

Abstracts

Agency in the Space of Reasons. A Comment on The Castle

Josep E. Corbí

The received view about rationalizing explanations divides our psychological states into two kinds with opposite directions of fit, namely: desires and beliefs. In *The Retrieval of Ethics*, Talbot Brewer makes a case against this view. He argues that it neglects an essential aspect of our agency, namely: that an agent's rationale for her actions must consider the value of what she desires beyond her merely desiring it. In this paper, I examine our experience as readers of *The Castle* by Franz Kafka to support Brewer's critical program, that is, his challenge to the received view. I will argue, however, that Kafka's novel poses a serious problem to Brewer's alternative approach, that is, to his attempt to retrieve our agency thanks to a certain understanding of the role of the good in rationalizing explanations. For this dual purpose, a reflection on the divide between the agent's experience and the external world, between the inner and the outer, will play a crucial role. The received view regards the agent's experience and the external world as split by an unsurmountable metaphysical gulf. I will stress that, despite K.'s efforts to the contrary, there is no way in which he might succeed in separating the inner from the outer; far from being split by a gulf, the inner and the outer emerge as densely interwoven in his life. It follows that the received view cannot account for the way K. inhabits the world, but the precise way in which the novel conceives of the imbrication between the inner and the outer hardly benefits Brewer's specific attempt to retrieve our agency.

On Deferral. Kafka and Derrida before the Law

Michaela Fišerová

The paper focuses on Derrida's reading of Kafka's *Before the Law* in order to point out that late deconstruction's ethical goals are closely related to Kafka's understanding of deferred meaning. As Derrida pointed out, Kafka conceived law as an aporia: the law is principally accessible to all citizens; moreover, everyone is obliged to know it. However, at the same time, the law remains inaccessible: it is guarded from the citizen's gaze. Apparently, juridical mediators could help to make the law "comprehensible", but they do not: their parasitical work of "translation" helps only to keep further push-

ing the deferral. Derrida's deconstruction presented in *Prejudices and Force of Law* is surprisingly close to Kafka's work. Similarly to Kafka, Derrida tries to disturb the "total" mystical presence of the Law by showing the problem of its ontological absence. Both of them operate a subversive movement, which translates idioms into aporias. Derrida's ethic of mistrust is inspired by Kafka's description of the trial as a paralytic place, where it is impossible to formulate a problem and to propose a solution. Finally, both Kafka and Derrida melancholically turn to resignation. Nevertheless, there is an important difference. In Kafka, parasites are a source of negative emotions and fatigue for the main character. Although the parasites give him advice to accept his situation as inevitable, he proudly refuses and when he resignedly accepts it, he dies. In Derrida, on the contrary, parasites positively establish the melancholic play of supplementarity. As deconstructed meaning is constantly deferred, general parasitism is seen as inevitable.

Kafka's Worlds. Gaps, Characters and Narratives

Bohumil Fořt

Fictional worlds theory uses the notion of gaps in order to describe the incompleteness of fictional worlds. However, the notion of gaps remains rather theoretically under-developed for analytical and interpretative purposes within the realm of fictional worlds theory. The particular types, number and distribution of gaps in fictional worlds determine the integrity of these worlds, their entities, and also the stories on which they are based. The aim of this study is to focus on a selection of Kafka's fictional worlds (*Amerika*, *The Metamorphosis*, *The Trial*, and *The Castle*) from the point of view of these gaps. Therefore, these worlds, as well as their protagonists and settings, will be thoroughly analysed and classified. Special attention is given to the integrity of the fictional worlds in question – especially in connection with classical narratological concepts and categories.

Only for You

Simon Glendinning

Kafka's short story *Before the Law* is about the Law. And yet as readers we are in front of it as in front of the Law: his text, for each reader, becomes or reproduces the very situation it describes. Readers read it and can become gatekeepers to the Law in turn, guaranteed as such by the more powerful Law they guard. This paper explores the readings of the fable/parable offered by Sartre and

Derrida, taking in themes of responsibility and freedom, literature and non-literary fictions, laws and justice, and Wittgenstein's affirmation of the mystical.

