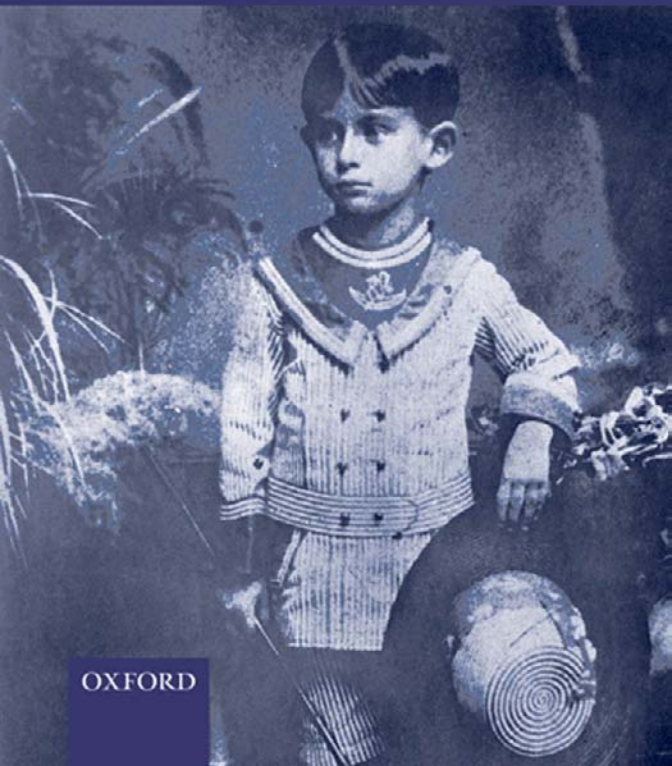
CAROLIN DUTTLINGER

KAFKA

AND PHOTOGRAPHY



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CAROLIN DUTTLINGER

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To Joseph H.

Preface

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Parts of this argument have already appeared in articles elsewhere; parts of Chapter 2 have appeared in ' "Die Ruhe des Blickes": Brod, Kafka, Benjamin and the *Kaiserpanorama*', in Christian Emden and David Midgley (eds.), *Science, Technology and the German Cultural Imagination* (Oxford: Lang, 2005), 231–55. Parts of Chapter 3 have appeared in 'Visions of the New World: Photography in Kafka's *Der Verschollene*', *German Life and Letters*, 59 (2006), 423–45, and parts of Chapter 6 have previously been published in 'Snapshots of History: Franz Kafka's "Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle" and the First World War', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 39 (2006), 24–43.

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List of Abbreviations

Where possible, German references to Kafka's texts are taken from the Critical Edition, edited by Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley, Jost Schillemeit, and Gerhard Kurz. English translations of Kafka's texts and other primary sources have on occasion been silently amended.

Fictional Writings

GV	*Der Verschollene*, ed. Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1983)
GVA	*Der Verschollene: Apparatband*, ed. Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1983)
EA	*The Man Who Disappeared (Amerika)*, trans. and intro. Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin, 1996)
GP	*Der Proceß*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990)
GPA	*Der Proceß: Apparatband*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990)
ET	*The Trial*, trans. Idris Parry (London: Penguin, 1994)
GS	*Das Schloß*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1982)
GSA	*Das Schloß: Apparatband*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1982)
EC	*The Castle*, trans. J. A. Underwood, intro. Idris Parry (London: Penguin, 1997)
D	*Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1994)
DA	*Drucke zu Lebzeiten: Apparatband*, ed. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1996)
N1	*Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1993)
N1A	*Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I: Apparatband*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1993)
N2	*Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*, ed. by Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1992)

ES	*The Collected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (London: Penguin, 1988)

Non-fictional Writings

TB	*Tagebücher*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, and Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990)
TBA	*Tagebücher: Apparatband*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, and Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1990)
ED	*The Diaries of Franz Kafka 1910–23*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh and Martin Greenberg with the cooperation of Hannah Arendt (London: Minerva, 1992)
B1	*Briefe 1900–1912*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1999)
B2	*Briefe 1913–März 1914*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1999)
B3	*Briefe April 1914–1917*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2005)
B	*Briefe 1902–1924*, ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1975)
EL	*Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (London: John Calder, 1978)
EF	*Letters to Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, trans. James Stern and Elisabeth Duckworth (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974)
GM	*Briefe an Milena*, ed. Jürgen Born and Michael Müller, ext. and rev. edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1999)
EM	*Letters to Milena*, ed. Willy Haas, trans. Tania Stern and James Stern (London: Minerva, 1992)
GO	*Briefe an Ottla und die Familie*, ed. Hartmut Binder and Klaus Wagenbach (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1974)
EO	*Letters to Ottla and the Family*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1982)
E	*Briefe an die Eltern aus den Jahren 1922–1924*, ed. Josef Čermák and Martin Svatoš (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1993)
F	Max Brod and Franz Kafka, *Eine Freundschaft*, vol. I: *Reiseaufzeichnungen*, ed. Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987)
A	*Amtliche Schriften*, ed. Klaus Hermsdorf and Benno Wagner (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2004)

AM	*Amtliche Schriften: Materialien*, ed. Klaus Hermsdorf and Benno Wagner (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2004) [CD-ROM]

Other Authors

BGS	Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. paperback edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991)
BSW	Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996–2003)
BA	Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999)

Introduction

> Ein verdrehtes Gesicht habe ich in Wirklichkeit nicht, den visionären Blick habe ich nur bei Blitzlicht.[1]

Kafka's photographs have always had a peculiarly iconic status in relation to his work. In themselves collectors' items, they are amongst the most recognizable of all authors' portraits, and continue to bear a persistent yet unfathomable significance for his writings in the minds of his readers. Philip Roth describes Kafka's appearance on his last photograph as 'sharp and skeletal, a burrower's face: … the ears shaped and angled on his head like angel wings; an intense, creaturely gaze of startled composure'.[2] Gabriel Josipovici uses very similar terms when he writes of Kafka's face as 'at once angelic and animal … completely gathered up into the eyes', concluding that 'his photographs disturb us in the same way as do his writings'.[3] Both writers draw an implicit connection between Kafka's photographs and his work, suggesting that his portraits can somehow contribute to an understanding of his enigmatic texts. However, while photographs *of* Kafka may loom large in his readers' imagination, Kafka's own stance towards photography, and in particular his extensive literary

[1] 'I haven't actually got a twisted face; it's only the flash that gives me that visionary gaze.' Kafka, in a letter to Felice Bauer of 2/3 December 1912 (B1 293/ EF 82).

[2] Philip Roth, 'I Always Wanted You to Admire my Fasting or, Looking at Kafka', in J. P. Stern (ed.), *The World of Franz Kafka* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), 202–17: 202.

[3] Gabriel Josipovici, *The Lessons of Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 3–4. Another critic fascinated by Kafka's photographs is Walter Benjamin, whose comments on one of his childhood portraits I shall discuss in Chapter 1.

engagement with the medium, has been something of a blind spot in existing scholarship.

