’s opacity to those on the outside of its social system, those on the inside clearly understand how it functions. This is even true of those, like Joseph K.’s uncle (“a small landowner from the country”), who are mostly of the trial world but venture now and then beyond its borders (91). When Joseph K. tells the uncle, “The first thing to grasp...is that this is not a case before an ordinary court,” the latter responds, “That’s bad” (96). But the uncle had already heard about his nephew’s trial, belonging as he does to the trial society. His first advice for Joseph is for him to break with the bank world, even if temporarily, removing himself from the hegemonic power in order to integrate into the world or zone of the trial—in other words to become himself peripheral. He tells Joseph K., betraying quite an intimate understanding of the trial’s processes and essence:

Things like this don’t occur suddenly, they pile up gradually, there must have been indications. Why did you never write to me? You know I would do anything for you, I’m still your guardian in a sense and till now I have been proud of it. Of course I’ll do what I can to help you, only it’s very difficult when the case is already under way. The best thing, at any rate, would be for you to take a short holiday and come to stay with us in the country. (96)

The uncle's admonition of Joseph K. presents a glimpse into the society of the trial, a view that Joseph abruptly dismisses. However, the uncle's statement should be carefully studied. First, he indicates that the context of the trial is of a much longer duration than Joseph K. (and the reader) had initially assumed. The accusation is not, in fact, the beginning of the process, but more like the end—or certainly indicative of an advanced stage. The accusation did not come out of the blue, as Joseph K. imagines (“Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning” (1)). Rather, it had been building for a long time and providing Joseph K. with ample “indications” of it, signs that he could not see or understand. Second, the prudent move for Joseph K., according to the uncle, is to reconnect to his family. The family connection is emphasized strongly. Joseph K.'s lack of parents is seen as an element that perhaps loosened his connection to the kinship network, but the uncle is suggesting that it can be reactivated. Third, the uncle is indicating the importance of space. The countryside is beneficial because it severs Joseph K. from the world of the bank at the same time as it forces him to integrate back into the kinship sphere. That Joseph K. responds in the following fashion only emphasizes the incompatibility between his way of looking at the case and his uncle's—showing that no matter how directly he is presented with a counter-scenario to the one he imagines from his position in the bank system, he cannot see it. So subsumed is he in the realm of the hegemonic power structure that he is made blind to any currents of subcultural or subaltern forces. He says to his uncle:

Since you tell me that the family would be involved in any scandal arising from the case—I don't see myself how that could be so, but that's beside the point—I'll submit willingly to your judgment. Only I think going to the country would be inadvisable even from your point of view, for it would look like flight and therefore guilt. Besides, though I'm more hard-pressed here, I can push the case on my own more energetically. (97)

Joseph K. has misunderstood everything that his uncle has told him. What he sees as “beside the point” (the family's deep involvement) is actually utterly central. He thinks that the guilt is still to be decided, even though the uncle has just divulged to him that it was already quite late in the process and his guilt had, more or less, been decided on. He thinks that his case could be better

managed from the city, even though the society of the city is largely to blame for his guilt according to the peripheral trial system.

Such errors of judgment are compounded during Joseph K.'s visit, together with his uncle, to the lawyer. Though Joseph K. learns that the lawyer has arranged for a Chief Clerk of the Court to be present, Joseph K. excuses himself from the meeting, not realizing the clerk's importance. The constellation of the lawyer, the uncle, and the clerk represents a powerful triad to advance his position in the trial, but Joseph K. cannot see it, describing the confabulation to the lawyer's nurse Leni as "old men jabbering" (107). Joseph's avoidance of the meeting exhausts his uncle, who upbraids him:

Joseph...how could you do it! You have damaged your case badly, which was beginning to go quite well. You hide yourself away with a filthy little trollop, who is obviously the lawyer's mistress into the bargain, and stay away for hours. You don't even seek any pretext, you conceal nothing, no, you're quite open, you simply run off to her and stay beside her. And all this time we three sit there, your uncle who is doing his best for you, the lawyer, who has to be won over to your side, above all the Chief Clerk of the Court, a man of importance, who is actually in charge of your case at its present stage. (111)

Joseph K.'s absence from the meeting shatters the cohesiveness of his support and in effect precipitates the further polarization of his thinking vis-à-vis the process of the trial.

Leni, too, attempts to instruct Joseph K. about the workings of the trial, both directly and indirectly, but again he cannot internalize her analysis of his predicament. As Joseph K. presses her for help, she pleads with him, "Please don't ask me for names, take my warning to heart instead, and don't be so unyielding in future, you can't fight against this Court, you must confess your guilt. Make your confession at the first chance you get. Until you do that there's no possibility of getting out of their clutches, none at all..." (108). This is a fairly stunning piece of information, one that fits precisely with the lesson of the uncle about the trial's timing: guilt has been determined and needs to be recognized for any movement in Joseph K.'s favor to occur. The movement is back into the fold of the society of the trial, one that Joseph cannot even glimpse or fathom, let alone accomplish.

The direct information that Leni imparts to Joseph K. has to do with the state of the trial itself—specifically its marginality. Joseph K. observes a painting of a judge on the wall and calls attention to it:

It represented a man in a Judge's robe; he was sitting on a high thronelike seat, and the gilding of the seat stood out strongly in the picture. The strange thing was that the Judge did not seem to be sitting in a dignified composure, for his left arm was braced along the back of the side-arm of his throne, while his right arm rested on nothing, except the hand, which clutched the other arm of the chair; it was as if in a moment he must spring up with a violent and probably wrathful gesture to make some decisive observation or even to pronounce sentence. The accused might be imagined as standing on the lowest step leading up to the chair of justice; the top steps, which were covered with a yellow carpet were shown in the picture. (107-108)

When Joseph K. proposes that this might be his judge, Leni reveals that she knows him, though in real life he appears differently than in the painting. "That picture," she tells Joseph K., "was painted when he was young, but it could never have been in the least like him, for he's a small man, almost a dwarf" (108). After learning that the man in the painting is "only" an "Examining Magistrate," Joseph K. expresses surprise that he is sitting in a "chair of state"—the throne. Leni reveals, "Actually he is sitting on a kitchen chair with an old horse-rug doubled under him." In other words, the entire painting is an imaginative construct, presenting the world of the trial in absurdly grandiose terms. A small man sitting on a kitchen chair and horse rug is transformed into an enthroned king.

Joseph K. rejects the two central lessons he has been told during his visit to the lawyer: first (and most importantly), that he should admit his guilt; second, that he should proceed with the trial through the personal and familial connections available to him. Instead, he continues to apply the values of the bank world, namely that he is innocent until the trial proves him guilty and that he must succeed procedurally and operationally in the context of the trial. It is not as though Joseph K. decides this; the discursive structures of the bank world dominate him so thoroughly that he cannot consider an alternative.

That Joseph K. is eventually executed by the trial system indicates that it is still a powerful entity, though the manner of the execution again points to marginality. Two men fetch Joseph K. They take him out of town—again to the periphery of the city. The execution scene proceeds as follows, ending the novel:

But the hands of one of the partners were already at K.'s throat, while the other thrust the knife deep into his heart and turned it there twice. With failing eyes K. could still see the two of them immediately before him, cheek leaning against cheek, watching the final act. "Like a dog!" he said; it was as if the shame of it must outlive him. (229)

Three elements are vital for understanding the nature of Joseph K.'s death. First, the method of killing is not one of the hegemonic power but of the marginalized group; and in this case the allusion is to the method of killing used by the ancient *sicarii*, a society of resisters charged with killing Jews in Jerusalem who collaborated with Roman power.⁸⁰ Second, the statement "like a dog" refers to the widespread belief that in the ancient world the "dog" was a common epithet for the "godless" gentile or Roman.⁸¹ Third, Joseph K.'s killing, like those perpetrated by the *sicarii*, is meant as both individual punishment and a means of social control, as an example, in other words, of the fate of the apostate. The shame that is to "outlive" Joseph K. is the shame of leaving the social fold and aligning with the dominant power.

