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### Popular modernism: representations of modernist literature in popular culture

Loontjens, J.

**Publication date**  
2012

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Loontjens, J. (2012). *Popular modernism: representations of modernist literature in popular culture*.

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## Chapter 5

### Exit: Kafkaesque Tourism

“A man who dies at the age of thirty-five,” said Moritz Heimann once, “is at every point of his life a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.” Nothing is more dubious than this sentence – but for the sole reason that the tense is wrong. A man – so says the truth that was meant here – who died at thirty-five will appear to *remembrance* at every point in his life as a man who dies at the age of thirty-five.

In other words, the statement that makes no sense for real life becomes indisputable for remembered life.

Walter Benjamin

All published novels have an ending in the formal sense that one can quote their last sentences. Many modernist novels, however, are known for their equivocal endings. Franz Kafka did not consider any of his novels finished. One can question whether Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Robert Musil’s *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* or James Joyce’s *Finnigan’s Wake* are completed works.<sup>167</sup> When is a novel finished? A writer finishes a book by writing the ending, but perhaps the writer finishes the story by rewriting the beginning, as I have suggested in the first chapter, or by deciding that the rewriting has to end, even if

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<sup>167</sup> James Joyce’s *Finnigans Wake* has a circular structure: the book ends with the beginning of the first sentence that on the opening page started in the middle of that sentence. This does not make it an unfinished book; on the contrary, the structure is closed and complete. In *Finnigans Wake* as well as *Ulysses*, a grand construction holds all elements and storylines together. Still, as Wood writes: “In one sense *Finnigans Wake* cannot end, but this sense involves the fact that what happens in it always already happened and is still going on: the same falls and rises, jokes and disgraces, continue through time and despite time” (2007: 1397). James Joyce’s *Ulysses* appears to have two endings. Fredric Jameson writes that “the Nighttown chapter recombines all the elements of the preceding chapters, producing all kinds of new relationships between them,” by which it discharges and diffuses all the preceding developments (2007: 180). This diffusion is brought to an ending by the “altogether different temporality, with the unexpected change in gender and the very different performative voice of Molly’s invincible monologue which cancels all the earlier masculine languages of *Ulysses*, and concludes – the famous final Yes – with a negation of the negation (180). The endlessness that is suggested by these two endings is part of a “production of external framing devices,” Jameson writes, which indicates unity rather than unfinished process.

it is not finished.<sup>168</sup> Robert Musil for instance wrote in his diary: “I have never taken anything beyond the opening stages” (1998: 462). There is an obvious difference between the ending of a writing process and the ending of a story. A novel is finished when the author decides that it is finished. However, this does not necessarily mean that the narrative is finished as well. In “The Last Night of All” (2007), Michael Wood aptly states that “there are many ways of stopping before reaching completion” (1395). In this last chapter, I consider these questions in relation to Franz Kafka’s work, as well as to his afterlife in the tourist industry of Prague.

In each chapter of the present study, I have taken a trip with a contemporary phenomenon to revisit modernist novels, somewhat like a tourist ride to see a literary sight in a comfortable Pullman bus. The metaphor of tourism alludes to the carefree way of getting acquainted with a complex oeuvre, and could be well applied to introductory books such as Alain de Botton’s *How Proust Can Change Your Life* (1998), or to the format of Oprah’s Book Club. In this chapter, however, tourism is no longer just a metaphor: I look at the representation of Kafka’s work in contemporary tourist guides. Tourism suggests leisure activities, fun, relaxation, entertainment and pleasure; perhaps not the things one readily associates with Kafka’s work. Yet, tourism is an integral aspect of modern life; and, in addition, one of Kafka’s favorite characters is that of the traveler.

Kafka’s characters often have a lot in common with tourists, as they wander through unfamiliar streets, without really knowing their way or what the local customs are or what is expected from the itinerant. Antony Johae writes that Kafka’s anonymous city “has a topography without a recognizable relief. It is received as a traveler enters a foreign city for the first time without a map” (1996: 19). Rolf J. Goebel in turn compares K. with the figure of the *flâneur*: “What links K. on the most basic level to these endangered *flâneurs* is his persistently observational gaze, a conspicuous leitmotif of the novel” (2002:

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<sup>168</sup> Proust’s *Recherche* also has the potential to continue indefinitely. Jameson asks, “faced with a text in which insertions and accretions are not only possible, but like the great coral reef have actually produced the text we currently have – how, under such conditions, any sense of completeness or totality is possible?” (181). Although Proust wrote “fin” under the final chapter, the manuscript shows that even after he wrote this word he continued changing and adding to the last sentences. Proust’s practice of rewriting suggests an ongoing process.

45).<sup>169</sup> The observational gaze is what the *flâneur* shares with the tourist. In that sense, Kafka's fiction could perhaps function as a mirror for the tourist.

Moreover, in the afterword to *Amerika*, Max Brod writes: "Kafka was fond of reading travel books and memoirs" (298). Julian Preece observes:

The traveler is one of his favorite figures (one thinks of K. from *The Castle*) along with the Stranger or Foreigner, like Karl Roßmann from *The Man who Disappeared*<sup>170</sup> or even Josef K. from *The Trial*, a stranger in his own city. But they are metaphorical itinerants who have ventured out from home into a threatening and puzzling environment (3).

The affinity with tourists is indeed that they have ventured out from home, but unlike tourists Kafka's itinerants are frantically in search of something. In *The Trial* as well as in *The Castle*, the main characters are in search of an authority, of which they do not precisely know by whom it is represented or where it is to be found.<sup>171</sup>

John Urry argues that "to be a tourist is one of the characteristics of 'modern' experience. ... It has become a marker of status in modern societies and is also thought to be necessary for good health" (2002: 4).<sup>172</sup> Jonathan Culler also regards tourism as a metaphor for modern life: "our primary way of making sense of the world is as a network of touristic destinations and possibilities which we ought in principle to visit" (1988: 166). "[T]he tourist' is one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general," Dean MacCannell argues in his book *The Tourist* (1999: 1). In order to understand this modern man in general, in this chapter I focus on the particular form of literary tourism, specifically the texts of Prague travel guides, which describe places that are connected to Kafka and his work.

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<sup>169</sup> In his comparison of Josef K. with the *flâneur*, Goebel continues: "K. is the dislocated stranger in his own phantasmagorical hometown, travelling its streets, suburbs, law offices, and dusty attics in frantic search of settlement, justice, legal resolution, of a closure that, until his eventual execution, remains forever deferred and denied" (47).

<sup>170</sup> Kafka's first novel *Amerika* has also been published under the title *The Man who Disappeared*.

<sup>171</sup> Goebel argues that "K.'s arrest does not mean confinement but paradoxically sets him in perpetual motion to venture through urban space in search of the court" (2002: 47-48).

<sup>172</sup> See also Feifer, Maxine. *Going Places* (1985: 224).

Literary tourism starts in the Eighteenth Century. In her book *Literary Tourism* (2006), Nicola Watson shows that over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain a fascination developed for the graves of famous authors, the houses in which they were born, and the places they described in their books. In “Watching the Detectives” (2009), Stijn Reijnders argues that in the last decades a shift has taken place from small-scale interest in the background of literary works to a widespread fascination in popular culture. For instance, tourists travel to see the location where a television adaptation of a detective book was filmed. Reijnders argues that spectators feel personally involved with fictional characters: they feel connected with them as well as with the places where those characters live. He argues that for such a bond between the spectator and the work the representation of *couleur locale* is important; readers feel they already know the places that are described in novels.

With respect to Kafka’s work, however, a feeling of familiarity with the *couleur locale* is complicated, because the cities and landscapes through which his characters wander are phantasmagoric and labyrinthine. One cannot follow the footsteps of Kafka’s characters and relive their storylines, in the way literary pilgrims do it. In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1997), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that the streets, offices, and buildings shed their spatiality. The topography in his work has no specific spatial logic, they argue. Walter Benjamin reaches a similar conclusion in several of his essays on Kafka. Yet, travel guides succeed in presenting Kafka’s work as belonging intimately to Prague. Through studying certain fragments from travel guides, such as *Novel Destinations* (2008) by Shannon McKenna Smith and Joni Rendon, and texts presented by the Kafka Museum in Prague, I analyze how the non-spatial logic in Kafka’s work is connected to the city’s topography. I study how those texts both honor Kafka’s writings and deny certain elements of his fiction, specifically those that make his stories and novels seem endless.

In *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), Frank Kermode argues that suspense in narrative depends on expectations as to the future. Even in books in which references to real time are lost, like Robbe-Grillet’s *In the Labyrinth*, the narrative depends on those expectations. Kermode dryly adds: “We cannot, of course, be denied an end; it is one of the great charms of books that they have to end”

(23). Still, one can question whether an unfinished novel really ends. In Kafka's work, one senses that there are infinite ways in which the narrative could continue. "As soon as something is said, something else needs to be said," as Maurice Blanchot summarizes the struggle that is inherent in writing (1995: 22). In his essays on Kafka, Blanchot elaborates on beginning and ending in language and writing. The essays have, as Stanley Corngold puts it, "stressed the intensity and single-mindedness of Kafka's devotion to literature, indeed to which he considered his being entirely literature, *Schriftstellersein*" (1986: 161).

Kafka is perhaps most known for leaving behind an oeuvre of unfinished stories and novels. Yet, one could also question why they are considered to be unfinished. Wood remarks that most of Kafka's parables and aphorisms are "perfectly finished, couldn't be more finished. ... What could we add to these miniature masterpieces; what could we take away from them?" (1400). From a certain angle, Wood is right: Kafka's stories seem perfect. At the same time, Kafka's stories follow a particular logic that defies a definite ending. In a strangely consistent manner, his work is structured by a logic that excludes the natural anticipation of the course of the narrative. Deleuze and Guattari analyze this particular logic, often reflected by the absurd topography in Kafka's work. I am interested in the way in which Deleuze's and Guattari's analysis of Kafka's topography may be related to the way in which Prague is presented in tourist guides as Kafka's city.