Although Kafka's fascination with photography certainly matched that of these critics, he would have been highly sceptical of any attempts to establish an equivalence between his photographs and writings. The very photographs which have held such significance for his readers are dismissed by Kafka, as my epigraph suggests, as distorting and misleading. Indeed, throughout his life he saw photography as an intriguing yet inherently problematic medium, an attitude which permeates both his fictional and personal writings.

An anecdote told by his Hebrew teacher, Friedrich Thieberger, illustrates Kafka's ambivalent stance:

> Ich sehe mich mit ihm vor dem Eingang seines Hauses stehen, als nach einem düstern Gespräch über persönliche Dinge unvermittelt das mildeste Lächeln auf seinem Gesicht lag, und er sagte: 'Ich muß Ihnen etwas zeigen!' Und mit einer behutsamen Bewegung der Hand, die etwas sehr Kostbares versteckt hervorholen sollte, griff er nach seiner Brieftasche, öffnete sie geradezu ängstlich und fand endlich mitten unter verschiedenen Zetteln das Gesuchte: eine Photographie, auf der die Kinder seiner ältesten Schwester abgebildet waren. Sein ganzer Trost an den sanften Einzelheiten des Lebens lag in seinem Blick. Aber ich erinnere mich an eine ganz andere Äußerung von ihm über Photographien. Da konnte man etwas von dem Grauen ahnen, das er dort empfunden haben mußte, wo er in allgemeine Zusammenhänge schaute. Ich begegnete ihm einmal, als ich einen unförmigen Kasten für photographische Vergrößerungen trug. Er staunte darüber. 'Sie photographieren?' fragte er, 'das ist doch eigentlich etwas Unheimliches', und nach einer kurzen Pause—'das vergrößern Sie noch!'[4]
>
> I can still see myself standing with him outside his front door when, after a gloomy conversation about personal matters, a gentle smile suddenly crossed his face, and he said: 'I must show you something!' And with a careful gesture as if secretly taking out something precious, he seized his wallet, opened it almost anxiously and finally found what he was looking for amongst numerous scraps of paper: a photograph depicting his eldest sister's children. His gaze reflected all his consolation in the little details of life. But I also remember an altogether different comment from him about

[4] Friedrich Thieberger, 'Kafka und die Thiebergers', in Hans-Gerd Koch (ed.), *'Als Kafka mir entgegenkam …': Erinnerungen an Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2000), 121–7: 123–4.

photographs. There one could gauge something of the horror which he must have felt when he was confronted with general structures and mechanisms. Once I bumped into him while carrying a cumbersome box for photographic enlargements. He was astounded. 'You take photographs?' he asked, 'but isn't that something rather uncanny?' And, after a brief pause, 'and you're even enlarging them!'

While Kafka here treats private photographs as cherished possessions, much as he does in his letters and diaries, he is also aware of the medium's uncanny character. As his response to Thieberger and his enlargement device suggests, this suspicion is reinforced by the technological dimension of photography: its capacity for mechanical reproduction and manipulation. Through techniques such as enlargement, the snapshot or serial photography, the camera opens up previously inaccessible realms of visual experience, providing new perspectives on supposedly familiar sights. Photographs thus uncover what Walter Benjamin calls the 'optical unconscious' of reality (BGS II 371/BSW II 511–12)—those details which are not commonly visible to the naked eye and which can acquire a disquieting character, not least because of the element of chance which undermines the photographer's control over the resulting image. Photography thus unsettles our received understanding of reality; despite bringing even remote sights within our reach, it can profoundly alienate us from what it depicts.

Regardless of his serious reservations about photography, Kafka was fascinated throughout his life by its versatility and its ubiquity in modern culture. In this respect, photography provides a focal point for his wider interests in visual perception and representation. Kafka allegedly described himself as an 'Augenmensch' ['visual person', literally 'an eye man'],[5] and his closest friend Max Brod stresses that Kafka's access to reality was primarily visual rather than analytical.[6] Yet the one for Kafka does not necessarily preclude the other. Indeed, photography's particular fascination for him lay in its ability to open up previously unnoticed realms of reality, thus provoking

[5] Gustav Janouch, *Gespräche mit Kafka*, 2nd revised and enlarged edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1968), 216; *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. Goronwy Rees, 2nd revised and enlarged edn (London: Deutsch, 1971), 160.

[6] Max Brod, *Über Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1966), 52.

reflection and interpretation. In his engagement with photographs he frequently resorts to textual commentary, analysis, and narrativization. Although Kafka never showed a particular interest in the practical dimension of photography, his extensive textual engagement with the medium illustrates the fascination that photographs held for him as an observer and writer. Indeed, his attraction to the medium is concerned with precisely this interface between image and text, with the ecphrastic translation from the visual into the verbal, but also with photography's stubborn resistance to this process. In Kafka's eyes, photographs offer only a limited and potentially puzzling view of reality, and he is frequently intrigued by what lies beyond the photographic frame. Such images appear to him as inherently incomplete representations of reality, and thus in need of textual supplementation. Indeed, the meaning of a photograph is rarely self-evident; Kafka portrays photographs as riddles to be resolved and finds himself drawn to incongruous or opaque details which undermine their overall 'message'. Paradoxically, however, his textual commentaries rarely reduce the pictures' ambiguity but only reinforce their inherent mystery.

Although photography is the most prominent and versatile of the visual media featured in Kafka's texts, it would be reductive to discuss it in isolation from other types of images, whether technical or traditional. For Kafka, photography forms part of the wider, dynamic domain of modernist visual culture; revealingly, he often uses the non-specific term *Bild* to describe such diverse phenomena as photography, painting, film, and even unmediated sights or impressions. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether an image discussed by Kafka is indeed a photograph; this ambiguity serves to underscore the continuities between different media and forms of experience. That said, photography remains the dominant paradigm onto which Kafka maps his encounters with the various spectacles of modern culture.

Kafka was fascinated with photography throughout his life; his first literary engagement with the medium dates back to his school years, and he continued to write about it until shortly before his death. Photography and photographs feature in all three of his novels, in several of his most famous shorter prose works, as well as forming a particularly persistent theme in the letters and diaries. Indeed, over

the course of his literary career, Kafka would come to explore the most central concerns of his writing—such as the family, identity, gender relations, memory, and power—through the photographic lens. Despite the diversity of these concerns, and Kafka's overall ambivalence towards the medium, photography remains a surprisingly stable presence in Kafka's writings, creating a sense of continuity between earlier and later, fictional and autobiographical texts.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN KAFKA'S PRAGUE: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Visual culture in the early twentieth century was undergoing a dynamic transformation. The technical media played a key role in this process of modernization, whereby innovations in the fields of technology and mass entertainment also affected the traditional arts. Accordingly, modernist visual culture was characterized by tensions between high and popular culture, between authenticity and reproduction, tradition and progress. Kafka took a great interest in these issues, and his texts explore the dialectical interplay between such conflicting visual paradigms. Indeed, part of his particular fascination with photography stemmed from its ambiguous position between tradition and modernity. Invented in the first half of the nineteenth century, photography had by Kafka's time become a familiar and well-established phenomenon;[7] nonetheless, it had marked the advent of a technological revolution which continued to transform visual culture, a fact which lent it paradigmatic significance as a harbinger of modernity. The technique of serial photography as developed by Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey had paved the way towards the invention of film, while aerial photography played a vital strategic role during the First World War. Moreover, the turn