⁸⁰ Josephus, in *The Jewish War*, captures the terror the *sicarii* spread in a Jerusalem under Roman rule: "When the countryside had been cleared of [bandit chief Eleazar's men], another type of bandit sprang up in Jerusalem, known as 'Sicarii.' These men commit numerous murders in broad daylight and in the middle of the City. Their favorite trick was to mingle with festival crowds, concealing under their garments small daggers with which they stabbed their opponents. When the victims fell, the assassins melted into the indignant crowd, and through their plausibility entirely defied detection. The first to have his throat cut by them was Jonathan the high priest, and after him many were murdered every day" (147). The *sicarii* were much more than "bandits"—they represented the most extreme wing of Jewish national resistance to Rome. They eventually occupied the fortress at Masada, the final redoubt of resistance to the Roman army's successful campaigns against the Jewish lands. Josephus writes of the final Roman siege of Masada, "The fortress was Masada, occupied by the Sicarii under the command of an influential man called Eleazar, a descendent of Judas who had persuaded many Jews...not to register when Quirinius was sent to Judea to take a census. At that time the Sicarii combined against those prepared to submit to Rome, and in every way treated them as enemies, looting their property, rounding up their cattle, and setting their dwellings on fire: they were no better than foreigners, they declared, throwing away in this cowardly fashion the freedom won by the Jews at such cost, and avowedly choosing slavery under the Romans" (393).

⁸¹ Though Mark Nanos argues against the authenticity of the claim of widespread use of the epithet "dogs" for gentiles in the ancient Near East, the link became strongly developed in its reversal—the later Christian designation of Jews as dogs.

Power in Kafka's *The Trial* is thus represented by two antagonistic and incompatible systems. The world of the bank is hegemonic, the dominant ideology in the novel. The trial world is peripheral, marginal—forced to the edges of the city, where it occupies only the most undesirable spaces, and the countryside. It is out of sight, nearly invisible to the dominant power. Yet the very process of marginalization provokes retaliation against a former member of the trial society who has crossed the line into the zone of hegemonic power. The trial first attempts to recuperate Joseph K., but this proves impossible. He is too much a man of the bank world. The only choice left is to execute him as an apostate, but such a move only serves to underscore the weakness of the trial as a whole; a stronger system would have been able to bring Joseph K. back. While the novel is about the trial's prosecution of Joseph K., it might be more accurate to say that Joseph K. is actually the aggressor, the persecutor. He enters the zone of the trial as the explorer lands on the island of the penal colony, that is, with a fully articulated "modern" worldview that cannot countenance the violation of its core principles. Time and again, Joseph K. ridicules and prosecutes the trial using the ideological weaponry of the bank. The trial's victory is a Pyrrhic one: it might have assassinated Joseph K. as a "Roman" collaborator, but it, like the *sicarii*, will eventually be annihilated at its own "Masada"—under siege by the modern constitutional, corporate state—the new imperial power.

The trial is not an operation or a legal institution—it *is a society*, one marginalized, peripheral, and fighting for its continued existence. It is permitted to exist at the edge of the modern city, for now. Its vehemence stems from the perpetual siege it is under by the dominant social power, the bank world. The bank world denies it, ridicules it, presses down on it—and by the sheer force of its centripetal energy and the appeal of its enticements, pulls people away from the society of the trial. The usher's wife and Leni indicate that the appeal to leave is especially prominent among women, a response to their social debasement. Power, then, is represented here as a social construct, a social mechanism. It can contain multiple structures at once, though one dominant social structure forces all others to the margins. The margins strike back at the center, at times with lethal force, but never with realistic hope of challenging the hegemony.

The basic characteristics of power in Kafka's work discussed so far set the stage for a type of resistance offered through Kafka's conception of the dreamscape. These characteristics include the hermetic quality of systems of power, a system's foundation in a set of social (including legal) and cultural norms and practices—the expression of power as performance or

everyday practice, the inherent fragility (despite their apparent invulnerability) of power structures, and the tendency of one system of power to overtake, displace, or marginalize competitors—a system’s intolerance. Kafka’s protagonists tend to resist the structures of power from within the basic authoritarian structure. George Bendemann aims at a kind of parricide. The explorer in the penal colony supports the new commandant over the old. Joseph K., in *The Trial*, attempts to impose the logic of the bank world on the culture and society of the “trial.” Whether they fail (like George or Joseph K.) or succeed (like the explorer), the basic dynamics of power remain authoritarian. Kafka, it would seem, thematizes a set of concentric circles of power with no way out. In the reading of *The Castle* that follows, I propose that the way out, the anarchic impulse in Kafka’s work, is most clearly presented through his views on dreams.

Kafka and Dreams

Toward the end of his life, Kafka describes the dream as a kind of radical space or force, one that can produce, or result in, a rupture or transfiguration of waking life. The radicality of the dream experience, traceable to 1911 in his diaries, seems to have grown for him with the years. By 1919, the combination of internal and external pressures provokes a new kind of (understanding or view of) dream intensity, which carries into the early 1920s and the period when Kafka writes *The Castle*. Kafka’s view of the dream as a symbolic entity and, first and foremost, a narrative construct—a story—gives way to an understanding of the dream as a boundary-crossing movement or propulsion and as a creative or even artistic intensity, though not primarily in a positive sense.

That dreams are a central concern for Kafka is evident from a reading of his diaries. Among his first entries is a dream-text focusing on the dancer Eduardova (9). Even in this first recorded dream, Kafka seems to have a sense that the boundaries of the dreamscape are fluid. The following passage straddles the line between the clearly defined dreamscape and the non-dream space, or “reality”:

The dancer Eduardova, a lover of music, travels in the tram, as everywhere else, in the company of two vigorous violinists whom she makes play often. For there is no known reason why one should not play in the tram if the playing is good, pleasing to the fellow passengers, and costs nothing; i.e., if the hat is not passed round afterwards. Of course, at

first it is a little surprising and for a short while everybody finds it improper. But at full speed, in a strong breeze and on a silent street, it sounds quite nice. (9-10)

It is textually impossible to determine whether Kafka means this paragraph as a continuation of the dream-text or as a description beyond the dream. Such a straddling is made explicit in a diary entry from 1911. It is noteworthy that Kafka perceives the dream state as being discrete from being asleep or awake. It is a third state—an entry into a distinct space:

October 2. Sleepless night. The third in a row. I fall asleep soundly, but after an hour I wake up, as though I had laid my head in the wrong hole. I am completely awake, have the feeling that I have not slept at all or only under a thin skin, have before me anew the labour of falling asleep and feel myself rejected by sleep. And for the rest of the night, until about five, thus it remains, so that indeed I sleep but at the same time vivid dreams keep me awake. I sleep alongside myself, so to speak, while I myself must struggle with dreams. About five the last trace of sleep is exhausted, I just dream, which is more exhausting than wakefulness. In short, I spend the whole night in that state in which a healthy person finds himself for a short time before really falling asleep. When I awaken, all the dreams are gathered about me, but I am careful not to reflect on them. Toward morning I sigh into the pillow, because for this night all hope is gone. I think of those nights at the end of which I was raised out of deep sleep and awoke as though I had been folded in a nut. (*Diaries* 60)

In the same diary entry, Kafka connects sleep patterns to his work as a writer:

I believe this sleeplessness comes only because I write. For no matter how little or how badly I write, I am still made sensitive by these minor shocks, feel, especially toward evening and even more in the morning, the approaching, the imminent possibility of great moments which would tear me open, which could make me capable of anything, and in the general uproar that is within me and which I have no time to command, find no rest. In the end this uproar is only a suppressed, restrained harmony, which, left free, would fill me completely, which could even widen me and yet still fill me. But now such a

moment arouses only feeble hopes and does me harm, for my being does not have sufficient strength or the capacity to hold the present mixture, during the day the visible word helps me, during the night it cuts me to pieces unhindered. (61)

The October 2 entry contains key concepts. First, Kafka makes the clear distinction between two selves—a sleeping self and a dreaming self: “at the same time vivid dreams keep me awake. I sleep alongside myself, so to speak, while I myself must struggle with dreams.” While not a full dissolution of selfhood, the passages recognize that the dream-Kafka and the dreamer-Kafka are distinct beings. Yet, the doubling function of the “I” alone is not what provides the experience with its intensity. The intensity is drawn from the vague recognition of the simultaneity of sleeping and dreaming, of one self’s awareness of the other across the oneiric boundary.⁸² Second, Kafka attempts to preserve the intensity of the simultaneous existence of a dream-Kafka and the dreamer-Kafka by his rejection of dream interpretation: “When I awaken, all the dreams are gathered about me, but I am careful not to reflect on them.” Kafka seems aware that the production of the dream-text, the interpretive story that comes from reflection, will concretize the dreamscape using dominant discursive strategies, most likely Freudian. Kafka’s rejection of reflection is a rejection of the production of the dream-text in order to preserve the intensity of the experience of the dreamscape, even though this intensity seems to be difficult to handle and potentially even destructive.

In the second part of his entry about the night of October 2, Kafka makes the connection between the destruction of the unified or atomistic self and the creative process—there is “harmony,” he thinks, two steps below the unified self of wakefulness and one step below the disunity of the fractured dreamscape. He writes, “...in the general uproar that is within me and which I have no time to command, find no rest. In the end this uproar is only a suppressed, restrained harmony, which, left free, would fill me completely, which could even widen me and yet still fill me.” It is unclear what Kafka means by “suppressed, restrained harmony,” though it is connected to the creative process of writing—perhaps it is the foundation of the artistic act. The foundation of the creative act of writing, then, is posed as an intensity of the movement in

⁸² Schwenger provides an interesting discussion of this diary entry in his chapter in *At the Borders of Sleep* on insomnia. For Schwenger, Kafka is referring to a hypnagogic state or even to a series of “waking dreams” that one might read as hallucinations of sorts. Schwenger writes, “The dreams that haunt the insomniac Kafka, then, are the product not of sleep but of a psychological night...The insomniac becomes aware of an incessant inner turbulence that dreams tap into but can also surge forward without the intermediary stage of sleep” (62).

and out of the dreamscape, or at the very least it is positioned in the borderland between dream and restless nocturnal wakefulness or insomnia. The shocking results of the upwelling of the artistic intensity are twofold. First, the drive toward harmony, if “left free, would fill me completely, which could even widen me and yet still fill me.” In other words, the intensity enables the self to be self-actualizing and to go beyond its shape, body, or limits. The intensity of the movement in and out of the dreamscape “widens.” Second, the result of this widening and self-actualizing is fragmentation, destruction, death: “during the night,” Kafka writes, “it [the mixture] cuts me to pieces unhindered.” The “mixture” is all that is contained within the self—including its experiences in the dreamscape. The advance and withdrawal of the dreamscape is the major disintegrating force.

Less than two months after the night of October 2, Kafka records a dream in his diary that again poses the idea of crossing boundaries or zones:

November 19 [1911]: Dream: In the theatre...I sit right up at the front, think I am sitting in the first row until it finally appears that it is the second. The back of the row is turned toward the stage so that one can see the auditorium comfortably, the stage only by turning....Despite the fact that when the play began many people in the first rows left, apparently to go backstage, I can see very little, for the girls left behind block the view with their large, flat hats, most of which are blue, that move back and forth along the whole length of the row....On the stage two critics sit on the floor, writing, with their backs resting against a piece of scenery....Again facing the auditorium I see that it is lit by simple paraffin lamps that are stuck up on simple chandeliers, like those in the streets, and now, of course, burn only very low. Suddenly, impure paraffin or a damaged wick is probably the cause, the lights spurt out of one of these lanterns and sparks pour down in a broad gush on the crowded audience that forms a mass as black as earth. Then a gentleman rises up out of this mass, walks on it toward the lamp, apparently wants to fix the lamp, but first looks up at it, remains standing near it for a short while, and, when nothing happens, returns quietly to his place in which he is swallowed up. I take him for myself and bow my face into the darkness. (122)

While the dream recognizes the separation between the stage (the performance space) and the audience (the real), this division is immediately called into question by the narrator's positioning. He is turned to view the audience, as if the performance space is there—or also there. This reversal of the significance of the spaces is reinforced by the position of the two critics, who would normally be in the audience but who are now on stage, leaning against a piece of the stage set as if folded into the territory of the performance. Are they writing a theatrical review of the “real” from the vantage point of the stage, or even as actors? The narrator's view of the stage is blocked by the wall of blue hats, again de-emphasizing the stage as the primary site of the gaze.

The central dramatic moment in the dream-text comes with the explosion of the paraffin lamp in the auditorium among the audience. This burst of intensity precipitates two additional boundary crossings. The first is that a man rises out of the audience, which had before this been a “mass as black as earth.” In other words, the man crystallizes in reaction to the lamp's explosion as a potential individual or self, distinguishable from the masses. This moment of becoming-self echoes the moment I describe in the Introduction and Chapter 1 with Mike N. stepping out of the regimental line and thus forming a reciprocal relationship between himself and the dream-I. The narrator of Kafka's theater dream makes explicit what remains implicit in my Mike N. dream—that is to say, the potential unity of dream-subject and dream-object. At the end of the theater dream, the narrator “bows [his] face into the darkness.” The “darkness” here is multivalent. It is the darkness of night. It is the “black earth” of the audience—the indistinguishable crowd. It is the darkness of the theater—and, connected to it, the edge of the perceivable dreamscape. The dream ends with the wrenching discomfort of two simultaneous subjects locked together but wholly other: first, the viewer of the scene and, second, the actor who emerges out of, and vanishes back into, the crowd.

Kafka's two most radical formulations of dreaming come later in the diaries. On December 5, 1919, he writes, “Again pulled through this terrible, long, narrow crack; it can only be forced through in a dream. On purpose and awake, one could certainly never do it” (390). On February 3, 1922, Kafka, already at work on *The Castle*, writes, “Almost impossible to sleep; plagued by dreams, as if they were being scratched on me, on a stubborn material” (411). The 1919 entry reminds of the tunnel in Jean Rhys' “Exhibition dream.” The dream for Kafka in this instance could be considered a kind of tunnel, a passage through which one can pass as if through a maze, finding one's way somehow from the entry point of the dreamscape to the

exit—as Aeneas enters the underworld through Cumae and exits through the gates of horn, as Alice enters the dreamscape through the rabbit hole. However, Kafka’s tunnel or passageway differs from Rhys’ or Virgil’s or Carroll’s tunnel. Here it is not a tunnel at all, but merely a “crack.” The body’s movement through this narrowest of cracks or fissures creates the zone of the dreamscape. It is a harrowing journey, one, as Kafka says, that he could “never do” if awake. It is only into the dreamscape that he can experience a “movement” of such raw intensity. It is this intensity—this force—that confronts the author of the creative act. Such a confrontation is proposed in Kafka’s story “The Burrow” (written in 1923, published in 1931). The major shift in the story from the animal narrator’s description of life in (and around) its burrow to the confrontation with a seemingly external sound comes when the narrator awakens from a long sleep. The sound that disturbs the animal-narrator begins during sleep and seems to tunnel through the dreamscape to awaken it. “I must have slept for a long time. I was only wakened when I had reached the last light sleep which dissolves of itself, and it must have been very light, for it was an almost inaudible whistling noise that wakened me” (343). The sound provides the bridge between sleep and wakefulness, perhaps between the dreamscape and the burrow. It is the intensity of the sound that actuates the passage.