Compared to the apparent boundlessness of the interior monologues in Faulkner's, Joyce's or Woolf's oeuvres, Kafka's work arouses a different sense of endlessness. The stories do not seem endless because they trace streams of associations. Rather, they suggest a sense of endlessness because of the indistinctness of the motives of the characters and the endless varieties of minute acts. It is worth considering this characteristic in relation to Fredric Jameson's reading of Kafka as well as Brian McHale's definition of modernism. Perhaps this particular sense of endlessness announces the end of literary modernism. Thus the question of the ending of the novel is connected to the question of the end of modernism. Did modernism end? Or is it an ongoing

project, as Jürgen Habermas has it?<sup>173</sup> In previous chapters, I have studied a number of contemporary reappearances of modernist novels in different contexts, such as contemporary literature, film, and Internet. Perhaps these reappearances signify that modernism never ends. The works are resurrected, appear as ghosts or as a form of afterlife.

Kafka preferred to have his work destroyed when he died. His work only survived his death thanks to the care of Max Brod. Not only his work survived, the image of Kafka also received a new life as the famous Czech author, which he never was while alive, a German Jew who never learnt to write Czech. To conclude this chapter, I discuss the role of death and afterlife in relation to our understanding of ending. I bring the endlessness inherent to Kafka's style of writing in dialogue with Heidegger's analysis of death as the "not-yet" as well as with Blanchot's texts on death and literature. While ending this chapter on the infinite postponement of ending, and of death, this chapter should be the closure of my study, which, then again, contributes to the continuation of the afterlife of modernism.



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<sup>173</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity" (1981).

### *Which Bridge*

Although Kafka's first novel *Amerika* (1962 [1927]) takes place in the USA and a few of his short stories are set in China, two countries that he never actually visited, most of the places in his work, as well as buildings, streets, bridges and cities, remain nameless.<sup>174</sup> Yet, many efforts have been made to demonstrate that the settings in his books correspond with the topography of Prague, particularly those of *The Trial* and *The Castle*. It seems that the city of Prague not only wants to stress it is the city where Kafka was born and lived for most of his life, but also that it is Prague one reads about in his work. In almost every tourist guide of Prague, one reads that Kafka once described his native city as being "a dear little mother with claws," suggesting that the city would never let him go.<sup>175</sup> These words now almost seem prophetic. Especially in the last two decades Prague's grip on Kafka has grown. In "Franz Kafka's Prague: A Literary Walking Tour," hosted on [www.nysoclib.org](http://www.nysoclib.org), Marilyn Bender writes that "Kafka has become the ubiquitous icon [of Prague]. His melancholy portrait is inescapable, adorning T-shirts, coffee mugs, posters, shopping bags, puppets and above all, graffiti. Franz Kafka, successor to Mickey Mouse."<sup>176</sup>

Most walking tours and tourist guides point out the places where Kafka lived, where he was born in 1883, as well as the supposed locations that play a role in his work. Several guided tours offer to read out passages from Kafka's work that are taken to correspond to the visited locations.<sup>177</sup> In *Novel Destinations: Literary Landmarks from Jane Austen's Bath to Ernest Hemingway's Key West* (2008), Shannon McKenna Smith and Joni Rendon include a chapter on Kafka, offering a short biographical sketch including various references to places in Prague. I want to take a closer look at a fragment in which both Kafka's diary

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<sup>174</sup> *Amerika* was the first novel Kafka worked on, it remained unfinished. After Max Brod assembled the uncomplete manuscript, it appeared posthumously in 1927. However, during Kafka's life, in 1913 the first chapter, "The Stoker," was published separately.

<sup>175</sup> This quote can, for instance, be found on the website of the Kafka Museum in Prague: <http://www.kafkamuseum.cz/ShowPage.aspx?tabId=-1>. Or on the website: [http://www.livelifetravel.com/features/kafkas\\_prague.html](http://www.livelifetravel.com/features/kafkas_prague.html). In *Time Out: Prague* (2004), the authors even refer to this citation as if everyone already knows it: "Franz Kafka was a little ambivalent about his feelings for *Matka Praha* – not many sons describe their maternal figure as having claws" (83).

<sup>176</sup> <http://www.nysoclib.org/travels/kafka.html>

<sup>177</sup> <http://www.guide-prague.cz/tour/franz-kafka-sightseeing-tour>

and *The Trial* are used as sources. The authors recount that Kafka enjoyed taking long walks through the city:

On one such walk, he lingered over the baroque statues of saints lining the Charles Bridge and noted in his diary the perfection of “the remarkable light of the summer evening together with the nocturnal emptiness of the bridge.” (The same bridge his alterego Josef K. would later be led across before his execution in *The Trial*) (274).

The way in which the quotation from Kafka’s diary precedes the remark about Josef K. suggests that his walk as described in his diary is related to K. walking across the bridge in *The Trial*. Unfortunately, McKenna Smith and Rendon do not mention the day or year in which the diary remark was written down. They do write that “Josef K. would *later* be led across” that same bridge (emphasis added). What is meant by the adverb “later” is not clear here. One could understand it as though the authors approach Kafka’s actual walk and the walk of the fictional character as two events that happened at two distinct moments in time. More likely, however, they imply that Kafka wrote the remark in his diary *before* he wrote the last chapter of *The Trial*. Thus, they connect the walk of the fictional character with a later moment in historical time, the moment that Kafka wrote this passage of *The Trial*, strangely assuming that a fictional walk takes place at the moment when it is written.

This also suggests that the authors would have detailed knowledge of at what point Kafka wrote what text. This is more complex than it might seem, since Kafka did not write chapters in a chronological order, nor in the order in which they finally appeared in print. The walk across the bridge, just before Josef K. is killed by two men with a double-edged butcher’s knife, takes place at the end of the book. However, this does not imply that this was the last passage Kafka wrote. In fact, as Stanley Corngold writes in *Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka* (2004), Kafka wrote “the first chapter ‘The Arrest’ together with the final chapter ‘The End’” (42). Corngold explains that Kafka started by writing the first and the last chapter because he felt that “he would never be able to bring his previous novel *Amerika ... to a close*” and that “he was determined to make certain that *The Trial*

should have an ending” (42). Moreover, in the “Postscript to the First Edition” of *The Trial* (1960 [1925]), Max Brod accounts that he had to rely on his own judgment for the order of the chapters (334). In an appendix, Brod adds unfinished chapters that he could not fit, as well as passages deleted by the author, including a passage of an earlier version of the last sentences in the penultimate paragraph, not long after the paragraph in which K. crosses the bridge.

Then again, perhaps the authors of *Novel Destinations* never intended to refer to the order of Kafka’s writing, but merely to the order of described events. They write that Kafka first crossed the bridge and that K., whom they call “his alter ego,” crossed the bridge at a later interval. To call K. his “alterego” suggests that *The Trial* is an autobiographical work and that the novel corresponds to facts, such as his “earlier” crossing of the Charles Bridge. This entails the assumption that an author usually experiences something before he turns it into fiction, or at the least that it cannot happen the other way around. The assumption seems logical. Several authors, for instance Malcolm Pasley and Stanley Corngold, have pointed at the analogy between Josef K. and Franz Kafka.<sup>178</sup> Yet, this resemblance does not concern distinct events in Kafka’s life, but the analogy between the trial of Josef K. and the writing of Kafka.<sup>179</sup> “It is worth noting,” Corngold writes, “that the German word for *The Trial*, which Kafka, moreover, spells ‘*Process*,’ means precisely this in English – ‘process.’” He continues: “As a result, there is a specific connection between Joseph K.’s trial and Kafka’s own ‘trial,’ so to speak, in writing this novel” (42).<sup>180</sup>

The correspondence between Kafka’s writing process and the trial in the book clearly entails another kind of correspondence than the one that the remark of the “earlier” crossing of the bridge assumes. The process described in the book and the process of writing the book are part of the same event: that of

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<sup>178</sup> In “Omissions and Contradictions in Kafka’s *Trial*,” Ignace Feuerlicht comments: “If one wants to equate K. with Kafka, one might just as well equate him with Hermann Kafka, Franz Kafka’s father, for like K., Kafka’s father was a self-made man, had an oratorical flair, looked down on people below his social rank, was of robust health, had frequent fits of anger, and was superficially religious” (1967: 340).

<sup>179</sup> See *Franz Kafka, Der Process: Die Handschrift redet* (1990), prepared by Malcolm Pasley.

<sup>180</sup> In *The Fate of the Self* (1986), Corngold explores different forms of self in Kafka’s work by bringing Kafka’s diary notes on writing into dialogue with the various views in, and on, his fictional work. See also chapter 2, in which I refer to Corngold with regard to the question of the author.

Kafka's writing. I do not want to argue that the experiences of the author have nothing to do with his writing; what I challenge is the assumption that a writer has to experience something before being able to transform it into fiction.