[7] Photography was invented in 1839, and by the early twentieth century had already become the subject of historical exploration. Walter Benjamin's 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie' ('Little History of Photography', 1931), in turn a review of contemporary historical studies, contrasts the early phase of the daguerreotype with the subsequent decline in taste effected by photography's popularization.

of the twentieth century saw a huge proliferation of photographic images, not only through the printed mass media but also through the production of more affordable portable cameras such as the Kodak 'box', which popularized photography as an amateur occupation.[8]

Although apparently on the periphery of Europe's cultural landscape, Kafka's Prague was the site of a thriving and diverse photographic scene. Prague photographers were engaged in a wide range of experimental, scientific, and artistic projects including studio and landscape photography, physiognomic, ethnographic, and anthropological portraiture, war photography, and avant-garde photo-collage.[9] Photography thus formed an integral part of both public and private culture; indeed, the large number of snapshots and studio portraits depicting Kafka, his family and friends, which have been collected in various illustrated volumes, underlines the pervasive role of photography in Kafka's life. Of him alone, twenty-four such images have survived, depicting him at different stages of his life from the age of one to the year of his death.[10] Many professional photographers pursued their artistic ambitions alongside their commercial enterprise; indeed, two childhood portraits of Kafka and his sisters were taken by the photographer Moritz Klempfner, who also photographed the writer Jan Neruda and who created photographic *tableaux vivants* in which he restaged allegorical motifs in a modern context.[11]

[8] For accounts of the history of photography, see Ian Jeffrey, *Photography: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981); Graham Clarke, *The Photograph*, Oxford History of Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd edn (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997); and Gerhard Kemner and Gelia Eisert, *Lebende Bilder: Eine Technikgeschichte des Films* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000).

[9] The breadth and versatility of Czech photography was demonstrated by the exhibition 'Czech Photography 1840–1950: A Story of a Modern Medium', which was held in Prague's Galerie Rudolfinum from 15 January to 28 March 2004. See Jaroslav Anděl, *Česká fotografie 1840–1950: Příběh moderního média* (Prague: Galerie Rudolfinum, 2004).

[10] The most comprehensive collection of photographs relating to Kafka's life is Klaus Wagenbach's *Franz Kafka: Bilder aus seinem Leben*, 2nd extended edn (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1994). An earlier volume which systematically assembled such pictures is the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Franz Kafka 1883–1924* in the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, in 1966.

[11] For the photographs, see Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka: Bilder*, 13–14. On Klempfner's allegorical photographs, see Pavel Scheufler, *Pražské fotografické ateliéry 1839–1918*, vol. 1: *1839–1889* (Prague: City of Prague Museum, 1987), 28, 102–3.

It is thus no coincidence that the studio portrait is the most frequently thematized photographic genre in Kafka's writing. Since its popularization in the mid-nineteenth century, such images had become a vital tool for the rising bourgeoisie in its quest to define for itself a social identity. As early as 1865, photographs had been described as 'the bourgeoisie's ancestral portraits',[12] that is, as an equivalent to the painted portrait enabling the middle classes to document their own status. Yet this stabilizing and assertive role of portrait photography relied on a highly codified iconography of bourgeois subjecthood. Thus photography's function as a tool of self-definition and self-fashioning coincided with the commercialization of the portrait industry, which brought with it a tendency towards uniformity and resulted in a deluge of stereotypical, formulaic pictures. The vogue for portrait photography, however, had its counterpart in more openly disciplinary uses of the medium which likewise emerged in the nineteenth century, when photography was increasingly used as a tool of categorization and registration, of surveillance and control. In disciplines such as ethnology, anthropology, criminology, and psychiatry, the medium served to depict various forms of 'otherness' both intrinsic and extrinsic to European society, thus policing the borders of normative identity. Kafka was highly aware of both dimensions of photographic portraiture and their dialectical relationship. In his texts, he repeatedly emphasizes the restrictive character of bourgeois identity constructions which are imposed onto the sitter, echoing the de-individualizing constraints of modern society. At the same time, he also addresses the more openly disciplinary uses of photography, for instance in criminology and anthropology, which provide an implicit counter-model to the bourgeois studio portrait.

Apart from these professional uses, photography was also gaining increasing popularity as an amateur occupation. Although Kafka appears not to have owned a camera, he occasionally took photographs, especially when travelling.[13] Unlike Brod, however, who liked to instruct less experienced amateurs, Kafka was never a

[12] Kemner and Eisert, *Lebende Bilder*, 55.

[13] We know of one type of camera, a model called 'Bella', with which Kafka took a picture when staying with his sister in Zürau. See the exhibition programme accompanying the catalogue *Kafkas Fabriken*, ed. Hans-Gerd Koch and Klaus Wagenbach, Marbacher Magazin, 100 (Marbach: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2002), 5.

particularly successful photographer; the few references to photographic recording in his diaries and letters all stress the obstacles which beset this process. In contrast, his primary interest was in the acquisition, viewing, and interpretation of photographs both private and public. As we shall see, Kafka frequently took his literary inspiration from photographs he saw in magazines and newspapers, in adverts, and on film posters and picture postcards. Photographs also played an important role in his work for the Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt [Workers' Accident Insurance Company], but the most important—and for Kafka most inspiring—pictures were those which he exchanged in a personal context, with friends, relatives, and lovers. Throughout his life, his correspondences were linked by one common thread: the insatiable desire for photographs of his addressees, which he invested with great emotional significance. In some cases, this demand for personal pictures even formed part of a deliberate ploy; as I demonstrate in Chapters 5 and 6, both Kafka and his protagonists make strategic use of photography as a tool of seduction. It is in their capacity as desired erotic objects and as symbols of an intimate connection that private pictures leave their deepest mark on Kafka's writings.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE: COMPETITION AND COOPERATION

The far-reaching aesthetic, social, and cultural ramifications of photography have long been reflected in literary responses to the medium. Since its invention in 1839, the mechanical nature of the recording process, as well as the realism of the resulting pictures, had been perceived as a challenge to traditional art forms; painters in particular felt threatened by the new technology and eventually responded to this invention with a movement towards abstraction. However, this debate also extended into the field of literature. Nineteenth-century writers such as Heine and Baudelaire perceived photography as diametrically opposed to the literary text, criticizing its automated mode of production which left no room for human intervention and

inventiveness. Even Realists and Naturalists, whose literary agenda echoed the immediacy of the photograph, were keen to distance themselves from the 'soulless' mechanical copies of reality produced by the camera.[14]