The diary entry from 1922 pushes even further into the domain of pure intensity. Here the intensity of the dreamscape prevents sleep entirely and suspends the person between wakefulness and sleep in a forbidding, hostile zone “plagued by dreams.” Beyond this, the dreamscape encroaches on the other side of the dream/real divide, marking it indelibly—scarring or even defacing it—“as if they were being scratched on me, on a stubborn material” (411). The dream here is being written on the surface of waking life, on the body as a sort of tattoo. This conjures the image of the body as a surface to be written upon, to be inscribed and thus to be animated. The awoken person seems defenseless against these re-inscriptions. As such, the passage through the dreamscape adds disfigurement to the body in an endless process of remaking it (or making it), rewriting it (or writing it)—in the same way as Kafka did with *The Castle*, a work or a literary process with no end. Schwenger might have this in mind when he writes, “...within the security of sleep is something that is in many ways its direct opposite. That something, of course, is the dream. And if in sleep we secure ourselves in rest, in dream we open into a restlessness without end” (80-81).

Kafka's depictions of the movement between an insomniac wakefulness and the space of the dreamscape, and his representation of this movement as an intensity that makes or reconfigures the subject and the subject's body present a challenge to Freudian dream analysis, which sees dreaming as an interpretable text within the framework of a diagnostic process. Kafka was aware of Freudian dream theory, as Schwenger points out, but his choice to avoid Freudian analysis of his recorded dreams indicates that he did not feel entrapped by or perhaps even attracted to these ideas. To the contrary, in a letter to Milena Jesenská, Kafka rejects psychoanalysis, mainly because, for him, it pathologizes the very intensities that define the opening up of the dreamscape. He writes:

...I consider the therapeutic part of psychoanalysis to be a hopeless error. All of these so-called illnesses, sad as they may appear, are matters of faith, efforts of souls in distress to find moorings in some maternal soil; thus psychoanalysis also considers the origin of religions to be nothing but what (in its opinion) causes the "illnesses" of the individual. Nowadays, of course, we generally lack a sense of religious community; the sects are countless and confined to single individuals—though perhaps it only appears so to the eye coloured by the present.

Such moorings, however, which really take hold of solid ground are after all not an isolated, interchangeable property of man, rather they are pre-existing in his nature and continue to form his nature (as well as his body) in this direction. And it's here they hope to cure? (Milena 173)

While this quotation does not address Freudian dream theory, it suggests that Kafka rejects the psychoanalytic impulse to systematize and medicalize the flux of a subject's inner life, including one's dream-life. In light of the social reading of *The Trial* above, it is noteworthy that Kafka understands individual "pathology" in terms of the individual's quest for a community of faith. Psychoanalysis, Kafka implies, is the theory of the bank world, an attempt to understand individuals as rootless and atomistic, and to cure the anachronistic or primitive desire to belong to a "religious community." The politics of "belonging" form the basic context for Kafka's novel *The Castle*, as the quintessential outsider, K., arrives in a village that does not seem to want him there and yet does not expel him.

The Castle

The Castle begins with a man's arrival in a country village late in the evening. The man, K., crosses a bridge and finds a village inn. He requests a night's lodging and receives it, only to find out shortly afterward that he is not permitted to reside, however temporarily, in the domain of the castle of Count Westwest. K. meets this exercise of power by claiming that he is the land surveyor summoned by the castle itself. While likely an act of subterfuge, the embrace of the identity of land surveyor represents a major challenge to the status quo of village life, a challenge that reverberates immediately in the novel. After K.'s (false) disclosure, an unattributed voice is heard uttering, "Land surveyor?" Moments later, the narrative voice tells that K. "watched the peasants gathering timidly and conferring, the arrival of a land surveyor was no trifling matter" (3). The sudden presence of a self-proclaimed land surveyor in the village is a significant challenge to established authority and provokes what seems like an emergency response from the castle—a response understood by K. in the following way:

K. listened intently. So the Castle had appointed him land surveyor. On one hand, this was unfavorable, for it showed that the Castle had all necessary information about him, had assessed the opposing forces, and was taking up the struggle with a smile. On the other hand, it was favorable, for it proved to his mind that they underestimated him and that he would enjoy greater freedom than he could have hoped for at the beginning. And if they thought they could keep him terrified all the time simply by acknowledging his surveyorship—though this was certainly a superior move on their part—then they were mistaken for he felt only a slight shudder, that was all. (5)

K. becomes bound to the castle through his naming as land surveyor—and, in fact, he is rarely referred to as anything else throughout the novel. By naming K., or recognizing his self-imposed function, the castle-village system attempts to reconcile itself with the challenge K. presents as a stranger, foreigner, or newcomer—in other words, as an inherently disruptive force to the delicate equilibrium that has been established among all members of this society. The strength of "castle" power, even if the castle is but a projection and remains a part of the village society, is

its hermetic structure and the order it has established within this structure.⁸³ This is not to say that this order is fixed and unchanging—rather there are explicit references and many more hints that the power within the castle-village system is fluid—for example, in Frieda’s journey from stable girl to barmaid and her eventual coupling with Klamm.

Evidence that K.’s arrival and, specifically, his naming as land surveyor cause disruption and reorientation abounds early in the novel. At Master Tanner Lasemann’s house, responding to Lasemann’s comment that no guests are needed in the village, K. says, “But every now and then someone is needed, such as me, the land surveyor” (12). Lasemann cannot bring himself to refute this, despite his doubts, saying, “I don’t know about that...if they summoned you, then they probably need you, this may be an exception, but we little people go by the rule, you shouldn’t blame us for that” (12-13). K.’s presence is marked as exceptional—a disruption of the norms of daily life. The next hint of the ripple effect of this disruption is the assignment of two people to work as K.’s assistants—Artur and Jeremias. Though clearly men of the village-castle, they take on the label of assistants to the land surveyor. Whether or not they are assigned to K. as a method of control seems to me less important than that they are assigned at all, further entrenching K. in his identity of land surveyor and connecting him to the web of the village-castle society.

Walter Corbella sees the type of surveillance he claims the assistants represent as fundamental to the operation of castle authority. He writes, “I maintain that Kafka’s Castle operates on the basis of panoptic principles, relying on an authoritarian regime and permanent surveillance for the sake of individual discipline and social stability” (70). He continues, quite correctly, I think, “The Castle resides primarily in [the villagers’] minds, governing their thoughts and determining their behaviors, and it marks, symbolically, the site of the gaze that reaches them in any place at any moment” (72). While this is true, the discipline and the social stability Corbella sees in the novel should not be exaggerated. As I will demonstrate below, the novel shows the scars of a fairly dramatic shifting of power within the village and social flux. The authoritarian regime, as Corbella calls the castle, is actually not governed by the castle and its officials at all—it is the product of a balance of power within the village itself.

⁸³ I agree with Ron Smetana’s claim that, “The Castle is not an independent entity. It is immanent as well as transcendent. Its existence and meaning lie with the villagers; there is no Castle other than the social realm.” Power and authority, Smetana asserts, are not attributes of the Castle and/or its officials; power lies with the villagers: “Castle officials, in fact, have no greater influence over the social order than do other villagers...authority is immanent in all village life, not just in official actions.” Smetana concludes, “[K.’s] unique and unsatisfying status in the village comes from his refusal to act on the knowledge that society is immanent—that the peasantry is the Castle” (54-58).