Let me quote the passage in which K. is led across the bridge:

In complete harmony all three now made their way across a bridge in the moonlight, the two men readily yielded to K.'s slightest movement, and when he turned slightly toward the parapet they turned, too, in a solid front. The water, glittering and trembling in the moonlight divided on either side of a small island, on which the foliage of trees and bushes rose in thick masses, as if bunched together. Beneath the trees ran gravel paths, now invisible, with convenient benches on which K. had stretched himself at ease many a summer. "I didn't mean to stop," he said to his companions, shamed by their obliging compliance. Behind K.'s back the one seemed to reproach the other gently for the mistaken stop they had made, and then all three went on again (1960: 283).<sup>181</sup>

The bridge remains anonymous. No attributes of the bridge are mentioned, except for the island under the bridge. This "small island, on which the foliage of trees and bushes rose in thick masses, as if bunched together," has been identified as Kampa Island under the Charles Bridge. Yet, it could also refer to the much greener island Střelecky Ostrov, which is situated under the Legion Bridge in Prague; if, that is, the bridge in the novel refers to an existing bridge at all. According to the website of the Kafka Museum in Prague, the path taken by Josef K. shows that it should be the Charles Bridge, as K. walks "from the Old Town to the outer limits of Kleinseite, over the Charles Bridge."<sup>182</sup> On the other hand, the topography of the city in *The Trial* is not realistic, and perhaps not even spatial, as I will discuss below. Crucially, K. perceives the city as if he is a visitor who is not acquainted with its streets, as if he is in the city for the first time. He is

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<sup>181</sup> In "The Exploration of the Modern City in *The Trial*" (2002), Rolf J. Goebel compares Josef K. to a Baudelairean *flâneur*. He comments on the last chapter of *The Trial*: "The walk through the night city reads like the final episode of three dandies, the executioners pale and fat, dressed in waistcoats and top hats, K. likewise in an elegant black suit" (57).

<sup>182</sup> <http://www.kafkamuseum.cz/ShowPage.aspx?tabId=-1>

constantly at a loss of where he is. In this respect, he resembles a tourist without a map.

The authors of *Novel Destinations* do not explain why the bridge in *The Trial* is identified as the Charles Bridge. But this may not be necessary, since, as Frans F. J. Schouten argues in "Heritage as Social Reality" (1995), most tourists do not search for historical evidence: "They may even be only partly interested in the historical reality as such. Visitors to historic sites are looking for an experience, a new reality based on the tangible remains of the past" (21). With respect to settings that play a role in literature, evidence is even less relevant, since it will remain dubious: one can always argue that the fictional place only exists in the fictional context, and that each reference to an actual spot could be fictional as well. Yet, in the tourist guides the buildings that are presumably represented in Kafka's work and the ones that he historically lived in are not at all distinguished as essentially different sites. In the instance of the touristic visit, the actuality of the place is more important than either the historical or textual context.

The tangible place serves as "objective" information that can be connected to historical narrative. The place has effectively resisted time, thus connecting the tourist with the writer who once was present at that very same spot. Kate Marsh writes in *Writers and their Houses* (1993): "A deeper bond with the writer is established when we realize that we are seeing the same view ... that a writer saw" (xiv). The presumed "deeper bond" between tourist and writer reveals how the heritage experience is based on "emotional realism" rather than historical evidence, as Gaynor Bagnall argues in "Consuming the Past" (1996). Bagnall writes: "emotional realism is underpinned by a desire for experience to be based in fact, to be genuine" (241).<sup>183</sup> Yet, tourists hardly question the factuality of information. In other words, the experience of being at a particular place, assumed to be part of a historical, literary, or fictional episode, itself takes the form of evidence: one is tangibly "there." Yet, it is not just being at that place that creates the experience of a "deeper bond" but a combination of visiting and

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<sup>183</sup> Regarding heritage tourism and the question what "heritage" is, see also: *Tourism and Heritage Attractions* (1993) by Richard Prentice. Concerning the political question of heritage, place-identity and tourism, see: *Building a New Heritage: Tourism, Culture and Identity in the New Europe* (1994), edited by G.J. Ashworth and P.J. Larkham.

information. The tourist knows what place he or she is going to visit, if only shortly beforehand. Arrival is the confirmation of anticipation and the realization of the experience of actually being at that historical place.<sup>184</sup>

Moreover, MacCannell argues, it is often not the object or the sight that attracts tourists, but the specific “marker” that makes it distinctive. With “marker,” MacCannell means any “information about a specific sight.” He writes: “Usually, the first contact a sightseer has with a sight is not the sight itself but with some representation thereof” (1999: 110). In our case, it would be the guidebook or the fragment from *The Trial*.<sup>185</sup> MacCannell furthermore argues that markers in the tourist industry well illustrate the arbitrariness of the relation between signifier and the signified. Referring to Charles S. Peirce, who argued that an interpretation of a sign is not a meaning but another sign, MacCannell writes:

One implication of the analysis of the tourist attraction ... is that the “principle” of the arbitrariness of the relationship of signifier and signified is only a corollary or a more fundamental principle: namely, that of the *interchangeability* of the signifier and the signified. ... The referent of a sign is another sign (118).

That interchangeability can also be observed in the fragment from *Novel Destinations*. It offers a complex knot of interchangeable signifiers and signifieds. At first, the text informing the tourist about the Charles Bridge appears to function as the signifier, while the bridge is the signified. Yet, the Charles Bridge also functions as a signifier itself, a tourist attraction that is connected to the history of Prague and the ending of Kafka’s novel, so that now Kafka’s novel

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<sup>184</sup> In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1987), Colin Campbell defines consumerism in similar terms. Urry summarizes Campbell’s analysis as follows: “He argues that covert day-dreaming and anticipation are processes central to modern consumerism. Individuals do not seek satisfaction from products, from their actual selection, purchase and actual use. Rather, satisfaction stems from anticipation, from imaginative pleasure-seeking”. Urry concludes that if Campbell is right about consumerism tourism is the paradigm case for Campbell’s theory (2002: 13).

<sup>185</sup> Jonathan Culler, following MacCannell, similarly argues that the marker becomes the sight (159). Urry, in turn, writes with regard to Culler: “This mode of gazing shows how tourists are in a way semioticians, reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism” (12-13).

becomes the signified, while the fragment from the novel can also be approached as the signifier and, then again, the bridge as the signified. Kafka's diary note, quoted in *Novel Destinations*, also functions as a signified, pointed out by the writers of the travel book as a referent. This simultaneously turns it into another signifier that points to the Charles Bridge as well, underpinning the marker that informs us about the bridge as being the bridge in *The Trial*. Thus, the marker in *Novel Destinations* refers to Kafka's diary notes, the novel, and the actual bridge in Prague. The quoted diary note is also assumed to refer both to *The Trial* and the Charles Bridge.

A closer look reveals that the main connection between the signifiers concerns a description of the play of light and water. In his diary, which McKenna Smith and Rendon quote, Kafka describes the "remarkable light of the summer evening together with the nocturnal emptiness of the bridge" (2008: 274). The water under the bridge in *The Trial* is also described as "glittering and trembling in the moonlight" (1960: 283). The form of the bridge is not mentioned in the descriptions. The fleeting play of water and the light serves as the link that points to the Charles Bridge. Light and water do not quite belong to a specific place or city; they escape topography. This brings me to the labyrinthine topography of Kafka's cities, on which more below. The focus on the light and the water underlines the namelessness of the city in which *The Trial* takes place rather than characterizing Prague. Moreover, this anonymous topography corresponds with the equivocation of beginning and ending in Kafka's work; a correspondence that Deleuze and Guattari have analyzed particularly well, as we will see below.

### *Illogical Spatiality*

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1997), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari characterize Kafka's work as a "rhizome" and a "burrow:" "The castle has multiple entrances whose rules of usage and whose locations aren't very well known" (3). The authors argue that the world in Kafka's work cannot be traced according to logical principles: there is no symmetry, no clear chronology, the beginning is lost, and there will never be an ending. Deleuze and Guattari explain

that Kafka's literature is an "expression machine": it first expresses and only then finds what it is about. This they view as typical for "minor literature."<sup>186</sup>

A major, or established, literature follows a vector that goes from content to expression. Since content is presented in a given form of the content, one must find, discover, or see the form of expression that goes with it. That which conceptualizes well expresses itself. But a minor, or revolutionary, literature begins by expressing itself and doesn't conceptualize until afterward (28).

Deleuze and Guattari contrast major with minor literature. The idea that form comes first and content follows in minor literature does not mean that Kafka's work is not connected to Prague at all. Deleuze and Guattari explain that minor literature for them also means that it uses a language that only is spoken by a minority: "an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses" (16).<sup>187</sup> With regard to Kafka's work, this is the German spoken by Prague Jews. Moreover, in minor literatures everything is ultimately political. What Deleuze and Guattari mean by "political" is not determined by specific actions or thoughts, but by every detail, form as much as content. "Political," I argue, here stands for the realization that each detail touches on the alternative of having to defend oneself or being able to trust the other—the question of intimacy and public space, of belonging and not belonging.

This political character of the work of minor literature resists psychoanalytic interpretations as well as the religious interpretations that consider the theme of failure a consequence of original sin. While the unfinished state of Kafka's writing is often connected to the theme of failure, one can also argue that precisely this unfinishedness resists religious and psychological appropriation. In *Franz Kafka* (1982), Erich Heller reaches a comparable

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<sup>186</sup> In *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* (2002), Julian Preece writes: "Kafka's diary comments from Christmas 1911 on the status of 'minor literatures', by which he meant specifically Yiddish but also Czech and the other non-German languages of the empire, show how his own sensitivity extended to the collective, cultural sphere" (2). According to Preece, these diary comments inspired the book by Guattari and Deleuze.

<sup>187</sup> The word "oppressive" here designates that the minority is confirming its otherness by its use of a language that cuts them off from the masses: "A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (16).

conclusion, arguing that “Kafka’s art of conclusively stating inconclusiveness ... deprives dogmas, opinions, and convictions of the air they need for breathing” (79). In other words, interpretations of Kafka that suggests a decoding are always hindered by the frustration of conclusions in his writings. The unfinished condition of his work opens up variegated possible endings and thus also possible readings.