It was only in the early twentieth century that the relationship between writers and photography became a more inclusive one, resulting in such works as André Breton's *Nadja* (1928) and Kurt Tucholsky's *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (1929), which integrated photographs into the literary text. This practice was further developed in the avant-garde movement, particularly in Dadaist collage; in Prague, in turn, the Devětsil group of Czech artists, which emerged after the First World War under the leadership of Karel Teige, created so-called 'picture-poems', collages of text and photography.[15] Kafka was thus writing in a cultural environment where a more constructive dialogue between literature and photography was beginning to emerge. Max Brod in particular displayed a great interest in the technical media and their impact on modern life, literature, and culture; in his essay collection *Über die Schönheit häßlicher Bilder* (*On the Beauty of Ugly Images*, 1913), he devotes several pieces to photography and film, and he also contributes to Kurt Pinthus's *Das Kinobuch* (*The Cinema-Book*, 1914), a collection of film scripts by literary authors. Kafka's work is less obviously involved in such developments; indeed, at first sight his texts appear largely unaffected by these modernist interrelations between literature and the new media. A closer look, however, counters this impression. Although nothing Kafka wrote was exclusively devoted to photography or film, the complexity of his engagement with such technical media by far exceeds that of Brod's essayistic pieces.

[14] For an exploration of the relationship between photography and nineteenth-century German literature, see Erwin Koppen, *Literatur und Photographie: Über Geschichte und Thematik einer Medienentdeckung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987); Gerhard Plumpe, *Der tote Blick: Zum Diskurs der Photographie in der Zeit des Realismus* (Munich: Fink, 1990); Rolf H. Krauss, *Photographie und Literatur: Zur photographischen Wahrnehmung in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 2000); and Bernd Stiegler, *Philologie des Auges: Die photographische Entdeckung der Welt im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Fink, 2001).

[15] Anděl, *Česká fotografie*, 46–9.

READING KAFKA PHOTOGRAPHICALLY

This study traces Kafka's engagement with photography through a cross-reading of his literary texts and personal writings. My aim here is not to promote a naïvely biographical interpretation, but rather to take the letters and diaries as an integral part of Kafka's literary production. These personal texts complement, prefigure, and reflect the fictional works,[16] and their manifold connections are particularly evident in relation to photography. Importantly, however, this 'cross-fertilization' between Kafka's fictional and non-fictional texts takes place on two different levels. Not only are particular photographic motifs transplanted into a literary context, but Kafka also transfers more general modes of visual perception and experience from his personal to his fictional writings and vice versa, thus interlinking the two on psychological, aesthetic, and epistemological levels.

In this study, I adopt a broadly chronological approach which traces the continuities and discontinuities in Kafka's writings on photography. This is coupled with an emphasis on the different thematic, cultural, and historical configurations in which the medium appears in his works. For this purpose I shall explore Kafka's texts against the backdrop of other early twentieth-century discourses, including scientific, political, and philosophical explorations of photography. Although Kafka has traditionally been approached through rather abstract interpretative frameworks, recent years have seen a greater readiness to situate his texts within their cultural and historical context. While no study has been exclusively devoted to the role of photography in Kafka's works, various critics have touched on this topic as part of a wider cultural-historical approach.[17] As I shall

[16] The fact that Kafka repeatedly reworked diary passages, especially from the travel diaries, illustrates the literary significance which he accorded to them. See, for instance, Malcolm Pasley, 'Kafka als Reisender', in Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler (ed.), *Was bleibt von Franz Kafka? Positionsbestimmung* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1985), 1–15: 7; Reiner Stach, *Kafka erotischer Mythos: Eine ästhetische Konstruktion des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987), 92; and Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 44.

[17] Articles which focus mainly or substantially on the role of photography in Kafka's writings include Heinz Ladendorf, 'Kafka und die Kunstgeschichte', *Wallraf-Richartz-*

demonstrate, it is through a combination of close readings and historical contextualization that Kafka's visual imagination can be most fruitfully explored.

Kafka's engagement with photography was first stressed by three critics associated with the Frankfurt School. Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno were the first to recognize and explore the importance of the medium for an understanding of Kafka's works. As I demonstrate in Chapter 1, their essays offer incisive inquiries into the aesthetic, social, and psychological significance of photography for Kafka's writings. Importantly, however, they are concerned not primarily with the motif of photography in Kafka's texts but with its role as a representational paradigm which profoundly inspired his literary outlook and approach. Benjamin, moreover, engages with one photograph of the young Kafka, which he figures as illustration, anticipation, and allegory of the later writings.

Jahrbuch, 23 (1961), 293–326; 25 (1963), 227–62; Franca Schettino, 'Photography in Kafka's *Amerika*: A Case of Transformation in the Narrative Literary Medium', in Moshe Lazar and Ronald Gottesman (eds.), *The Dove and the Mole: Kafka's Journey into Darkness and Creativity* (Malibu: Undena, 1987), 109–33; Michel Collomb, 'Kafka et la photographie', in Roger Bozzetto, J. Molino, and André M. Rousseau (eds.), *Art et littérature* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1988), 151–8; and Michael Neumann, 'Die "Zunge", die "Ruhe", das "Bild" und die "Schrift": Franz Kafkas Phänomenologie des Photographischen', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, 76 (2002), 672–95. Reiner Stach, in *Kafkas erotischer Mythos*, and Elizabeth Boa, in *Kafka: Gender*, have commented on photography in relation to gender, whereas Wolf Kittler, in 'Schreibmaschinen, Sprechmaschinen: Effekte technischer Medien im Werk Franz Kafkas', in Wolf Kittler and Gerhard Neumann (eds.), *Franz Kafka: Schriftverkehr* (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 1990), 75–163, refers to the medium in his article on Kafka and technologies of writing. Mark Anderson, in *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg 'Fin-de-Siècle'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; repr. 2002), discusses photography as part of Kafka's engagement with *fin de siècle* culture, and John Zilcosky's *Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2003) likewise touches on this topic. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in their *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, fore. Réda Bensmaïa, Theory and History of Literature, 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), mobilize the medium in a more abstract, metaphorical capacity, as part of their anti-Freudian reading of his texts. Kafka's more general stance towards the art historical tradition is addressed by Ladendorf, 'Kafka und die Kunstgeschichte', and Hartmut Binder, in 'Kafka und die Skulpturen', *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 16 (1972), 623–47, while Jacqueline Sudaka-Bénazéraf, *Franz Kafka: Aspects d'une poétique du regard* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), discusses Kafka's own drawings and sketches. Zischler's intriguing *Kafka Goes to the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003; German original, 1996) focuses on the role of film in the diaries and letters.