K. is right, then, when he senses that he has power in relation to the power structures of the castle-village. The first chapters demonstrate this quite clearly. K.'s arrival and self-definition succeed in maintaining his presence in the village—none dares expel the land surveyor. He receives explicit recognition from Klamm in a letter. He provokes the assignment of assistants. When he enters the taproom with Olga, his presence behind her shifts the way the peasants interact with her. While in the taproom, he attracts the attention of the peasants who are curious to learn something new from him. Such an insertion of new information, new knowledge, is a threat to the status quo of any hermetic system. Most centrally, K. breaks the relationship between Klamm and Frieda, and himself begins a relationship with Frieda, a direct challenge to the seeming hierarchy of the castle-village, which goes totally unanswered⁸⁴: “And as though Frieda had been fortified by K.’s consent, she clenched her fist, knocked on the door, and cried: ‘I’m with the surveyor. I’m with the surveyor’” (41). Frieda breaks with Klamm and goes with K. to improve her position—most notably to escape the abuse she endures from Klamm’s servants. Again, as in *The Trial*, women inside the trial or castle-village system see outsiders as potential ways to either improve their situation or to escape from the structures entirely (and, indeed, Frieda’s secret dream is ultimately escape—to “France or southern Spain”).

The first day with Frieda is the high point of K.’s power in the novel—partly because his intentions to stay are not yet clear and so the castle-village system does not perceive him as a continued threat, let alone as a representative of a bigger, looming existential threat. Having left the Gentlemen’s Inn with Frieda for his lodgings at the Bridge Inn, K. finds himself in a quite comfortable condition:

Besides, it wasn’t so terribly unpleasant, sitting at the table drinking the good coffee Frieda had brought, warming himself at the stove Frieda had stoked, having the assistants run up and down the stairs ten times in their clumsy eagerness to bring him soap, water, a comb, a mirror, and finally, since K. had softly uttered a wish that could be interpreted that way, a little glass of rum. (45)

⁸⁴ Corbella is on target when he calls this relationship a “disturbance” in the system of power (75).

Though critics often focus on the ways in which the dominant castle authority controls and frustrates K., it would be more accurate to say that K., even if unwittingly at times, challenges the structures of castle-village power quite profoundly and provokes responses that reveal not the strength of the castle-village system, but its fragility—or, more accurately, that reveal both its strength in the immediate territorial sense and its fragility in the wider context.⁸⁵

K.'s self-identification as a land surveyor creates a crisis in the castle-village system—the extent or seriousness of this crisis has not been fully appreciated in the critical literature on the novel. The arrival of a land surveyor presents at least three discrete types of threats: 1) the potential encroachment of an external state on castle-village lands—threatening precisely the territory's "sealed up" nature, as Stach calls it (443); 2) a redistribution of lands within the castle-village system; 3) shifts in interpersonal relationships in relation to this new variable. The depth of the threat of the arrival of a land surveyor emerges during K.'s meeting with the council chairman. Like the representatives of authority in "The Judgment," "In the Penal Colony" and *The Trial*, the chairman is presented as a sick, infirm man, bedridden, in this case, from illness and gout. Toward the beginning of the meeting, the chairman explains to K. why a land surveyor is not needed in the village—and in doing so points to the very threats the land surveyor represents:

You were, as you say, taken on as a surveyor, but we don't need a surveyor. There wouldn't be the least bit of work for a person like that. The boundaries of our small holdings have been marked out, everything has been duly registered, the properties themselves rarely change hands, and whatever small boundary disputes arise, we settle ourselves. (59)

This statement exposes the anxieties that the idea of the land surveyor raises in the castle-village system. First, a land surveyor, it seems by definition, is an outsider—there are no land surveyors in the castle-village system and thus, if one is needed, he would have to be summoned from abroad. The lack of a local land surveyor indicates that property lines in the castle-village system

⁸⁵ Stach, in the third volume of his biography of Kafka, nicely compares the village in *The Castle* to the real village of Spindelmühle, where Kafka began writing the novel. In contrast to the tourist town of Spindelmühle, Stach writes, "An outside world does not seem to exist for the villagers..." of the novel (433-434) He adds, and this will be important for my discussion below, "The world of *The Castle* is arcane and sealed up tight" (443).

are permanent and fixed—or, if not fixed, then determined by other means than a strict adherence to a property deed or title. Moreover, the chairman’s statement that the “boundaries of our small holdings have been marked out” could indicate that the borders of the entire domain of the castle-village system are being challenged from outside. One potential way of understanding this scenario is to see the castle-village system as an aristocratic territory, one which, though nominally still dominated by the aristocratic family, has now been subsumed under the aegis of the modern state. While the aristocrat, Count Westwest, is still symbolically important for the coherence of the region’s identity, the state has stripped him of any real power. It is likely that the count and his heirs have abandoned the territory entirely out of economic necessity—leaving behind the castle-village system, which regulates itself through the deployment of traditions and the web of relationships based on them. In such a situation, any breaching of the system’s boundaries—any assertion of the state into the territory—would cause massive social disturbance and even social and cultural collapse. Far from being, as Michael Löwy claims, “the modern state with its bureaucratic, hierarchical apparatus, impersonal, authoritarian, and alienating,” the castle or castle-village system is a territory beyond the state, a territory threatened by the state and its assertions of power across the borders—in however seemingly insignificant ways (“Paper Chains” 204).

The very idea of a land surveyor’s arrival creates a political crisis in the castle-village system, revealing the system’s instability and fragility. The first rift that occurs is between the castle officials and the peasants. The chairman tells K. what happened when news got out about the potential summoning of a land surveyor:

...every day formal hearings were held at the Gentlemen’s Inn with respected members of the community. Most stood by me, but a few became suspicious, land surveying is an issue that deeply affects peasants, they scented some sort of secret deals and injustice, they also found a leader, and Sordini [a castle official] had to conclude from their presentations that if I had raised the matter at the local council not everyone would have opposed the summoning of a surveyor...In all this a certain Brunswick played a prominent role... (66-67)

The notion of the arrival of a land surveyor, in other words, results in or exacerbates factionalism in the castle-village system of a type that cannot be controlled by the castle authorities and their village representatives, again betraying that there is no inherent difference in power between them and the villagers. There are only apparent differences—as there is only an apparent aristocrat, not a real one. In the debate over the issue of the land surveyor, Brunswick emerges as a powerful political force. As the chairman tells K.:

As for Brunswick: if we could expel him from the community, virtually everyone would be happy, Lasemann not least of all. But Brunswick gained some influence at that time, he's not a speaker but a shouter, and that's good enough for some. And so I was forced to lay the matter before the council, which by the way was Brunswick's only success at first, since the council naturally decided by a large majority to have nothing to do with the surveyor. That too was years ago, but the matter still hasn't died down, partly through the conscientiousness of Sordini, who tried to probe the motives of both majority and opposition by means of the most meticulous inquiries, partly through the stupidity and ambition of Brunswick, who has various personal contacts with the authorities that he was able to bring into play thanks to his boundless imagination. (67)

K., upon announcing himself as a land surveyor, enters into this political struggle. He is not, then, simply arrayed against the castle-village system as an outsider and opponent. Immediately, he is subsumed into intense social-political conflict—or reanimates it: “And just imagine,” says the council chairman, “how disappointed I was, Surveyor, after the happy conclusion of the entire affair...when suddenly you appear and it seems as if everything is about to begin all over again” (69). The authorities in the castle-village system cannot bring themselves to remove K. from the territory—one of the biggest puzzles of the book. Why is K. not simply expelled from the village environs and made to continue on his journey? Two reasonable answers present themselves. First, the authorities fear that by expelling K. they will be made even more vulnerable to external interference. Second, it could be that the internal political dynamics make such an expulsion impossible. Either way, the authorities conclude that the best method of dealing with K. is to attempt to absorb him into the castle-village structure, albeit as a permanent “outsider” or “stranger,” and in a role less politically problematic—that of school

janitor instead of surveyor. The limits of this strategy are plain to see—most tellingly in that even after K. agrees to take on the job as school janitor, he is still mostly referred to as “surveyor.”