Deleuze and Guattari confirm Kafka’s relation to Prague, but redefine it as a relation that is marked not so much by the city’s topography, but rather by his being part of a specific sociohistorical minority. Yet, Kafka does not describe the problems or life of an individual, nor of the author himself, they continue. On the contrary, everything takes on a collective value. The letter "K" in *The Trial*, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “no longer designates a narrator or a character but an assemblage that becomes all the more machine-like, an agent that becomes all the more collective because an individual is locked into it in his or her solitude” (18). Josef K. is the opposite of an alterego. Instead of writing personal literature or an individual history, Kafka’s language always goes “farther in the direction of deterritorialization, to the point of sobriety,” where it becomes collective and anonymous (19). This aspect also makes it revolutionary, as minor literature is a writing in and against “the heart of what is called great (or established) literature,” in which a narrator or character invariably undergoes a psychological development (18).

In contrast to Deleuze and Guattari’s argument, the tourist industry endeavors to present the characters in Kafka’s work as autobiographical. As we have seen in the previous section, the factuality of tourist information is quite porous and permeated with fiction. However, the tourist industry does not simply delude visitors by presenting construction as reality. Many tourists are aware of, but do not actually mind the fabrications. Urry rightly points out that “some visitors ... almost delight in the inauthenticity of the normal tourist experience” (12).<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> In “Literary Places, Tourism and the Heritage Experience” (2001), David Herbert writes that the question remains whether historic sites are “genuine and whether they faithfully represents reality” (317). Even the plain buildings in which Kafka lived for a certain period illustrate that “literary places are no longer accidents of history, sites of a writer’s birth or death; they are also social constructions, created, amplified, and promoted to attract visitors” (313).

Tourist guidebooks sometimes also comment on the construction of Kafka's Prague. For instance, the authors of *Time Out: Prague* (2004) write that "Kafka's image is plastered everywhere these days, but ... it was all essentially for foreign tourist consumption" (83). They also claim that Czechs do not consider Kafka to be a Czech writer to this day, because he wrote in German. The fact that Kafka never completely mastered the Czech tongue confirms the condition from which "minor literature" stems. According to *Time Out*, Czechs rather mention Bohumil Hrabal, Karel Capek and Jaroslav Seifert as famous Czech authors (83).

In *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (2002), Ruth Ellen Gruber argues that Prague presents Kafka as the "symbol of multicultural 'Mitteleuropean' ideal," attracting literary tourists as well as those in search of Jewish heritage (145). Whereas communism repressed Jewish expressions for decades, the Czech Republic and Poland have put Jewish culture and heritage "to the broadest and most cultivated touristic use" since the nineteen-nineties (143). Kafka's parents were Westernized Jews who hardly paid any attention to the Jewish tradition. Gruber writes that "the most famous lament for Jewish tradition denied by assimilated parents, [is] Franz Kafka's *Letter to His Father*, written in 1919" (30). Gruber continues that "against a background of mounting political anti-Semitism, Kafka and other assimilated Jews ... felt cheated by what they perceived as empty or artificial 'modern' Jewishness" (30).

Kafka died before Hitler came into power, but his sisters were killed in Auschwitz. During forty years of communism, however, it was not Kafka's Jewish background that was the main reason for the scorning if not banning of his work, but the fact that "his nightmare satires [were] a dangerous reminder of totalitarian mentality," as Marilyn Bender writes.<sup>189</sup>

Gruber argues that the tourists who visit Jewish heritage sites are not necessarily attracted by Jewish history: "all of Prague's glorious architecture, charming cobbled alleyways, and richly fascinating history became an attraction" (145). Similarly, the tourists who follow one of many Kafka walking routes are not necessarily literary pilgrims. According to research by Herbert, documented in "Literary Places, Tourism and the Heritage Experience", most tourists lack "specified and detailed prior knowledge" (322). Herbert argues that literary

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<sup>189</sup> <http://www.nysoclib.org/travels/kafka.html>

pilgrimage is becoming rare in comparison to literary tourism, which is multiplying. The difference between literary pilgrimage and tourism is that literary tourists do not necessarily have “*detailed* prior knowledge,” whereas literary pilgrims do have such knowledge (emphasis added 322). It is even possible that the tourists do not have any special interest in Kafka at all, since, as Herbert argues,

literary places become stopping points along a more general tourism itinerary. The appeal of such places is, at least in part, one of geographical convenience, a location that fits into a route encompassing cathedrals, churches, country houses and gardens (315).

In other words, the places connected to Kafka become interchangeable with other tourist sites. This interchangeability makes literary value arbitrary, while simultaneously, and perhaps paradoxically, precisely this sense of arbitrariness mirrors the strange and illogical spatiality as well as the manner in which power operates in Kafka’s novels. About Kafka’s story “The Great Wall of China,” in which the wall is built in parts that everywhere leave gaps that might never be filled in, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the building of this fragmented wall represents the power of a transcendental authority that “imposes a discontinuous distribution of individual periods” (72). The unity of the transcendental power, which lacks clear laws or content, can only be felt by specific persons. The construction makes power more effective, since the ignorant have to obey without understanding why. Such anonymity of power is at work in both *The Castle* and *The Trial*, as well as in several short stories. At times, it seems an uncanny prophecy of the totalitarian regime that would reign over the Czechs.

In Kafka’s work, most people are ignorant about the law. The law operates—but why, how, when and because of what, remains altogether unsure. It may seem crude to compare the ignorance of citizens of the law to touristic ignorance of historical background. Yet, there are similarities between systems or orders, economic or political, in which the ignorance of the people is an important factor for its functioning. The opaqueness and complexity of those

systems gave us the word “Kafkaesque.” Ignorance is not the consequence of a lack of self-reflection or critical thought; rather, it is the result of a system.

### *Ignorance and Infinity*

In the essay “Franz Kafka” (1999), written for the tenth anniversary of Kafka’s death, Walter Benjamin compares the law in Kafka’s work with law in the prehistoric world. The law in *The Trial* is never clear, never known. Benjamin quotes from *The Trial*: “It is characteristic of this legal system that one is sentenced not only in innocence but also in ignorance” (796-797). Benjamin argues, “laws and definite norms remain unwritten in the prehistoric world” (797).<sup>190</sup> The trial that never ends, since there are no clear laws, becomes a trial because of this endlessness. Because the sentenced subject remains ignorant, the trial is the punishment itself. Simultaneously, the sentenced ignorance appears to be his only guilt. In Kafka’s short story “The Problem of Our Laws” (1988), the narrator complains how unfair and impractical it is that their laws are “kept secret by a small group of nobles” (437). The secrecy of the laws is a source of endless speculation. To gain knowledge of the law, some people have scrutinized the “doings of the nobility,” but this only increased their uncertainty about the law:

when in accordance with these scrupulously tested and logically ordered conclusions we seek to adjust ourselves somewhat for the present or the future, everything becomes uncertain, and our work seems only an intellectual game, for perhaps these laws that we are trying to unravel do not exist at all (437-38).

In contrast to this story, in which the nobility appears to guard the law, in *The Trial* the people in power seem “as lawless as those at the bottom of the pile,” Benjamin writes (498). He argues that “the only bond that unites them is a unique feeling of anxiety” (498). He continues: “it is fear of an unknown guilt and

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<sup>190</sup> In “The Exploration of the Modern City in *The Trial*,” Goebel reveals an unexplored connection between Benjamin and Kafka, by presenting K. as the “archetypal modern city dweller” he argues that in the *Arcades Project* “Benjamin portrays what could be seen as the historical precursor to the hapless Josef K.,” “the figure of the Baudelairean *flâneur*” (43).

of the atonement, which brings only one blessing: it makes the guilt explicit" (498). But the moment of atonement is forever postponed and thus the guilt is never completely explicit.

In the essay "Before the Law" (1992), Jacques Derrida deploys Kafka's story by the same title in order to question the conventions and laws of what he calls the "literary institution." He argues that "what remains concealed and invisible in each law is thus presumably the law itself, that which makes laws of these laws, the being-law of these laws" (192). The impossibility of getting to the bottom of the law is perhaps the core drama in Kafka's work. The unfathomable law is also the reason that *The Trial*, which ends with K.'s death, is still an unfinished book: not just because Kafka never put the chapters in order, or declared it finished, but also because the uncertainty about K.'s guilt remains unresolved. Right before he dies, K. asks: "Where was the Judge whom he had never seen? Where was the High Court, to which he had never penetrated?" (286).

In the essay "Kafka and Literature," Blanchot refers to the same story as Deleuze and Guattari and writes: "'The Great Wall of China' was not finished by Kafka. The fact that the work is connected with the theme of failure by its own failure must be regarded as the sign of uneasiness that is at root of all literary designs" (23). Failure and guilt are two overdetermined themes in Kafka studies. Corngold summarizes the core of this theme with regard to Kafka's relation to writing: "If he writes, he is guilty of failing to live; if he does not write, he has sinned against the spirit" (2004: 38). Similarly, David Constantine shows how Kafka describes the writing process in his diaries as an endless string of failures, while he perceives everything that kept him from writing as the cause of his failure in life. In "Kafka's Writing and Our Reading" (2002), he writes: "So he fails to write; or he writes and the writing is a failure. And what would success matter? Would it outweigh the damage done by trying? He doubts it" (12).

Deleuze and Guattari, however, reject those themes, refraining from psychological interpretation. They prefer to read "The Great Wall of China" as a story that explains Kafka's manner of expression. The discontinuity of the building of the wall becomes the symbol for the infinity of the work. There will always remain gaps. Perhaps they will be forgotten, perhaps they will be found,

but the wall will never be finished. Thus, the relation between the discontinuity and infinity of the wall of China can be read as a metaphor for the writing process while excluding the organizing themes of guilt and failure: Kafka's novels are not unfinished because they lack clear endings or because Kafka was unable to finish, but because they could have been continued at an infinite number of points.