Kafka's early diaries, discussed in Chapter 2, testify to his immense fascination with a wide and diverse range of visual media and technologies which he encounters both at home and on his travels. He not only describes a variety of different visual media and their representational techniques and optical effects, but also reflects on the relationship between visual technologies and the literary text. This relationship, however, is by no means unproblematic; in his encounters with the cinema, for example, the fleeting images projected onto the screen resist and fragment narrative inscription. The stereoscopic photographs displayed in the Kaiser Panorama, in contrast, allow for a more focused mode of perception and description. Indeed, this particular episode in the early diaries turns out to be crucial for Kafka's subsequent literary development, as it introduces a more continuous, sustained mode of perception which is then mobilized in the fiction.

As I argue in Chapter 3, both Kafka's encounters with the heterogeneous spectacles of modern life and his more sustained, 'photographic' mode of perception are transplanted into *Der Verschollene* (*The Man Who Disappeared*, also known as *Amerika*). Photography features in the novel in two guises: it is closely associated with Karl Rossmann's European origins, while also shaping Kafka's portrayal of the United States. In both instances, Kafka draws on actual photographs as tools of literary inspiration; by juxtaposing private family portraits with published travel photographs of the United States, the novel highlights both differences and continuities between traditional (European) and modern (American) forms of visual experience.

The photographic portrait and its significance for familial power dynamics recur as key themes in *Die Verwandlung* (*Metamorphosis*). The fourth chapter explores the role of photography in this text in the light of various intertextual connections with, for instance, the letters and Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz* (*Venus in Furs*). While stressing the role of photography for the construction of social, cultural, and personal identity, these texts also imply how the power relations and hierarchies underpinning these constructs might be reversed and subverted. Thus Gregor Samsa's previous conformity to photographic frameworks of identity is exploded when he transforms into the monstrous 'other' of this order, a process which is accompanied, condensed, and even triggered by photographic images.

Chapter 5 focuses on Kafka's detailed and extensive engagement with photography in his correspondence, primarily with Felice Bauer. The numerous photographs which Kafka and Felice exchange in the course of their courtship figure as objects of desire, screens for projection, and substitutes for physical proximity. Kafka tries to 'decode' Felice's photographs through a fetishistic mode of interpretation founded on a dialectical interplay between the presence of the photograph and the absence of its referent. However, while Kafka thus invests individual photographs of Felice and other female correspondents with a precarious emotive charge, he is also fascinated by the illicit accumulation and exchange of personal, even erotic, images.

As I demonstrate in Chapter 6, Kafka's engagement with Felice's photographs as riddles requiring explanation is mobilized in *Der Proceß* (*The Trial*), where the medium becomes closely associated with themes of criminology, analysis, and detection. The text draws on two criminological applications of photography: its testimonial capacity as a record of the 'scene of the crime', and its role for the establishment of physiognomic typologies of criminality. In this respect, *Der Proceß* represents a distorted version of the detective story, one in which the role of photography as a means of criminological investigation is travestied in the protagonist's unsuccessful attempts to gain a complete and objective picture of his situation.

Chapter 7 explores the recurrence of this interplay between vision and power in 'Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle' ('Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor'), 'Ein Hungerkünstler' ('A Hunger Artist'), and *Das Schloß* (*The Castle*). In the first two texts, photography is used as a manipulative tool of political propaganda and popular entertainment. Whereas the bachelor Blumfeld is reminiscent of Gregor Samsa in his investment in mass-produced images, the hunger artist is the victim of a culture industry which progressively replaces the artist's body with mass-produced photographic simulacra. The alienating and deceptive effect of the technical media is highlighted in Kafka's last novel, where such questions take on a more abstract, existential character. In the world of the Castle, photographs and other images function as part of an overall machinery of surveillance, manipulation, and control. More than any other of Kafka's characters, the land surveyor K. fails in his attempts to measure, map out, and record the

surrounding reality, and thus to gain insight into his own position and identity.

As this study demonstrates, Kafka's texts are deeply yet subtly influenced by his engagement with the visual culture of his time. From within the complexity of Kafka's writings on photography, however, one insight emerges with striking insistence: while photographs bring the world within the viewer's reach, rendering it accessible and apparently comprehensible, they also contribute to a profound sense of distance and alienation. Despite their apparent immediacy, photographs expose a fundamental rift between essence and appearance, between surface and depth, remoteness and proximity, and as such they feature as an endlessly alluring yet deeply troubling presence in Kafka's works. Photography thus acts as a nodal point in his writings, a phenomenon which invites an interpretation which it simultaneously resists, both reflecting and refracting the underlying concerns of Kafka's literary vision.

1

Kafka and Photography: History of a Theoretical Configuration

Kafka's contemporaries were quick to realize the importance of photography for an understanding of his work. The 'photographic' nature of Kafka's texts was stressed by Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno, who all discerned a deep affinity between his writings and the medium. This approach reflects not only these critics' common agenda but also the more general cultural and intellectual climate of their and Kafka's time. Highlighting various concerns shared by Kafka—such as the relationship between photography and literature, the fragmenting effect of the photographic gaze, and its role in shaping the individual's relationship to society—these critics provide a theoretical backdrop against which Kafka's own conceptions of photography can be explored.

Kracauer, Benjamin, and Adorno approach the topic from both sides of the photographic lens. For them, the photographic paradigm brings out new and previously unnoticed aspects of Kafka's literary vision, while his own writings on the medium in turn open up new perspectives on photography's historical, social, and political ramifications. Indeed, for none of these writers is photography simply an objective, mimetic medium. In particular, Kracauer's and Benjamin's respective essays on photography, written within four years of each other, move beyond the cliché of photographic realism and immediacy, stressing instead the medium's anti-realist dimensions and its associated critical potential. Despite their superficially mimetic character, photographs challenge rather than affirm our familiar view of the world. While Kracauer argues that photography counteracts the status quo through its fragmenting effect on reality, for

Benjamin photography reveals the 'optical unconscious' of reality: those details, angles, and perspectives which can only be captured on film as they evade the unmediated human gaze. For both critics, then, the advent of photography opens up new, potentially alien perspectives on reality, revealing our view of the world to be provisional, one-sided, and hence potentially subject to change. This anti-realist conception of photography is central to all three critics' engagement with Kafka; what is more, it also underpins—as we shall see in later chapters—Kafka's own explorations of the medium. To read Kafka photographically is thus to home in on the fundamental tensions of modern life, in which the individual is confronted and constructed by impersonal socio-political machineries.

Despite an overall affinity in their critical outlook and approach, however, the three thinkers approach the issue of Kafka and photography from different angles. While Kracauer draws a general comparison between Kafka's literary style and the photographic medium, Adorno explores this analogy through more detailed textual analyses. Benjamin's take on this issue is at once more specific and more general. He engages with a childhood photograph of the author, which he explores in no fewer than three different texts, interlinking literary criticism with a history of photography and his own personal recollections. For Benjamin, this particular image encapsulates not only various central aspects of Kafka's writings but also the character of an entire era: that of the turn of the twentieth century, the threshold between tradition and modernity, which forms a crucial reference point in the works of both Benjamin and Kafka.