**Intersections with and Impossibilities in Kafka's World.
Derrida, Deleuze, Welles**

Stanley E. Gontarski

One of the most striking features of the Orson Welles adaptation (or recasting) of Franz Kafka's unfinished novel, *The Trial*, is its opening sequence, a rendering of the *Before the Law* (*Vor dem Gesetz*) parable as a prologue to the film, the story board version offering thus a narrative conundrum before we see the unexplained arrest of Joseph K. Welles commissioned collaborators, husband and wife team Alexander Alexeieff and Claire Parker, to apply their labor-intensive "pinscreen animation" technique to a stunning visualization of the parable. This paper explores a number of interventions into the Kafka text by major artists and philosophers, Albert Camus, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze, culminating in Welles's innovative 1962 visualization of the tale, for which he was both screenwriter and director.

**The Power of Analysis and the Impossibility of Understanding.
Kafkaesque Remarks**

Petr Kofátko

The paper focuses on the functions of detailed analyses and pedantic explanations of situations and events provided by Kafka's characters. Taken together, they create the impression of a solid orientation within the system. Nevertheless, the more elaborate and compact they are, the more they make it clear that the system, by its very nature, resists understanding. This incomprehensibility, amplified by explanations, does not amount to an inability to understand Kafka's text and to get access to its literary functions (which should be compensated by discovering its "hidden sense"), nor does it undermine our ability to relate these functions to our own everyday experience. On the contrary, the key function of the text consists precisely of this: the failures of our attempts to make sense of the Kafkaesque situations in ordinary pragmatic terms should remind us of the incomprehensibility of our own world, precisely as our failed attempts at continuous reading of Beckett's late texts are supposed to let us experience various sides of the universal mess (the literary work being part and product of this mess). The

incomprehensibility of the Kafkaesque situations and of the world they are anchored in implies the “inextricability of guilt” – in that sense that it is impossible to identify those elements of the protagonist’s biography which constitute his guilt and separate them from the “innocent” rest.

The Animal That Laughs

Gregg Lambert

Early on, Deleuze and Guattari insisted on the presence of a subterranean and diabolical laughter throughout all of Kafka’s writings, which they opposed to the dominant existential, psychoanalytic and theological traditions of secondary interpretations that focused almost exclusively on the themes of infinite guilt, resentment, masochistic sadness and stoic resignation. In their 1972 work *Pour une littérature mineure* they attempt to detonate all these “sad passions” that surrounded and obscured Kafka’s own expression, liberating the joyful intensities of laughter. However, in Kafka’s own self-representation – especially in the letters and the diaries – it is the same “sad passions” and the situation of being held hostage by them which provide the very condition of humour that marks all the comic possibilities of “playing with the Other” (Levinas), that is, of deferring the state of subjection to the accusative mode or of being a subject to and for others. Of course, Kafka emblematises – as a constant source of his own self thematisation – the writer’s desire to escape from the world of others, which is certainly not divorced from the concupiscent that belongs to Gyge’s magical cloak of invisibility, which moreover, in Kafka’s case, actually becomes a Dracula’s cape, as he has been accused by critics of betraying almost every obligation, of breaking every promise and oath – in short, of being guilty. In some way, this is what Deleuze and Guattari wanted to free their “Kafka” from, as if liberating him from the great confinement of his critics, breaking the chains of interpretation, allowing him to take flight, “stealing head over heels and away”, to quote a line by Red Peter from, *A Report to an Academy*. However, in Deleuze and Guattari’s representation, Kafka’s laughter only belongs to animals, and does manage to address the real function of the comic in Kafka’s writings, which is its social function. As Bergson writes, beginning with Aristotle, the human (*zoon politikón*) is not only defined as a species that has the capacity for political life but also as “an animal that laughs”.

Kafka's "Underground Man". Reflections on *The Burrow*

Jerrold Levinson

In this paper, the author explores a variety of interpretations of Kafka's enigmatic and intriguing narrative, *The Burrow*, focusing most of the attention on the epistemic situation of its unnamed and minimally described protagonist, whom he calls the Burrower, and the unbanishable existential anxiety that is its upshot. Along the way the author makes connections with some other literary works, most notably Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Toward the end, the author addresses the issue of Kafka's narrative being unfinished, and whether that is a cause for regret.