In the "Postscript to the First Edition," Brod writes about the *The Trial* that

Before the final chapter given here a few more stages of the mysterious trial were to be described. But as the trial, according to the author's statement made by word of mouth, was never to get as far as the highest Court, in a certain sense the novel could never be terminated – that is to say, it could be prolonged into infinity (334).

Deleuze and Guattari detect a similar unlimited continuity in the topography of Kafka's work, arguing that the fragments, blocks, rooms and offices are always in connection with each other via back doors and passage ways. In *The Trial*, for instance, K. by

opening the door of a tiny room close to his office at the bank, finds himself in the judicial site where two inspectors are being punished; going to see Titorelli "in a suburb which was almost at the diametrically opposite end of the town from the offices of the court," he notices that the door at the back of the painter's room leads into precisely the same judicial site (73).<sup>191</sup>

Such spatial displacements also occur in *The Castle* as well as in *Amerika*. Separate spaces are never isolated or limited, but in contact with one another. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari argue that, although disconnected and illogical, the

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<sup>191</sup> In his analysis of *The Trial*, Erich Heller points out that very often doors are closed, he notes that: "Doors in Kafka's writings appear to be an architectural invention for the purpose of preventing people from entering" (1982: 76). This does not necessarily oppose Deleuze and Guattari's argument of the infinite continuity, since in their analysis the continuity always is disconnected and illogical.

segments still form a continuity. In relation to “The Great Wall of China,” they write about “block-arches”; in relation to *Amerika*, about “block-segments;” in relation to *The Trial*, about “block-series”; and in relation *The Castle*, they speak about “blocks of intensity.” All these share their contiguity, though they might be far apart from one another. This striking topography is not merely a mental topography, nor is it only interior or subjective; yet, it “definitely ceased to be spatial” (78).

It is not spatial, because it defies the static logic of space, according to which buildings always remain on the same spot, and cannot be connected unless they are built next to one another. Keeping the loss of regular topography in mind, it becomes strange that readers attempt to locate sites from Kafka’s work in Prague with some precision. Turning back to the fragment from *Novel Destinations*, the light reflected on the water now offers the only true correlation between the bridge in Kafka’s diary and the one in *The Trial*, precisely because water and light escape topography. Thus, one could conclude that the authors of *Novel Destinations* unintentionally present a link that is aligned with Kafka’s topography, even though it goes against the entire goal of their book, in which static topography must be preserved, in order to lead tourists to the right spots. If, however, the locations connected to Kafka become interchangeable, as they are “stopping points along a more general tourism itinerary,” the continuity between the different places to which the tourists are guided becomes as illogical as Kafka’s “block-series.”

To conclude this section, I want to return to the fragment from *The Trial* in which K. is standing on the bridge. The location combines the spatial logic of a concrete structure with the fluent spatiality of running water. Like the bridge, perhaps Kafka’s work has neither completely ceased to be spatial. Rather, it alternates between different logics: hesitating, stopping, doubting and correcting. When K. has been staring at the water and the island under the bridge for a while, he suddenly seems to wake up:

“I didn’t mean to stop,” he said to his companions, shamed by their obliging compliance. Behind K.’s back the one seemed to reproach the

other gently for the mistaken stop they had made, and then all three went on again (283).

K. paused to look at the water, daydreaming about the summers in which he had stretched out on the benches on the island. Suddenly, however, he realizes that he in fact “didn’t mean to stop.” Whereas he did not mean to stop on the bridge, the description of this short interruption of his walk to the place where he will be executed forms the reason many literary tourists also stop at a bridge – the Charles Bridge – and stare down at the small island under the bridge, mimicking Josef K.’s movements. But as K. did not mean to pause and even feels ashamed that he forces the other two men to stop as well, it seems that K. did not mean for anyone to stop. Not at the Charles Bridge, nor at another.

### *Imaginary Topography*

After a brief biographical sketch of Kafka, which includes noteworthy addresses in Prague, McKenna Schmidt and Rendon conclude: “Today, Prague’s *Franz Kafka Museum* continues the work of Brod and others who refused to let Kafka slip anonymously into the night” (275). In this section, I look at the texts that the Kafka Museum publishes on their permanent exhibition. The curators divide the museum in two spheres, “Existential Space” and “Imaginary Topography,” reflecting what they call the “dichotomies of the author.”

McKenna Schmidt and Rendon write about the exhibition:

Reflecting the dichotomies of the author himself, the exhibition is divided into two spheres. The first, “Existential Space,” brings Prague’s influence on Kafka into focus through a chronology of manuscripts, photos, and correspondence. The second space, “Imaginary Topography,” invites visitors to go underground into a bleak and hallucinatory Prague as seen from Kafka’s point of view, re-created through an interplay of images, sound, light, and larger-than-life installations such as rows of filing cabinets (275).

The assumption that the curators of the exhibition in the Franz Kafka Museum are able to recreate Prague from the point of view of Kafka's work can be compared to the claim that anyone can write like Faulkner if only he or she follows the exercise offered on Oprah Winfrey's website.

The division of the exhibition into two parts, the sphere of inherited documents and the sphere behind these documents, can be interpreted as an attempt to visualize what Ervin Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) has called the social establishment of *front* and *back regions*. MacCannell summarizes Goffman as follows: "the front is the meeting place of hosts and guests or customers and service persons, and the back is the place where members of the home team retire between performances to relax and prepare" (1999; 92). Whereas Goffman's division concerns spatial regions that have different functions in social life, the separate spaces in the museum do not represent two actual rooms or places in which Kafka lived or worked in the Kafka Museum. Yet, the dichotomy that the exhibition deploys could be compared to the one between public and intimate life. Because the "Existential Space" represents Kafka's documented life, it can be associated with the front region, while the "Imaginary Space" represents Kafka's inner world or back region.

My motivation for suggesting this correspondence is Goffman's warning that front regions become increasingly difficult to separate from back regions. What we might perceive as a back region in fact is staged as a front region. MacCannell also argues that, in the tourist industry, back regions are often made accessible to tourists to give them an impression of "authentic" culture. He writes: "what is taken to be real might, in fact, be a show that is based on the structure of reality" (95). In other words, it is not easy to distinguish between authentic culture and staged culture, if this distinction can be made at all.<sup>192</sup>

Nevertheless, there is also an important distinction at stake. The one side of the dichotomy in the exhibition is dominated by Prague's influence on Kafka,

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<sup>192</sup> According to MacCannell all tourists search for authentic foreign culture: "Tourist consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in this direction, but often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic (101)." Yet, Urry rightly points out that "that some visitors – what Feifer (1985) terms 'post-tourists' – almost delight in the inauthenticity of the normal tourist experience" (12).

while the other side is dominated by Kafka's personal perception of Prague. One may question whether it is possible to divide those influences and perspectives in two separate spheres. It is more likely that the different perspectives alternate and mingle in such a way that one cannot tell which part belongs to which sphere. In addition, the fluctuation of perspectives within the mind is something in which Kafka excels and that Jameson has analyzed particularly well. Jameson focuses in particular on the way the fluctuating perspectives relate to the desire for an ending, which Kafka keeps frustrating. He uses the term "peripeteia" to clarify this.

In "Kafka's Dialectic" (2007), Jameson argues that the dramatic effects in Kafka's stories do not depend on the psychoanalytic content, but "on the pure form of the reversal as such, the peripeteia" (103). In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode concisely clarifies peripeteia:

peripeteia depends on our confidence of the end; it is a disconfirmation followed by a consonance; the interest of having our expectations falsified is obviously related to our wish to reach the discovery or recognition by an unexpected and instructive route (18).<sup>193</sup>

Peripeteia is a play with expectations, a "falsification of simple expectations as to the structure of the future" (23). Jameson shows how Kafka brilliantly makes use of expectations, mainly by reversals of intention, confidence or point of view. Those repetitive reversals presume a string of dichotomies, which can be detected at several levels, as we will see. Before I return to the text of the Kafka Museum, allow me to move to Jameson's explanation of the pure form of reversal with regard to the story "The Judgment," in which Georg is the victim of a reversal of point of view:

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<sup>193</sup> Kermode mentions three examples of different use of peripeteia: "In the *nouveau roman* of Robbe-Grillet there is an attempt at a more or less Copernican chance in the relation between paradigm and the text. In Camus the counter-pointing is less doctrinaire; in Dostoevsky there is no evidence of any theoretical stand at all, simply rich originality within or without, as it chances, normal expectations" (23).

“The Judgment” can also be seen as a simple alternation, in which a first position, in which Georg is subject, seeing the world outside (in some contentment with it), is then submitted to the opposite logical possibility, in which he becomes object, and is then seen successively through the judging eyes of the father, the friend, the outside world, and so forth (2007: 103).

Jameson’s summary of Kafka’s story shows how drastic changes of perspective demonstrate that a character’s knowledge is temporary and uncertain. The change of perspective resembles the idea behind the exhibition in the Kafka Museum, as it first “brings Prague’s influence on Kafka into focus,” and then “Prague as seen from Kafka’s point of view.” However, there is an important difference here: “The Judgment” precisely shows that one can never completely rely on a point of view, nor can anyone really know whether one’s point of view is shared by others. Moreover, one should not mistake the narrator for the author: the perspectives of Kafka’s various narrators do not need to conform to Kafka’s perspective on the world. In addition, varying perspectives do not only shift between different minds, they often take place inside one character. Kate Flores even argues in her article “The Judgment” (1958) that different characters in Kafka’s work symbolize different sides of one mind.<sup>194</sup>

Yet another aspect of Kafka’s work that is problematic in a visualization of Kafka’s point of view is that his stories are often dominated by questions, some of which resembling the questions that, as we have seen in previous chapters, McHale defines as modernist: “How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?” (1987: 9) And, especially the following ones:

What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of

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<sup>194</sup> Flores reads the story “The Judgment” against the background of Kafka’s diary notes, in which he frequently comments on self-division. Flores argues that Kafka uses the characters of Georg and his “friend” in Russia to portray two contradictory aspects of his own personality (14). Thus, if one wants to continue reading the story as a view of the inside of Kafka’s personality, the other characters in the story would only add more aspects to his personality and shifting views.

knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable? (9).