KRACAUER AND ADORNO: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GAZE

In his essay 'Die Photographie' ('Photography', 1927), Siegfried Kracauer is the first to associate Kafka's narrative style with the photographic gaze. On the whole, Kracauer's stance towards photography is rather ambivalent; he regards the medium as symptomatic of the progressive erosion of a unified individual and collective consciousness. Contrasting photographs with 'memory images' stored by the

human mind, he argues that the former depict the totality of a given scene without selection or omission. The human mind, in contrast, does not record all available information but selects specific features which hold a personal significance, fusing them into a meaningful whole. While photography thus appears to offer the more complete picture of reality, this totality is in fact deeply fragmented, as its individual components are not unified by an underlying meaning: 'Die Photographie erfaßt das Gegebene als ein räumliches (oder zeitliches) Kontinuum, die Gedächtnisbilder bewahren es, insofern es etwas meint' ['Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory images retain what is given only insofar as it has signficance'].[1]

Kracauer uses a portrait of his grandmother as a girl to illustrate the fragmentary effect of photography; as the temporal gap between viewer and sitter widens, the grandmother's appearance dissolves into a half-ridiculous, half-uncanny array of outdated clothes, hairstyle, and accessories, which are no longer held together by a personal familiarity with the sitter: 'Es fröstelt den Betrachter alter Photographien. Denn sie veranschaulichen nicht die Erkenntnis des Originals, sondern die räumliche Konfiguration eines Augenblicks; nicht der Mensch tritt in seiner Photographie heraus, sondern die Summe dessen, was von ihm abzuziehen ist' ['A shudder runs through the viewer of old photographs. For they make visible not the knowledge of the original but the spatial configuration of a moment; what appears in the photograph is not the person but the sum of what can be subtracted from him or her'].[2] Yet this process of fragmentation is not limited to old photographs, but lies at the heart of modern culture. It comes to the fore in the illustrated magazine, whose random assemblage of images and information 'schließt systematisch den Zusammenhang aus, der dem Bewußtsein sich eröffnet' ['systematically excludes their

[1] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Photographie', in *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 21–39: 25; 'Photography', in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans., ed., and intro. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 47–63: 50. For a more general account of Kracauer's theory of photography in relation to historical consciousness, see Dagmar Barnouw, *Critical Realism: History, Photography, and the Work of Siegfried Kracauer* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

[2] Kracauer, 'Photographie', 32; 'Photography', 56–7.

contextual framework available to consciousness'].[3] Kracauer's essay thus traces the fundamental discrepancy between human experience and a photographic view of the world which 'assembles in effigy the last elements of a nature alienated from meaning'.[4] Yet this is not a purely negative process; at the end of his essay, Kracauer revalorizes this development, highlighting its constructive, emancipatory potential.

If the coherence of reality is undermined by the dissecting photographic gaze, this can trigger an awareness of the provisionality of the status quo. This realization can in turn be mobilized for the sake of a complete re-ordering of society; faced with the photographic fragments of reality, the observer should reconstruct the 'richtigen Ordnung des Naturbestands' ['right order of the inventory of nature'].[5] It is at this crucial point in the argument that Kracauer turns to Kafka, whose works both illustrate and counteract this process:

> In den Werken Franz Kafkas entledigt sich das freigesetzte Bewußtsein dieser Verpflichtung [der Rekonstruktion]; es zerschlägt die natürliche Realität und verstellt die Bruchstücke gegeneinander. Die Unordnung des in der Photographie gespiegelten Abfalls kann nicht deutlicher klargestellt werden als durch die Aufhebung jeder gewohnten Beziehung zwischen den Naturelementen.[6]
>
> In the works of Franz Kafka, a liberated consciousness absolves itself of this obligation [of reconstruction] by destroying natural reality and scrambling the fragments. The disorder of the detritus reflected in photography cannot be elucidated more clearly than through the suspension of every habitual relationship among the elements of nature.[7]

Kafka's texts take the fragmenting effect of photography to a new extreme; having dissolved the familiar unity of reality, they resist the reintegration of its disparate elements into a new harmonious whole. In Kracauer's reading, then, Kafka's works mobilize a photographic aesthetic of fragmentation, illustrating its disorienting consequences in scenarios which offer no scope for synthesis.

[3] Kracauer, 'Photographie', 34; 'Photography', 58.
[4] Kracauer, 'Photographie', 38; 'Photography', 62.
[5] Kracauer, 'Photographie', 39; 'Photography', 62.
[6] Kracauer, 'Photographie', 39.
[7] Kracauer, 'Photography', 62.

Kracauer does not pursue this notion of Kafka's 'photographic' imagination any further, thus leaving it in a suggestive state of fragmentation.[8] However, his idea is subsequently developed by Theodor Adorno, who explores the structural analogies between photography and Kafka's writings in different contexts, returning to this topic over the course of twenty years. Written almost thirty years after Kracauer's essay, Adorno's 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka' ('Notes on Kafka', 1953) argues that photographic fragmentation can be mobilized to critical effect. Adorno describes Kafka's work as a 'Rätselbild' ['enigmatic image'] of reality composed of its scattered fragments;[9] both Kafka's characters and his narratives more generally adopt a quasi-photographic perspective on reality, whose heterogeneous sights are captured as if through the lens of a camera.[10] As a result, Kafka's texts are pervaded by a 'Schatz der Blitzlichtaufnahmen kreidig und mongoloid wie eine kleinbürgerliche Hochzeit Henri Rousseaus' ['a fund of flash photographs … as chalky and mongoloid as a petty bourgeois wedding by Henri Rousseau'],[11] inducing a sense of 'shock' in his readers who find themselves confronted with these disturbingly vivid snapshots.[12] Indeed, Kafka's texts are informed by a fundamental tension, whereby the discursive continuity of the narrative is recurrently disrupted by static visual scenes: 'Vorgestrig grelle Tableaux … sind vielfach in sein Werk eingelassen; vielleicht hätte alles Tableau werden sollen, und einzig ein Überschuß an Intention hat es durch lange Dialoge verhindert' ['Yesterday's gaudy tableaux … are frequently inserted into his work; perhaps everything was originally supposed to become a tableau and only an excess of intention prevented

[8] Kracauer wrote various pieces on Kafka during his time as literary editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Prior to publishing his 'Photography' essay, he had reviewed *Der Proceß* (1 November 1925) and *Das Schloß* (28 November 1926), subsequently followed by a review of *Der Verschollene* (23 December 1927) and the posthumous edition of stories (3 and 9 September 1931). For a full bibliography of Kracauer's publications, see Thomas Y. Levin, *Siegfried Kracauer: Eine Bibliographie seiner Schriften* (Marbach: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989).

[9] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, paperback edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), x. 254–87: 278; 'Notes on Kafka', in *Prisms*, transl. Shierry Weber and Samuel Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 243–71: 264.

[10] Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen', 263–7, 284; 'Notes', 252–5, 269.

[11] Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen', 267; 'Notes', 256.