The character of Brunswick provides a link between the two most significant political events in *The Castle*—the debate over the summoning of a land surveyor and the ruination of the Barnabas family by the castle-village complex. K. learns the saga of the Barnabas family from Olga, one of Barnabas’s sisters. As Olga tells it, following a celebration in the village, a castle official made an outrageously vulgar sexual proposition to her sister Amalia, summoning her to the Gentlemen’s Inn. Amalia rejected the offer, tearing the official’s note into pieces and tossing them at the official’s messenger. This act of defiance, so Olga says, resulted in social ostracism for Amalia and the whole family—despite the fact that no direct punishment or any word at all was issued from the castle authorities. The most prominent result of the ostracism was the loss of class status; the Barnabas family had been prominent middle-class artisans but was now reduced to penury. The father had been a master cobbler with Brunswick as his apprentice. Soon after the incident, this relationship reversed—Brunswick left the workshop to start his own shop, taking all of the clients with him. Barnabas’s father lost his livelihood and eventually the family lost their house and valuable possessions, all taken by Brunswick. It seems probable that the political capital Brunswick accrued during the debate over the summoning of a land surveyor helped him achieve or solidify the professional reversal of fortunes with Barnabas’s father. The actual appearance of K. in the village as land surveyor, thus, represents a new front in the power struggle between Brunswick and the Barnabas family, one that could have deep implications for the society and culture of the whole castle-village complex. It is precisely this potential that Olga senses and that motivates her to pull K. into her sphere. The alliance of the land surveyor with the Barnabas family presents a potentially powerful front against the Brunswick faction and the ideology that supports it—“castle stories,” as Amalia derisively calls the entirely unsubstantiated mythology of castle life.

Contrary to much work on *The Castle*, the picture that emerges of power in the novel from my reading is not one of bureaucratic domination, robust state authoritarianism, inflexible parameters, or fixed relationships. Castle-village power is entirely social. These relationships are anything but fixed—people are constantly looking for ways to maneuver within the castle-village system. Frieda uses K. to break from Klamm and her position as the barmaid at the Gentlemen’s

Inn. Pepi rises from her position as chambermaid to fill Frieda's role. The landlady at the Bridge Inn exploits her relationship to the landlord to acquire the inn under favorable conditions.

Brunswick succeeds in inverting the master-apprentice relationship to Barnabas's father. The Barnabas family declines from a solid middle-class existence to abject poverty. The introduction of K. as a new variable in the equation of power threatens to produce both small and large ripple effects in the system.

If power in *The Castle* is understood as social and shifting (instead of hierarchical and rigid), the vulnerability of the castle-village structure as a whole can be better grasped. K.'s arrival as land surveyor threatens both the system as a whole from beyond its borders and disrupts its internal dynamics. It could even be that, much like Joseph's K.'s death presages the death of the trial world, K.'s very arrival in the village means the dissolution of a now anachronistic castle-village system. K. might be the first foreigner to cross the bridge into this strange domain, but he is likely not the last. The only response the system can muster against K. is an attempt to incorporate him into the social body. The great irony of the book is that this is precisely K.'s desire, too.

K.'s Dream

Toward the end of *The Castle* and just after Frieda abandons him, K. finds himself in the room of Bürgel, a "connecting secretary" from the castle. This accidental encounter provides K. with his closest contact to castle officialdom in the novel. Bürgel, unlike other officials, is friendly to K., seducing him with promises of intervening positively in his case. But K. is too tired to engage with Bürgel. The weariness that has been with him for the entirety of his time in the village—exacerbated by days of interrupted sleep—overcomes him just as Bürgel seems to divulge to K. the hidden secret to achieving one's desires at the expense of the system. The secret is to approach a sympathetic castle official by night, when he is most vulnerable, and to extract the desired result—an extraction that the weak, vulnerable official cannot help but relinquish. The parallels between the hypothetical scenario outlined by Bürgel and the present circumstances K. finds himself in are obvious: Bürgel is offering himself to K. It is in this context that K. has the only dream in the novel:

K. slept, but it wasn't really sleep, he was still hearing what Bürgel was saying, perhaps better than earlier when he was still awake but dead tired, one word after another accosted his ears, but that irritating awareness was gone, he felt free, it was no longer Bürgel who kept him, but he, K., who now and then groped about for Bürgel, he had not yet reached the depths of sleep, but he had dipped into it and now no one was going to steal this from him. And it seemed to him as though in this way he had achieved a great victory and a group of people was already there to celebrate it and he or even somebody else was raising a champagne glass in honor of the victory. And in order to let everyone know what it was all about, the battle and the victory were being repeated once again, or perhaps they weren't being repeated but were taking place for the first time and had been celebrated earlier and kept on being celebrated, because there was fortunately no doubt at all about the outcome. A secretary, naked, very much like the statue of a Greek god, was being hard pressed by K. in battle. That was quite comical, and in his sleep K. smiled gently at the way the secretary was being constantly startled out of his proud posture by K.'s advances and quickly had to use his raised arm and clenched fist to cover up his exposed parts, but he was not yet quick enough. The battle didn't last long, for step by step, and very big steps they were too, K. advanced. Was this even a battle? There was no real obstacle, only every so often a few squeaks from the secretary. This Greek god squeaked like a girl being tickled. And then finally he was gone; K. was alone in a large room; ready to fight, he turned around and looked for his opponent, but there wasn't anybody there anymore, the group of people had scattered as well, only the champagne glass lay broken on the ground, K. stamped on it. But the splinters hurt; with a start he woke up feeling sick, like a small child on being awakened; nevertheless, at the sight of Bürgel's bare chest a thought from the dream came to him: "There's your Greek god! So pull him out of the sack!" (264-265)

The movement into the dreamscape represents the only moment in the novel when the setting moves beyond the territory of the castle-village complex, which up to this late point in the book has been a nearly totally "sealed up" world. K. escapes this world by slipping into a hypnagogic state—not entirely awake, not entirely asleep, but enveloped by the emerging dreamscape. The significance of this shift is reflected in the startling phrase: "but that irritating

awareness was gone, he felt free...” This is a shocking revelation—the notion that a failure of awareness opens up a potential space for freedom. The winning of this freedom is, for the dreamer-K., a “great victory” and the subsequent dream translates this notion of victory into a narrative.

K.’s movement into the dreamscape results in the loss of “awareness.” This awareness or consciousness is what defines his relationship to the specific setting and to others present, in this case Bürgel. The “awareness” is irritating to K., presumably because it acts to register these surroundings and relationships, and to define them always within the dominant understanding of the castle-village system. The loss of awareness opens up new configurations—and immediately the loss of consciousness produces a shift between K. and Bürgel: “...it was no longer Bürgel who kept him, but he, K., who now and then groped about for Bürgel...” It is not entirely clear what this means, except that K. has turned from a passive object to an active subject.