Those questions inhabit all of Kafka's work. Kafka does not seem to search for an answer, however. Rather, his work shows the impossibility of reaching an answer.<sup>195</sup>

Kafka presents those questions through exploring the possible directions a story can take; narrative explorations that are led by distrust rather than curiosity, by fear of missing the right interpretation rather than wonderment. Jameson writes: "Kafka ... to a far greater degree than any other writer [opens] up a given situation to the whole range of its possibilities" (101). Jameson analyses this tendency through redeploing a distinction that Samuel Taylor Coleridge formulated between Imagination and Fancy, which Jameson explains as follows:

Imagination designates this first idea for a text which falls from the ceiling or from heaven – what if I were a bug? – while Fancy then comes to name that laborious and patient process of making an inventory of the consequences in a supremely logical fashion which also libidinally absorbs all the jouissance of the writer's elaboration of each successive sentence (101-102).

Imagination is the idea from which a story starts; fancy leads to an "incommensurability of interpretive dynamics and methods," because it develops the story by following up on the endless questions that the narrative incites and that frustrates possible unequivocal endings (102). Jameson argues that this means that psychoanalytic, historical or political interpretation cannot be

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<sup>195</sup> Corngold argues that the struggle between the different parties in "The Judgment," either of the self, or represented by the father and the son, is established through the struggle of the "literal and metaphorical dimensions of words," a technique that he calls crucial to "The Judgment:" "The struggle turns on a word that the reader may recall from Gerhard Kurz's remarks on allegory: the word *zudecken*, meaning, literally, the act of 'covering with a blanket.' The father asks his son Georg twice: 'Am I well covered up?' seeming, the narrator remarks, 'to be strangely intent upon the answer. ... 'Don't worry, [replies Georg,] you're well covered up.' 'No,' cried his father. ... 'You wanted to cover me up, I know, my young sprig, but I am far from being covered up yet.' And here he seems to mean, 'I am not dead and buried yet'" (29).

applied to the process led by fancy, but are only “applicable to the moment of Imagination” (102). The reason that fancy is not “subject to interpretation lies in the paradoxical fact that it is itself a virtual frenzy of interpretation” (106). This would make it an almost impossible, or at least endless, project to interpret Kafka’s work.<sup>196</sup>

The Kafka Museum also mentions the imagination as an important starting point as they distinguish between “Existential Space” and “Imaginary Topography.” The Existential Space mainly presents historical documents, such as “manuscripts, photos, and correspondence.” With “existential,” the Museum means a mixture of historical and biographical information that refers to Kafka’s life in Prague. However, that is not all, as the Museum argues on its website:

Our aim is to explore the city, seeing it from Kafka's point of view. An exclusively biographical or merely chronological approach would not be enough; the challenge lies in condensing the principal conflicts in the life of Kafka in Prague, guided by the writer’s own gaze. This means joining Kafka on his descent into the depths of his city, adapting ourselves to his sensorial range and cognitive register, becoming involved in a slow distortion of space-time - in short, agreeing to an experience where everything is allowed except indifference.<sup>197</sup>

Evidently, the Kafka Museum does not hesitate about the possibility of presenting “Kafka’s point of view” or “the writer’s own gaze.” However, the museum misses out on a crucial aspect of Kafka’s work. While the museum attempts to recreate Kafka’s point of view, this point of view should become an object of another point of view, a process that continues ad infinitum. A representation of Kafka’s perspective risks suggesting a specific angle or ideology, which is difficult to reconcile with his style of writing.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Such infinity of alternatives perhaps anticipates the “pastiche” that according to Jameson is the appropriate mode of postmodernist culture, as he argues in “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (1984).

<sup>197</sup> <http://www.kafkamuseum.cz/ShowPage.aspx?tabId=-1>

<sup>198</sup> In other modernist works, comparable processes are represented in streams of consciousnesses of skeptical minds as for instance Ulrich’s in Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*, Mrs. Dalloway’s in Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, or Quentin’s thoughts in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*.

Georg Lukács, however, does recognize a particular perspective in Kafka. In his article “Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann” (1964), he argues that Kafka simplifies the world in which he lives and denies being part of a larger social and historical whole. Thus, Lukács reduces Kafka’s work to an “archetypal example”; he “claims that modernists reduce social reality to nightmare and portray it as an angst-ridden, absurd world, thus depriving us of any sense of perspective,” to use Eysteinnsson words (1994: 25). However, it seems Lukács’s reading deprives the work of other perspectives. It is not so much Kafka who simplifies the world but rather the attempt to summarize Kafka’s work that risks simplification. Lukács takes this risk when he criticizes the lack of historical awareness in Kafka’s work. That risk stands out even more bluntly in the summaries that the Kafka Museum and tourist guidebooks offer.<sup>199</sup>

Although the authors of the introduction to the Kafka Museum admit that “with the odd exception, Kafka does not name the places he describes in his novels and short stories,” and that “the city steps back” and “is no longer recognisable by its buildings, bridges and monuments,” they still point out that this transfigured city is Prague.<sup>200</sup> It is Prague that Kafka has turned “into an imaginary topography, which transcends the fallacy of realism.” According to the author of this text on the website of the museum, Kafka’s intention was to have his topography act as “topological metaphors or allegorical places.”

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*Fury*. Kafka’s characters perhaps dwell less on seemingly random observations as often is the case in other modernist works, the changes in perspective in his work are rather manifest in the endless reversals in rational and almost too logic contemplations.

<sup>199</sup> In *Aesthetic Theory* (1984), Theodor Adorno argues the opposite of Lukács’s theory, namely that the power of Kafka’s work lies precisely in the fact that he does not attempt to “duplicate the façade of reality,” but “makes an uncompromising reprint of reality while at the same time avoiding being contaminated by it” (28).

<sup>200</sup> The text on the website continues: “And even if they are recognised by an inhabitant of Prague or by a student of Kafka, they have become something else. People are often keen to pinpoint real Prague places in Kafka’s fiction. It is generally recognised that the anonymous cathedral in *The Trial* is none other than Sv. Vitus cathedral, and that the path taken by Joseph K. in the last chapter leads from the Old Town to the outer limits of Kleinseite, over Charles Bridge. It is also said that in *The Judgment*, from Georg Bendemann’s window, we recognise the wharf, the river, the opposite bank of the Moldava, just as they could be seen from Niklasstrasse, where the Kafka family lived in 1912. Efforts have been made to prove that the topography of Prague is a constant which simply goes unnamed. Yet this is not what really matters. In his fiction, Kafka carries out a more difficult operation: he turns Prague into an imaginary topography which transcends the fallacy of realism. Kafka’s phantasmal architecture has other ends. Rather than a particular house, school, office, church, prison or castle being important, it is what these constructions reveal when they act as topological metaphors or allegorical places. What surprises does this transfigured Prague hold in store? Just how far can the metamorphosis of a city take us?”

<http://www.kafkamuseum.cz/ShowPage.aspx?tabId=-1>

The text does not explain what these metaphors or allegories stand for. This is also difficult with regard to Kafka's work. McHale aptly writes that

Kafka's texts seem to promise allegorical meaning, soliciting an allegorical interpretation from the reader, yet withholding any indication of *specific* allegorical content. Everything is *potentially* allegorical, but nothing is *actually* an allegory; the trope seems to lack a specific literal level or frame of reference. Each vision of the Castle, for instance, seems to charge it with potential abstract meaning, eliciting the reader a drive to specify that meaning – God? the Old Law? Authority? History? Culture? and so on (141).

Kafka's allegories are overdetermined: "they have too many interpretations, more than can possibly be integrated in a univocal reading" (142). Not only can each allegorical object in Kafka's work be explained in different ways, each of these allegories can also be reversed, suddenly representing the futility of human being, ignorance, or the guilt of the son, instead of God, the Law or the demanding Father. Following Jameson's argument, only the moment of imagination escapes this reversibility and can be explained as a metaphor or an allegory. This would be the moment at which the idea for a text, a plan or an intention, originates. Readers of Kafka's work, we will never be able to penetrate that moment. All we have is what that moment brought about, the endless folds and reversals of fancy.

At the website of the Kafka Museum the adjective "imaginary" designates the transformation of the actual city Prague into the nameless cities in Kafka's work. However, when rereading the text, it seems to me that in fact this introductory text itself is presenting a metaphor or an allegory: not so much of Kafka's work, but of *the representation of* Kafka's work. The imaginary topography that the museum presents refers to the literary walking tours through "Kafka's Prague," which has become an imaginary city.

The tourist industry has created a coherent imaginary topography with the name "Kafka's Prague." This is a city that is real, but it is also manipulated and manufactured, highlighting the aspects supposedly connected to Franz

Kafka. References can be demonstrated to be historical and factual, yet, they are also imaginary as they have become part of an industry that supports itself by multiplying and enlarging a selection of details connected to Kafka. Prague has separated itself from Kafka precisely by appropriating him. This is comparable to the term “Kafkaesque”: one does not need to have read anything by the writer to include this word in one's vocabulary. The topography that should highlight the connection between real Prague and Kafka's literary imagination has made Kafka into a an image of the constructed connection between the city and the author.