[12] Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen', 263; 'Notes', 253.

this, through long dialogues']. [13] By implication, the photographic moments of Kafka's narratives are associated with a reduced level of authorial intention, suggesting that such images are the result of a pre-rational, instinctive mode of creation. For Adorno, as for Kracauer, this photographic character enforces the anti-realism of Kafka's texts, their capacity to arrest the world in vividly alien tableaux.

While Adorno's 'Kafka' essay echoes an idea first expressed by Kracauer, his argument is more immediately influenced by his dialogue with Walter Benjamin. In a letter to Benjamin of 17 December 1934, Adorno develops an interpretative model which prefigures his later, more detailed analysis:

> Führe ich Ihnen meinen ältesten, 9 Jahre zurückliegenden Deutungsversuch zu Kafka an: er sei eine Photographie des irdischen Lebens aus der Perspektive des erlösten, von dem nichts darauf vorkommt als ein Zipfel des schwarzen Tuches, während die grauenvoll verschobene Optik des Bildes keine andere ist als die der schräg gestellten Kamera selber.[14]
>
> Let me only mention my earliest attempt to interpret Kafka, nine years ago now—I claimed he represents a photograph of our earthly world from the perspective of a redeemed life, one which merely reveals the latter through a corner of the black cloth, whereas the horribly distorted optics of the photographic image is none other than that of the obliquely angled camera itself.[15]

This passage offers a radicalized version of Adorno's later argument. In terms both general and elliptical, Kafka's work is described as a photograph of earthly life recorded from a transcendent perspective. In this quasi-theological framework, the author takes on the role of a photographer. Despite his 'redeemed' position, however, he does not provide a harmonious, conciliatory view of reality; rather, the image of the world obtained through his 'obliquely angled' camera is horribly distorted. At this point, however, the argument takes a further dialectical twist: the distortion of this worldly scene is not a

[13] Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen', 264; 'Notes', 253.

[14] Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), 90.

[15] Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 66.

reflection of the real state of affairs but results from the photographer's wonky equipment. Kafka's photographic narratives do not offer an immediate replication of reality but confront the reader with subtly and disconcertingly distorted snapshots of modern life.

Crucially, the resulting snapshots do not eclipse the difference between the depicted world and the perspective of their producer. As Adorno stresses, the corner of the photographer's cloth is visible in the resulting picture, acting as a tangible trace of the underlying process of representation. By abandoning the phantasmagoria of photographic realism in favour of a narrative optic which lays open its own techniques of distorting exposure, Kafka's texts uncover their own reifying social and psychological foundations. In Adorno's letter, then, the photographic paradigm serves to repudiate both conventionally realist and symbolic interpretations; Kafka's texts are photographic in the way that their skewed perspective exposes the underlying power structures of reality as its optical unconscious.

'TORTURE CHAMBER AND THRONE ROOM': ICONOGRAPHIES OF A BOURGEOIS CHILDHOOD

The above passage appears within a detailed letter in which Adorno responds to the manuscript of Benjamin's 'Kafka' essay, subtitled 'Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages' ('Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death', 1934). Adorno claims that his own interpretation is in fact nine years old, thus predating Kracauer's 'Photography' essay, yet it requires the catalyst of Benjamin's comments on the relation between Kafka and photography to bring to light Adorno's own ideas about this configuration.

Although Adorno responds to Benjamin's 'Kafka' essay with various points of query and dissent, he singles out the issue of photography as evidence of their 'Übereinstimmung in den philosophischen Zentren' ['agreement in philosophical fundamentals'].[16] At first sight, however, Benjamin's argument is based on a rather different premise.

[16] Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel*, 90; *Correspondence*, 66.

1. Franz Kafka, *c.* 1887.

Both Adorno and Kracauer draw analogies between Kafka's texts and photographic modes of representation; Benjamin's contribution to this debate, in contrast, is at once more specific and more associative. Rather than casting Kafka's narratives as photographic in terms of their narrative style and perspective, he engages with a real photograph, a studio portrait of the author as a four-year-old child. This portrait becomes something of a nodal point within Benjamin's writings: it is discussed not only in the 'Kafka' essay but also in 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie' ('Little History of Photography', 1931) and, somewhat more surprisingly, in his childhood memoirs, *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* (*Berlin Childhood around 1900*, 1932–8). The Kafka photograph thus marks a point of convergence

between Benjamin's historical, literary, and autobiographical projects of the 1930s, illustrating his recurrent concern with questions of selfhood and identity in the de-individualizing climate of modern life.[17] In Benjamin's texts, this image becomes emblematic not only of an individual process of socialization, but also of the socio-cultural dynamics of the period as a whole.

At first sight, Benjamin's engagement with a childhood photograph of Kafka seems rather peculiar given his otherwise text-immanent approach. In fact, his engagement with the picture steers clear of any biographical tendencies; the image is not read, say, as a Freudian template for future neuroses but takes on the more associative function of a visual allegory which reflects and condenses central aspects of Kafka's writings. The section entitled 'Ein Kinderbild' ('A Childhood Photograph') marks an interesting anomaly within Benjamin's essay, in which each section opens with a story or parable taken from outside Kafka's work. These episodes are related to Kafka's own texts through a logic of analogy and anticipation, whereby anecdotes such as the one about the Hasidic pauper are said to lead 'tief in den Haushalt von Kafkas Welt' (BGS II 433) ['deep into the household that is Kafka's world' (BSW II 812)]. The idea is to find material which illuminates Kafka's writings without being part of them, by creating a loosely structured network of shared motifs and concerns. The discussion of the childhood photograph at the beginning of the second section thus aligns this image with the various anecdotes recounted by Benjamin, suggesting an equivalence between photographic and textual material. Indeed, the image itself is not reproduced within the essay—nor in any other of Benjamin's texts published during his lifetime—and is hence present only in the mediated form of its description.

While the image thus forms part of a penumbra of contextual material, it is at once more intimately connected to Kafka's writings and further removed from them than are the textual parables. Benjamin introduces his ecphrastic account with the phrase 'arme kurze Kindheit' (BGS II 416) ['poor, brief childhood' (BSW II 800)], a

[17] For an analysis of the role of the Kafka photograph in 'Little History of Photography' and *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, see my forthcoming article 'Imaginary Encounters: Walter Benjamin and the Aura of Photography', *Poetics Today*, 29/1 (2008).

quotation from Kafka's story 'Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse' ('Josefine, the Singer, or The Mouse People', 1924), which acts as a kind of motto for the subsequently described image. In fact, this relationship between text and image goes beyond the level of content. Benjamin's remark that Kafka's formulation 'ist … Bild geworden' (BGS II 416) ['has become image' (BSW II 800)] in his childhood photograph sets up a reverse genealogy between the author's last completed story and a portrait taken nearly four decades earlier. Benjamin's primary concern is thus not to trace a psychological genealogy which would construct the childhood photograph as the 'primal scene' of the subsequent work. Rather, the childhood photograph is retroactively mobilized; within the reverse chronology of critical interpretation, it comes to anticipate, reflect, and condense central aspects of the mature writings. If anything, Benjamin's association between the photograph and 'Josefine, die Sängerin' is based less on a biographical narrative than on a structural point of convergence; the fleeting brevity of Kafka's narrative model of childhood finds its counterpart in the photographer's flash, which condenses the continuity of lived experience into one eternally arrested moment.