Noise. Kafka's Lesson

Richard Müller

Kafka's literary work, created in the time of the first expansion of telecommunications and in tacit relation to the emerging analogue media, represents various instances of malfunctioning between the constituents of the information exchange. The idea suggests itself to transpose certain thematic elements of Kafka's writing into the components of information theory. Given that its terms are better tailored to dealing with the transmission of information rather than the processes of meaning interpretation, how should we understand such analogy? This paper approaches the question firstly by overviewing the various changes of the concept of noise in the contexts of information theory, Umberto Eco's 'open work' poetics, Miroslav Červenka's literary semiotics and Michel Serres' philosophy. It is shown how the concept of noise is redefined - from a physical phenomenon occurring on the channel to interference which depends on the existence of codes as certain operational sets of probabilities and expectations. In Serres, however, noise becomes the unavoidable foundation of communication and its paradoxical driving force. The emergence of noise in the new reproduction apparatuses and its profusion in communication is connected with melancholy in Kafka. As the examples of *The Trial* and the later short story *Poseidon* suggest, there seems to be an interconnection in the behaviour patterns of the physical systems, as described by the contemporary statistical mechanics models, and of the communication systems defined by the impossibility to yield information. The exponential growth of signs arising without possibility of verification and the interference of noise in communication and the physical environment result in the collapse of the boundary between the internal and

the external environments. Kafka's literary experiments (incl. *The Care of the Family Man* and *The Judgement*) can be understood as attempting to grasp the possibilities of writing under the conditions of the desacralisation of sense.

Kafka's *The Judgement* and the Logic of The Ordinary Reading of Literature

Anders Pettersson

The paper focuses on Kafka's short narrative *The Judgement* (*Das Urteil*, 1912). However, although the contribution may be of some interest for the understanding of this Kafka story and of Kafka's achievement in general, *The Judgement* is being discussed primarily as an illustrative example. The main point of the paper is to sketch an overall perspective on the ordinary reading of literature. It is commonly believed that interpreting critics and ordinary readers basically have to perform the same task: that of understanding the meaning of the text in question. The author argues that this view seriously misconstrues the activities of both critic and reader. He also discusses, in a more tentative fashion, what one is rationally justified to demand from ordinary readings of literature performed for the sake of understanding and experiencing a literary text.

Kafka's Exclusion of the Law of the Excluded Middle

Göran Rossholm

Kafka's prose is characterized by polarities often described as contrasts, paradoxes, contradictions and ambiguities. In this paper they are studied as violations of the Law of the Excluded Middle in classic logic. An array of examples from the novel *The Trial* and *The Castle* and several of the short stories are presented and discussed. The hermeneutic consequence of these violations – i.e. do the violations make interpretation of Kafka's works in general invalid? – and the question whether they fulfil a common aesthetic purpose are finally addressed.

The Decisive Moment is Everlasting. Static Time and the Problem of Closure in Kafka's Poetics

Eyal Segal

Kafka's chronic difficulties with finishing his texts, leading to the fragmentary state in which many of them remained, are well-known. Together with Kafka's general aversion to publication, they account for the fact that only a relatively small part of what is recognized today as his fictional oeuvre was

actually published during his lifetime. Since fragmentariness is such a dominant quality of the Kafkian corpus, it naturally attracts attention and elicits attempts at explanation. Such explanations may be sought at the biographical level, but the recurrent fragmentariness also calls for explanations of a different order, related to the structural logic of the texts themselves. My basic claim is that the dynamics of the text-continuum in many of Kafka's works can be defined as one of a (potentially) "infinite" nature, which creates a fundamental difficulty in bringing the text to any satisfactory conclusion. This textual logic is strongly related to the static (or "anti-narrative") nature of the represented world, where time's essential dynamic aspect is nullified, and with it the possibility of any true resolution of the basic tensions which beset the fictional world. I focus on two texts: *The Burrow* and *The Trial*. Both provide instructive examples of how stasis produces open(-ended)ness, or an inherent difficulty in creating closure, but each employs in this context different textual strategies. There is also a difference (with interesting consequences) in their state of fragmentariness: whereas *The Burrow* breaks off before the end, *The Trial* does have an ending; its middle, however, is unfinished.

Bernhard, Kafka, and the Collapse of Thinking

Daniela Šterbáková

Observing and describing, together with tireless questioning and inquiring, are at the centre of many discussions and soliloquies of Franz Kafka's and Thomas Bernhard's characters. The characters strive to understand the world, but they never come to a satisfying conclusion: it is always possible to ask yet another question. Thinking, an endeavour to understand, is thus doomed to collapse and so are the characters. They fail, go insane, die or they never begin to live. There are motifs by means of which Kafka and Bernhard give expression to the question of thinking, as well as to differences in what they believe to be the core of the problem. By drawing on Bernhard's novels *Genen*, *Alte Meister* and *Holzfällen*, and on selected works of Kafka, the author focuses on the reasons why for Kafka and Bernhard observing fails as the path to knowledge, why knowledge is deemed deceptive and why (and how) thinking has to be mastered if one is to remain sane and capable of action.