The writers of tourist guides or the museum website seem unbothered by the modernist questions formulated by McHale: “How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?” (9). The knowledge that is transmitted by the guidebooks is not unreliable, but, as the guides largely quote one another, the texts are limited and to a certain degree “imaginary.” The main source of reference for the guidebooks often seems to consist of information produced by the tourist industry.

Kafka's work is perhaps among the most difficult to represent visually. To begin with, his topography is no longer “spatial,” since it defies laws of space and time, as Deleuze and Guattari argue. Secondly, the work introduces new directions with each new sentence. Thirdly, “with each detail there rise the ghostly alternatives of what it might have been better to have done in its place,” as Jameson writes (106). Hence, an exhibition that attempts to inhabit Kafka's point of view should perhaps continuously remain in progress, just like Kafka's characters endlessly pursue a certain goal that itself often remains indistinct. As I discuss below, even death, the most definitive end of all, cannot end those continuous quests in which Kafka's characters find themselves entangled.

*The Impossibility of Dying*

In "Franz Kafka's Prague: A Literary Walking Tour,"<sup>201</sup> Marilyn Bender concludes:

The grave, decorated now with fresh tokens of esteem, is part of the irony alluded to at the beginning of this tour: Kafka as tourist attraction. The literary pilgrim in search of closure can take the Metro by line A to the Zelivskeho station and walk a short distance to the entrance of the Jewish cemetery (Zidovske hrbity).<sup>202</sup>

One of the signs of a writer's immortality is that his or her grave is frequently visited. Or, to put it the other way around, as Beckett formulates it: "the dead are only dead in so far as they continue to exist in the heart of the survivor" (1965: 44). Writers are often called immortal: they live on in the texts that they leave behind, as well as in their author's name and their readers' minds. In Kafka's work, however, one finds another aspect of immortality: of continuing to live while already being dead.

Jameson argues that, because of Kafka's logical account of "possibilities conceivable in the situation at hand," even the stories that have a definitive ending, such as Gregor's death in "Metamorphosis" or the execution of Josef K. in *The Trial*, suggest that their endings could as well have been postponed or delayed (99). Even death does not seem definitive in Kafka's work. Death in Kafka's work is a state about which one can debate, which hesitates and procrastinates.

For instance, in "The Hunter Gracchus," Gracchus dies but simultaneously continues to live. Gracchus fails to really die: he is immortal, yet he claims that he is dead. Gracchus blames this situation on the death ship he is lying in, which has lost its way. The man on the coal bucket in "The Bucket Rider" is likewise lost forever. In the first part of the story he seems a poor man who wants to buy coal for his stove. However, in the continuation of the story he also resembles a ghost,

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<sup>201</sup> available through [www.nysoclib.org](http://www.nysoclib.org)

<sup>202</sup> <http://www.nysoclib.org/travels/kafka.html>

who cannot be seen or heard and who sits on his coal bucket that is so light that he can ride on it.

In *The Ghosts of Modernity*, Rabaté analyses how modernity is haunted by ghosts and voices from the past, and how modernity itself is a ghost that haunts us today. “The dead can never die,” he writes (1996: xiii). The realization makes all the dead immortal: each age remains unfinished, each project endless. In “Reading Kafka,” Blanchot writes:

We do not die, it is true, but because of that we do not live either; we are dead while we are alive, we are essentially survivors. So death ends our life, but it does not end our possibility of dying; it is real as an end to life and illusory as an end to death (1995: 8).<sup>203</sup>

This happens to Gracchus: he has ceased living, but still has to die. The condition of Gracchus’s living death can be read as an expression of a deep uncertainty about what death entails. However, his incapability of dying does not indicate a fear of death, or a search for an escape from death, the theme of so many literary works, to begin with the 4000 years old epos *Gilgamesh*. Gilgamesh sees his friend Enkidu pass away and tries to find a medicine that will prevent him from dying. In *La Mort: Essais sur la Finitude* (1994), Françoise Dastur writes that this text, which more or less forms the cradle of all literature, shows how our relation to death is always a relation to someone else’s death. Dastur adds that Epicurus said that death *is not* as long as we are and that from the moment on that we *are not*, death is not either. In short, death is nothing to us. The only experience of death that we can have is of seeing someone else die; a realization on which many philosophers, like Heidegger, have commented.

Yet, in Kafka’s work, even the experience of someone else’s dying does not give us certainty about death as the end of life. In the story “The Married Couple,”

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<sup>203</sup> In the essay “Literature and the Right to Death” (1995), Blanchot also discusses the impression of annihilating existing reality in the act of writing. The idea that literature creates by simultaneously suppressing and killing an existing reality, is also a topic in for instance the film *Capote* (Bennet Miller, 2005). In this film the writer Truman Capote is waiting for the protagonist of his non-fiction book to be executed (in real time) in order to be able to write the ending. The film *Stranger than Fiction* (Marc Forster, 2006), is also about the sacrifices of literary writing: a person who discovers that he is the protagonist in a book, agrees to die because it fits in the ending of the novel.

for instance, the narrator visits an old couple for business reasons. During his visit he witnesses the old man die. The son of the old man weeps; he is laying sick in bed in the same room. Another salesman, present in the room, is resolved to do nothing. The narrator understands that it is up to him to inform the wife of the death of the old man:

[S]o I, only I was left to do something, and the hardest thing that anyone could be asked to do, that was to tell the news to his wife in some bearable form, in a form that did not exist, in other words (455).

When the wife enters the room, however, she takes the dead hand of her husband, kisses it “playfully,” and, while the husband moves and yawns loudly, she helps him to put on his nightshirt that she has warmed before the fire. Still in shock that the old man had died and that he was the one who would have to inform his wife, now the narrator has to recover from a second shock: that the old man lives. Not only does the old man still live, he also appears to have listened closely to the business offers the two agents have made.

In “The Married Couple” one can see, in Jameson’s words, the “pure form of reversal” at work: one moment the old man is dead, the other moment he is alive. The dynamic of reversal that Jameson defines as the crucial characteristic of Kafka’s work is also visible on a smaller scale. For instance, in the fragment above, the narrator concludes that he has to tell the news of the old man’s death in “some bearable form,” to which he immediately adds, “a form that did not exist.” Thus, he realizes that he has to do something, which he immediately declares impossible.

As we can see, it is not merely reversal that is at stake here: sometimes the reversal is so strong that it turns into denial, or more precisely, into the impossibility of what was initially asserted. Let us take a look at an earlier sentence from the same story, in which this mechanism is apparent as well. The narrator has been in the room with the married couple, their son and the other agent for some time when he thinks:

Now at last, it seemed to me, my moment had come, or rather it had not come and probably would never come; yet if I was to attempt anything it must be done at once, for I felt that here the conditions for a business interview could only become increasingly unfavorable; and to plant myself down here for all time, as the agent apparently intended, was not my way: besides, I did not want to take the slightest notice of him (453).

In the first sentence the reversal is pushed to the extreme: the moment had come/it had not come/it would never come. If there will never be a right moment, “my moment,” than the meaning of that moment becomes vacant. However, if he was to attempt anything, it had to be done at once, which means that, because the moment would never come, the only right moment was that very same moment or, in fact, any moment. The narrator declares that he did not want to plant himself “down here for all time, as the agent apparently intended.” Then again, after having made clear that he does not want to do something as the other agent seems to do, he says that he “did not want to take the slightest notice of him,” which – if he really did not take any notice of him – would make his previous remark superfluous. The narrator continuously declares his own thoughts redundant.

Jameson compares Kafka’s “execution of the tireless composition of successive sentences” with Heidegger’s concept of “Sorge” (108). He argues that although most Heideggerians translate *Sorge* as care,

it is surely more appropriate to identify as Worry: constantly leaping ahead of ourselves and thinking of the next step, very much in the spirit of the *pro* and the *contra*, the imagined consequences of first this and then that logical alternative (108).

I agree that worry does seem a better word for Dasein’s mental condition of “Being-ahead-of-itself” while “Being-in-the-world,” as Heidegger defines *Sorge*. However, Heidegger also writes that *Sorge* should not be understood “just ontically as ‘worry’ or ‘grief’ [als ‘Besorgnis und ‘Bekümmernis’]; *Sorge* is also a manner of Dasein of interpreting itself (1962: 241). Yet, Jameson neither alludes

to worry in the sense of grief or of sadness, rather to worry as an “interminable weighing of alternatives, a tireless passage back and forth between the pro and the contra” (96).

According to Jameson, the constant weighing of alternatives, the continuous state of worry, which for Heidegger is the most central and permanent experience of human reality (*Dasein*), is minutely followed in Kafka’s stories. As I discussed above, this “leaping ahead of ourselves and thinking of the next step” is also connected to the logic of reversal. The thoughts of the different narrators constantly swing between this possibility and that, weighing what the right interpretations of the thoughts might be.

Jameson continues that it is tempting to explain “worry” as an “obsessional neurosis” that can also be found in other novels, in which “the imperatives of correctness and legality inspire a fear that determines a constant monitoring of the self” (108). But this is not what Jameson finds in Kafka, nor what Heidegger means with *Sorge*. Jameson writes, “all these diagnoses are interpretations of what in Kafka’s text remains an unnamed and unique dynamic of production and a kind of perpetual present of the text in that very process of producing itself” (108). He argues that the temporality of this process becomes foregrounded in, for instance, “The Burrow” or in “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk.” In “The Burrow,” the narrator endlessly adds to his burrow; yet, he believes that he does not do what he should have done to make it a perfect burrow. Thus, the theme of not being able to end also plays an important role here. Let me briefly focus on the connection between the incapability of finishing, ending, death and Heidegger’s sense of *Sorge* as worry, especially *Dasein*’s “Being-ahead-of-itself.”