The startling result of this loss of awareness and, with it, the disintegration of the castle-village system, is that K. “felt free.” This feeling of freedom precedes the narrative report of the dream, the formation of the dream-text. The feeling of freedom reflects the rupture in consciousness and the movement into the territory of the dreamscape. As “irritating” awareness fades and the dreamscape emerges, freedom presents itself. The central question, though, is what is meant by this freedom. How should it be understood in relation to the power structures of the castle-village system? On the one hand, it seems clear that the freedom is of a radical type—that it is not limited by any qualifying statements, not a “freedom from” anything or a “freedom to” do anything. It is a pure state of being free. This freedom results from the falling away of awareness or consciousness, implying that pure freedom emerges with a relinquishing, at least momentarily, of a situated understanding of selfhood. Since the castle-village power structure is built precisely on the ability of the system as a whole to locate and define each individual member in relation to all others, this relinquishing of position is tantamount to a radical rejection of the system’s reality.⁸⁶ On the “waking” side of the hypnagogic line, Bürgel explains to K. a

⁸⁶ This freedom that results in the movement into the dreamscape should be compared with the other moment of “freedom” in the novel. This comes after K. has attempted to waylay Klamm on his way out of the Gentlemen’s Inn by hiding in the sleigh that is ready to take him to the castle. K.’s attempt prevents Klamm from leaving and eventually the coachman gives up waiting and parks the sleigh and the horses in the stable. When only K. remains in the courtyard, the narrator provides access to his reflections: “...it seemed to K. as if they had broken off all contact with him, but as if he were freer than ever and could wait as long as he wanted here in the place where he was generally not allowed, and as if he had fought for this freedom for himself in a manner nobody else could have done and as if nobody could touch him or drive him away, or even speak to him, yet—and this conviction was at least

seemingly effective strategy to deal with the castle authorities, namely by exploiting his immediate situation with Bürger himself. But this seeming grasp at power, i.e., the advancement of K.'s interests, contrasts directly with the feeling of freedom in the dreamscape, revealing that there is no freedom possible from within the castle-village system; one must escape the system to discover freedom. The bitter irony here is that this feeling of freedom exists but for a single moment—it can be nothing other than fleeting, ephemeral, and partial. The dream-text itself writes the feeling of freedom back into the structure of power and upon waking K. carries none of its potential radicalism with him.

The freedom K. experiences is not, at first, related to a victory over the castle-village system. The link between the feeling of freedom and the notion of competition and domination only comes when the dream-K. starts to translate the primordial understanding of freedom in narrative terms. First, the freedom is equated with the state of deep sleep—again a state of total but temporally limited erasure of identity. The achievement of sleep, however, invites the notion of “victory”—and this notion leads to the idea of contestation. The achievement of sleep and thus of freedom, then, is reframed as an inversion of hierarchy. Instead of K. being oppressed by the castle officials and village society, he now oppresses or dominates the representative official and wins the support of the villagers. In the dream-text, the castle authority is symbolically naked and helpless—exposed and ashamed of itself. Dream-K. exploits this shame to push his advantage. However, the quest for domination proves futile. The end result is that the crowd vanishes. The idea that one can invert power relationships or wrestle power from the authorities proves barren. The initial feeling of freedom is not experienced again through victory. Dream-K.'s stamping of the champagne glass and his injuring himself means the end of the party—and the angry recognition that his (apparent) victory over the castle authorities is meaningless. Freedom cannot be found there.⁸⁷

Despite the limited appearance of freedom in the dream in *The Castle*—occupying no more than a single sentence, perhaps extending into two, its political implications are significant.

equally strong—as if there was nothing more senseless, nothing more desperate, than this freedom this waiting, this invulnerability” (106). While the freedom of moving into the dreamscape is a result of the move beyond or outside of the structures of authority, the freedom “won” by K. in the courtyard is a product of competition and confrontation, which results not in a kind of false or sham sense of freedom but in a purer, transcendent experience of being free.

⁸⁷ Zoltan Balazs says it well when he argues that K. “keeps thinking about the other side, for there is always an other side for him. Call it ambition, a mission to destroy or a desire to build, becoming powerful is always like wanting to be on the other side” (90).

The freedom of this moment is anarchic. It does not, in its spontaneous upwelling, depend on any hierarchical relationships. It imagines a state of being outside of power. Of course, it is impossible to exist beyond hierarchies and outside of flows of power, as I discuss in Chapter 1. *The Castle*, however, invites the reading of the possibility of experiencing this type of a-hierarchical zone as waking reality crumbles, the dreamscape emerges, and the dream-text has yet to displace the pre-narrative dreamscape. The depth of the dreamscape is a space beyond reach of both the castle-village system and the opposing dominant system of the modern state that K. unwittingly embodies. K., in this moment, is stripped of his identity—that “irritating awareness”—and one can intuit that it is not only Bürgel who appears naked, but K., too, and that this nakedness is a stripping away of “dress” in the physical and non-physical sense. Bürgel’s artificiality (he appears as an animated statue of a Greek god) reflects back on the dream-K.—for he, too, is not K. but an empty vessel, in which any and all possible identity formations could be poured. This artificiality is further emphasized by the performative nature of the dream scene. The action consists of repeated reenactment—implying that the actor playing the combatant K. is not the dream-K., but a stand-in for the dream-K., who watches the performance along with the crowd. When K. attempts to claim the mantle of victory, the spectators vanish, suggesting that they cannot recognize him or distinguish between the real dream-K. and the actor-K. in the dream performance.

If the two key ideas about dreams from Kafka’s diaries discussed above are read into this moment of *The Castle*, the significance deepens. The first idea is that of radical displacement: “Again pulled through this terrible, long, narrow crack; it can only be forced through in a dream” (*Diaries* 390). In *The Castle*, the transition into the dreamscape means both the unmaking of the self, including the location of the self within the social system, and the emergence of a type of anarchic freedom. Indeed, its “narrowness” in the novel is quite severe—the width of one sentence among thousands. In Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy,” the juxtaposition of freedom with social identity construction is made explicit. In the story, the narrator, an ape, describes the choice he makes to give up his ape-ness and to become human in order to find his “way out” of his cage—“I had to stop being an ape” (253). The narrator elaborates:

I fear that perhaps you do not quite understand what I mean by “way out.” I use the expression in its fullest and most popular sense. I deliberately do not use the word

“freedom.” I do not mean the spacious feeling of freedom on all sides. As an ape, perhaps, I knew that, and I have met men who yearn for it. But for my part I desired such freedom neither then nor now. In passing: may I say that all too often men are betrayed by the word freedom. And as freedom is counted among the most sublime feelings, so the corresponding disillusionment can also be sublime....No, freedom is not what I wanted. Only a way out... (253)

The ape’s “report” describes his assimilation into the ways of human beings in order to live a life beyond the cage and in open society. The “way out” was to become human, to imitate human actions (like drinking schnapps) and human speech. It is speech, the saying of “Hallo,” that allows the ape to “[break] into the human community” (257). This “way out,” of course, has come at considerable cost to the ape—freedom has been abandoned and a deep sense of self-alienation accompanies the ape’s reaching the “cultural level of an average European.”⁸⁸ If the “way out” was an abandonment of ape-ness in order to conform to the norms of human society, freedom, in the “Report,” meant choosing for death. Even had the ape fought through the cage, he says, he would have to fight his way onto deck, only then to throw himself overboard into the deep sea to drown. Like the ape in “A Report to an Academy,” K. faces the choice between the freedom of the dreamscape or the “way out” proposed by Bürgel—that is, how K. can work within the castle-village system. Unlike the ape, K. achieves neither. He cannot embrace the radicality of the opening toward freedom and fails to comprehend Bürgel’s instructions about how to operate within the social system, in other words how to speak the language of the castle-village, the ape’s “Hallo.” K., unlike the ape, remains caged—other.