Heidegger argues that, in *Dasein*, “there is undeniably a constant ‘lack of totality’ which finds an end with death” (286). In the “Being-ahead-of-itself” *Dasein* experiences its own future death as a continuous “not-yet.” This “not-yet” is part of *Dasein*’s condition, since the possibility of one’s death is already present from the first moment that one lives: “As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die” (289). When one dies eventually, this does not mean that one fulfills oneself. Heidegger argues that

Dasein is already its “not-yet”, and is its “not-yet” constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too. The “ending” which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-an-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a *Being-towards-the-end* [Sein zum Ende] of this entity (289).<sup>204</sup>

The fact that one can never experience one’s own death makes that death only exists insofar as it is “not-yet.” Consequently, the “not-yet” is death, or the only thing we experience of death. In short, “not-yet” is the end, is death, and simultaneously it is precisely not-yet-the end, not-yet-death. This structure is inherent to *Dasein*, but can also be detected in Kafka’s work. The hunter Gracchus is the personification of this structure, as he passed the “not-yet,” while he still experiences it as “not-yet.” At first, Gracchus seemed an exception, a person who is dead while being alive. But he is not different from other beings. Although dead, he lives and still has to die. In this way “we are essentially survivors,” as Blanchot writes (1995: 8).

Kafka’s narrators continuously express themselves by reflecting on situations that suddenly take an unexpected turn or announce a sudden end or change, which makes the narrators aware of possible endings. Yet, simultaneously the worries of the characters express the impossibility of ending, or reaching a conclusion, because their situation always transforms. While this awareness sometimes brings about a slight nervousness in Kafka’s characters, simultaneously it is the cause of the protagonists’ rather aimless wandering that characterizes many of Kafka’s stories. This is also one of the reasons for the comparison between his protagonists and tourists. Antony Johae compares Josef K. with a traveler that “enters a foreign city for the first time without a map” (1996: 19). Comparatively, Rolf J. Goebel compares K. with the figure of the *flâneur* (2002: 45).

In sum, in Kafka’s work not only the thought of death is determined by the “not-yet,” but each situation is saturated with the “not-yet” of its ending, which makes one aware of all potential directions it could take. As Heidegger argues, it is a mistake to understand death as a form of fulfillment. Likewise when reading

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<sup>204</sup> Heidegger also writes: “The Being of Dasein has been defined as care. Care is grounded in temporality. Within the range of temporality therefore, the kind of historizing which gives existence its definitely historical character, must be sought” (434).

Kafka's work one realizes that actually no project, small or large, can be "fulfilled." Each protagonist experiences continuously that he is "not-yet" there: the endings of the projects or of the pursuits are endlessly procrastinated.

In the essay "Franz Kafka: *Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer*" (1999), Benjamin argues that procrastination forms the "true meaning of that noteworthy and often striking fullness of detail which according to Max Brod lay at the heart of Kafka's search for perfection and the true way" (496). Benjamin starts his essay by quoting the entire short story mentioned in the title, which he sees as emblematic for Kafka's work. In this tale, a messenger from the emperor is "struggling to make his way through the chambers of the innermost palace. Never will he get to the end of them. And even if he succeeded in this, nothing would be gained – he would still have to fight his way down the stairs" (494).

Benjamin compares this endless procrastination with the rabbinical stories and anecdotes of the Haggadah. He explains that these haggadic stories "serve to explicate and confirm the teachings – the Halachah" (496). However, "they are a Haggadah that constantly pause, luxuriating in the most detailed descriptions, in the simultaneous hope and fear that it might encounter the halachic order, the doctrine itself, en route" (496). Benjamin argues that what Kafka "enjoys about these interminable reflections is the very fear that they might come to an end" (496-497). In "Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats" (1994), Peter Osborne discusses Benjamin's reading of procrastination in Kafka's work. Osborne stresses that it would be "a mistake to seek, like Kafka's characters, hope in postponement. For it is infinite. The proceedings gradually take on the form of a judgement. Time *is* the trial" (73).

In that sense, the novels cannot end. Benjamin argues that "it is in fact that his books are incomplete which shows the true working of grace in his writings" (497). It seems that the stories, like the characters, are unable to bring narrative to a conclusion. As Jameson points out, with each word interminable alternatives arise for the direction a story might take. Because this is such a crucial aspect of Kafka's writing, Kafka's oeuvre resists a reductive reading that provides us with a coherent meaning. Constantine argues that Kafka's fiction always is in progress, "it is underway" (19). He concludes that "any reading that supposes, or in its procedure implies, that Kafka, already in possession of the

truth, then merely encoded it in the process of writing, so that the business of literary criticism is *decoding* – any such reading is wrong” (19).

If unfinishedness is an essential part of Kafka’s writing, we have to conclude that this unfinishedness makes the stories finished, makes them typical for Kafka’s oeuvre and gives us the feeling that they are perfectly finished. As Wood writes about Kafka’s parables and aphorisms, one could perhaps say about all his work that it “couldn’t be more finished. ... What could we add to these miniature masterpieces; what could we take away from them?” (2007: 1400). The lack of closure in Kafka’s work is mirrored by his presentation of death that cannot be trusted to be a definite ending. To end this section, however, I want to return to Kafka’s death and the commentary by Marilyn Bender, which turns the unfinishedness of his death into a spatial issue when she writes that “[t]he literary pilgrim in search of closure can take the Metro by line A to the Zelivskeho station and walk a short distance to the entrance of the Jewish cemetery (Zidovske hrbity).”<sup>205</sup>

When I was in Prague, I also visited Kafka’s grave, standing silently next to the spot where Kafka’s bones are laying six feet under the ground; the bones that once held together his thoughts, fears and anxieties about writing. His parents rest under the same gravestone. The tablet on the grave also commemorates three sisters of Franz Kafka who fell victim to the Holocaust. On the grave lay numerous metro and bus tickets, left by visitors as tokens of their commemoration of the famous writer. On these tickets, the day of the year was printed. These tickets are, on the one hand, witnesses of the specific days at which the visitors were there, and on the other hand, proof of the ongoing interest in Kafka’s work.

Whereas a visit to Kafka’s grave might form the closure of a literary walking tour, those visits also give Kafka an afterlife. Put otherwise, the visits hinder him in leaving this world completely, as all the chambers, stairs and court yards make it impossible for the messenger in “Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer” to ever leave the palace of the emperor. Kafka tourism might not always do justice to Kafka’s work, and the texts in the tourist guides might not always be as precise as some might wish for. On the other hand, however, tourists and the

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<sup>205</sup> <http://www.nysoclib.org/travels/kafka.html>

tourist industry contribute in their own way to the continuing process of interpretation of Kafka's work, reaffirming the endless character of Kafka's unfinished stories.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, as in previous ones, I have used McHale's distinction, according to which modernist fiction is pre-occupied with epistemological questions, whereas postmodernist fiction is pre-occupied with ontological questions. From this distinction, one can conclude that Kafka belongs to the era of modernism. The question remains whether this era is finished, or still going on, part of, or next to, other eras such as postmodernity – an era perhaps more past than modernism. While Kafka's work fits the definition of modernist literature, this chapter shows that it is also part of contemporary culture.

As we have seen throughout my dissertation, modernist novels do not simply belong to a cultural field that bears the name "modernism;" rather, the works belong to different cultural eras and fields at the same time. Consequently, it is difficult to argue whether and when modernism ended. Modernism has become part of other contexts and periods. Some might argue that this makes the term "modernism" redundant. Yet, modernism still exists. In this sense, modernism is akin to Rabaté's description of ghosts: "the ghost is a product of discourse for, if nobody or almost nobody has ever seen one with his own eyes, everybody is at least familiar with the widely circulated rumor" (217). Modernism as a rumor that is still in circulation. To define the beginning or ending of a rumor is an endless task, since one only adds to the continuation of the rumor by speculating about its ending.

Reading the travel guides through the framework of Kafka's fiction, as I have tried to do in this chapter, brings several aspects to the fore. Whereas Kafka's stories seem to hesitate about the direction the story will take in each sentence, the tourist guides know where the reader should go. The act of "ending" a text does not only mean to "finish" a text, it also gives the texts an end in the sense of a goal. When a text is brought to an end, a goal is achieved, as if the writer, and later the reader, finally arrives at a definite spot. This kind of ending is absent in Kafka's work, even in his finished work, as Jameson has

argued. Yet, precisely this kind of ending forms the premise of travel guides. Simultaneously, Deleuze and Guattari have shown convincingly that unfinishedness also pertains to the spatiality in Kafka's work, which ceases to be spatial. The unspatial character of Kafka's fictional places makes each referent to an existing place debatable.

While tourists leisurely visit sites that commemorate Kafka and his work, the travelers in his fiction never arrive at the places they are searching for. As we have seen, Kafka's travelers are never free: they are always haunted and obsessed by their pursuit and assumed obligations, as well as their endless wavering thoughts. There is no moment of eventual arrival. As Blanchot writes, "There is no rest, either at the level of the sentence or at that of the whole work. Nor is there any in regard to the struggle that cannot make any assertion without correcting itself" (1995: 22). Blanchot touches the heart of a problem: there is never a conclusion in Kafka's work, nothing is ever completely achieved, neither in the lives of the characters, nor at the level of word choice. As we have seen in this chapter, the experience of a total absence of rest in the sense of relief mirrors Kafka's particular style of writing: the more precise the writer is, the more difficult it is to decide when a text is finished. "There is no rest," not even after having finished a piece of writing, since there is no real sense of finishing; there are always further corrections to be made.