The second idea about the radicality of dreaming in the diaries concerns its power to write over, inscribe on, or deface the “stubborn material” of waking life—marking the body of the sleeper. In *The Castle*, this marking is enacted through the stabbing of the shards of broken glass, which serves to obliterate the dreamscape. The initial feeling of freedom, then, has evolved into a feeling of pain. This sensory evolution suggests that the feeling of freedom must be

⁸⁸ At the end of the “Report,” the ape describes the costs of his process of conformity: “Nearly every evening I give a performance, and I have a success that could hardly be increased. When I come home late at night from banquets, from scientific receptions, from social gatherings, there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do. By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of the bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it. On the whole, at any rate, I have achieved what I set out to achieve. But do not tell me that it was not worth the trouble” (258-259).

preserved through pain—a scratching of the stubborn substance without which the whole process would be swiftly forgotten in the unforgiving light of wakefulness.

While the dream-text can be woven into various interpretive schemata of *The Castle*, the moment of freedom in the transition from wakefulness to the dreamscape cannot be assimilated into the constructs of power that structure the novel. The freedom is not won through an assertion of power over the castle authorities, either by someone within the castle domain or an intruder from beyond it. The freedom, thus, does not correspond to the kind of rights-based freedom of the modern state that both K. and Joseph K. in *The Trial* are attempting to assert. While an external assertion of force—for example of the bank world against the trial world—would reinstitute hierarchy and authority in the name of liberation, K.’s moment of freedom escapes this trap. Finally, K.’s freedom does not depend on a shifting of the social hierarchy in the village. In this sense, it is a type of freedom directly opposed to Brunswick’s inversion of the master/apprentice relationship with Barnabas’s father and the use of political strategies to win social power in the village. K.’s freedom, in fact, cannot be public—as the dream-text makes clear, the spectatorship of K.’s so-called “victory” serves to quash the moment of freedom and to effect the transition back into the world of wakefulness.

The value of K.’s moment of freedom in *The Castle* is enormous—made enormous by its very smallness in comparison to the novel’s complex portrait of a system of power and authority in a state of clear decline though so hermetic as to be (partly) unaware of the acuteness of the crisis. The scene between K. and Bürgel is fundamentally about the vulnerability of the castle authority—the limits of its power. Bürgel’s advice is for K. to seek the advancement of his interests by exploiting the system’s vulnerability. While seemingly plausible, this working within the structures of power is an authoritarian answer. The alternative, which wells up in parallel to this authoritarian approach, emerging in the movement into the dreamscape, is the anarchic possibility of knowing one’s freedom—not as a part of the system of power, not as a product of a certain identity construct (like that of land surveyor), not as an ally of a specific faction (that of Brunswick or the Barnabas family) but rather as a subject momentarily emancipated from all definitions, all notions of identity, all strategies of resistance or self-interest—all narratives of one’s life. Only here in *The Castle*, in the depths of what seem like the most hopeless circumstances, does Kafka propose—as the dreamscape emerges—a type of radical freedom that could be characterized as anarchistic. I can only speculate that for Kafka the potential of the

emerging dreamscape to rupture constructed reality and to refashion it through its intense power reminded him of the potential of the creative act of writing—the inscribing of a vision on the stubborn material of the page. K.’s freedom, seen in this light, is Frost’s shattering ice, Eve’s polyvalent desire, the serpent’s chaos, Job’s terror—it is the disordering force of chaos and unmaking that precedes—and is the very foundation for—any true creative act. These are acts of anarchy.

Conclusion

Recent studies of Kafka have attempted to locate him as an anarchist, radical, or subversive writer.⁸⁹ Michael Löwy reads *The Castle* through a late 19th century, early 20th century anarchist lens, concluding that Kafka is “questioning...the despotic basis of all states, of the state in general (as anarchists do)...” (50). My discussion has called into question the appropriateness of equating the castle-village structure with the modern state, as Löwy does, and contests his assertion that “the castle maintains a seamless dominance over the village population and inspires fear and obedience” (52).⁹⁰ I have argued that the situation in the castle-village system is much more dynamic, fragile, unsettled, and contested than Löwy describes. Against the dominating bureaucratic system, Löwy submits that Kafka proposes the individual in the “libertarian tradition” as the potential emancipatory agent. The individual best embodying this tradition, for him, is not K. but Amalia, who defies the authority of the castle when she refuses to submit to its demands for sexual exploitation and abuse (56-57). While I agree with Löwy that Amalia’s act is heroic, it also seems like a kind of Bartleby-like refusal; it is powerful, disruptive, and yet doomed to failure. The libertarian individual can resist power, then, as K. and Joseph K. also do, but it cannot (re)imagine freedom.

More radical and politically anarchic than Amalia’s forceful refusal is the type of

⁸⁹ Much of the debate about Kafka’s politics concerns the extent to which he identified as an anarchist, took seriously the anarchist ideas he was exposed to, and participated in Prague’s anarchist circles. The positions range from considering Kafka as a committed anarchist to seeing him as being only superficially involved. These debates do not play a significant role in my analysis of Kafka’s politics of the dreamscape, as the radicalism I read there is not dependent on a systematic presentation of anarchist theory.

⁹⁰ This type of analysis leads Löwy to see Kafka as a kind of prophet of totalitarianism. “The libertarian inspiration is inscribed into the heart of Kafka’s novels. When he speaks to us of the *state*, it is in the form of ‘administration’ or ‘justice’ as an impersonal system of domination which crushes, suffocates, or kills individuals. This is an agonizing, opaque, and unintelligible world where unfreedom prevails. *The Trial* is often presented as a prophetic work. With his visionary imagination, the author had foreseen the justice of the totalitarian state and the Nazi or Stalinist show trials” (“Kafka and Libertarian Socialism” 10).

freedom that emerges from K.'s movement into the dreamscape. This movement causes a rupture in K.'s understanding of himself. To dream, then, for Kafka, is to unmake the self, opening up the opportunity for self-(re)creation. This reading relates to Nicholas Dungey's notion of the authorship of the subject. Focusing on Kafka's letters and diaries, Dungey argues,

Writing daily journal entries and letters allowed Kafka to come to grips with what Foucault calls the decentered, aesthetic self. Writing these multiple selves into his letters and diary entries allows Kafka to recreate and assert some power over the diffuse nature of his self and begin the process of directing them in pursuit of self-creation. (81)

The erasure of self is the precursor to its re-creation. It reminds of the constructed nature of selfhood and identity, and proposes the active creation of alternative constellations. Together with the momentary obliteration of the self, the movement into the dreamscape escapes the trap of hierarchical notions of freedom. Freedom in the dreamscape cannot be won at the expense of another—the constructions of hierarchies and hierarchical inversions are the product not of the movement into the dreamscape but of the reverse movement from the dreamscape into the narrative construct of the dream-text.

As such, it could be argued that this “freedom” and this “anarchy” are politically toothless and nothing but a literary flourish with no resonance in actual political struggle. In fact, Kafka's conception of dreaming contains the core of his most radical political expression as well as the foundation for anarchic thinking and action—the dissolution of self and other, a return to a state of “primordial chaos,” as the beginning of the creative act of becoming free. I say this because the essential element of Kafka's notion of power is its hermetic quality, the illusion (or delusion) that power is total, ubiquitous, and unquestionable. Perhaps this is why Kafka chooses the name “Klamm” to represent the human form of the castle—taken from the Czech word *klam*, meaning deception, deceit, fallacy, sham, or illusion. Power might be *klam*, but it is so in a way that is total, unapproachable, incomprehensible, and irrefutable. One cannot lessen the oppression of power by challenging this deception through counter-deception (like pretending to be a land surveyor)—the real challenge to *klam* is in escaping it, fleeing the deceptive totality of the system of power through the pinprick of the dream into the domain of freedom. Once experienced, this freedom makes the system of total power both explicable and (one would hope)

unbearable.