Following this general association between text and image, Benjamin then provides a detailed account of the picture:

> Es gibt ein Kinderbild von Kafka, selten ist die 'arme kurze Kindheit' ergreifender Bild geworden. Es stammt wohl aus einem jener Ateliers des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, die mit ihren Draperien und Palmen, Gobelins und Staffeleien so zweideutig zwischen Folterkammer und Thronsaal standen. Da stellt sich in einem engen, gleichsam demütigenden, mit Posamenten überladenen Kinderanzug der ungefähr sechsjährige Knabe in einer Art von Wintergartenlandschaft dar. Palmenwedel starren im Hintergrund. Und als gelte es, diese gepolsterten Tropen noch stickiger und schwüler zu machen, trägt das Modell in der Linken einen übermäßig großen Hut mit breiter Krempe, wie ihn Spanier haben. Unermeßlich traurige Augen beherrschen die ihnen vorbestimmte Landschaft, in die die Muschel eines großen Ohrs hineinhorcht. (BGS II 416)

> There is a childhood photograph of Kafka, a supremely touching portrayal of his 'poor, brief childhood'. It was probably made in one of those nineteenth-century studios whose draperies and palm trees, tapestries and easels, placed them somewhere between a torture chamber and a throne room. At the age of about six the boy is presented in a sort of greenhouse setting, wearing a

tight, heavily lace-trimmed, almost embarrassing child's suit. Palm branches loom in the background. And as if to make these upholstered tropics still more sultry and suffocating, the subject holds in his left hand an oversized, wide-brimmed hat of the type worn by Spaniards. Immeasurably sad eyes dominate the landscape predestined for them into which the auricle of a large ear seems to be listening out. (BSW II 800)

While photographically accurate, Benjamin's description also holds a powerful emotive charge. The portrait's 'supremely touching' quality derives from the sitter's palpable alienation from his surroundings; the young boy seems lost amongst the overbearing decor of the photographic studio, an effect further increased by the masquerade of his suit, stick, and Spanish hat. Indeed, this attire is in tune with the eclecticism of the studio backdrop, which resembles an overcrowded stage set. Yet this theatrical setting offers little scope for an emancipatory performance but instead reduces the sitter to yet another decorative prop. Indeed, the image entails a strange reversal of animate and inanimate elements; not only is the child exposed to the objectifying gaze of the camera, but the palm branches 'looming' in the background are in turn invested with an uncanny perceptual agency which heightens the underlying sense of objectifying exposure.

Benjamin describes the studio as being situated 'between a torture chamber and a throne room', thus alluding to the conflicting dynamics at work in turn-of-the-century photographic portraiture. The studio's association with a throne room suggests a link between photography and the carefully staged public displays through which monarchical and other modes of political power can be exerted. Since its popularization in the nineteenth century, photography had become a tool of self-legitimization for monarchs, politicians, and other figures of public life[18]—a practice in turn emulated by the bourgeoisie, for whom the new medium offered an affordable means of demonstrating

[18] Compared to the painted rulers' portraits of past centuries, however, photography entailed a shift in representational practice. With the growing political and cultural emancipation of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, the position of monarchs across Europe became more precarious, as they could no longer rely on absolutism to legitimize their position of power. As a result, they needed to cultivate popular support to maintain their political and economic privileges, and photography provided a chief tool in this undertaking. Monarchs such as Queen Victoria or Napoleon III of France commissioned photographs which depicted them as middle-class figures to increase their legitimacy amongst the liberal bourgeoisie. The huge success of such images,

their individual status and political influence. Benjamin's simultaneous evocation of the torture chamber, however, implies that such photographic strategies of self-assertion were not entirely unproblematic. Despite their supposed individuality, photographic portraits relied on a set of formulaic conventions, such as backdrops, props, and poses.[19] In 'Kleine Geschichte der Photographie', Benjamin takes this argument one step further when he describes the photographic process as one of 'execution and representation' (BGS II 375/BSW II 515), thus pointing to the paradox at the heart of photographic portraiture, whose rituals of self-fashioning resulted in the annihilation of the sitter's individuality. As we shall see, this paradox takes on a central significance in Kafka's writings, where the precarious role of photographic identity constructions is explored in both a literary and a personal context.

Indeed, Kafka's treatment of this issue ties in with another aspect of Benjamin's writings. The vogue for bourgeois and 'celebrity' images coincided with another application of photographic portraiture, namely the depiction of 'dissident' members of society, such as criminals, ethnic minorities, or the insane. A comparison of both photographic traditions reveals that 'the developmental trajectory of scientific and pseudo-scientific photography of the human face and body mirrors that in art and social portraiture'.[20] As a result, the studio doubles as the 'throne room' of photographic self-representation and as the 'torture chamber' of disciplinary classification.

Kafka's photograph sheds an interesting light on these parallel developments, as it illustrates the permeable boundaries between bourgeois self-fashioning and the photographic documentation of

which fuelled the craze for *carte de visite* photographs, illustrates photography's crucial role in the visual legitimization of power. See Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001), 13; 45.

[19] For examples see Hamilton and Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, 30–3. Benjamin here draws on an argument by his friend, the critic and photographer Gisèle Freund whose study of nineteenth-century photography, *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle* (1936), argues that its formulaic props, overbearing costume, and predetermined poses are used 'to distract the viewer from the subject in order to suggest a type rather than an individual' (*Photography & Society* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1980), 61).

[20] Hamilton and Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, 15.

otherness. These two interrelated strands are particularly apparent in the childhood portrait. Rather than reflecting the sitter's own fantasies and desires, portraits of children act as a repository for adult fantasies and aspirations;[21] the photographed child becomes a blank screen for the projections of the parental gaze, for stereotypes and identity constructions which are in turn part of a wider collective imagination. At the same time, however, the child is ambiguously situated between the realms of nature and culture; in photographic portraiture, the child's construction as the prototypical bourgeois subject is founded on its perceived innocence and its status as society's not-yet-assimilated pre-cultural other.

Kafka's photograph is exemplary of this practice as it juxtaposes the iconographies of exoticism and Western, colonial mastery. The boy is depicted within a sultry tropical atmosphere evoked by the palm tree. Given Kafka's personal background, however, this exotic setting gains a highly ambivalent character. With his Spanish hat, stick, and riding crop, the young boy appears as the master of this exotic landscape; his image partakes in the popular genre of exotic portraiture, in turn a reflection of the turn-of-the-century vogue for travelling and the associated scope for self-fashioning.[22] The picture's playful masquerade, however, gains a more complex significance given the assimilatory aspirations of Kafka's parents. Like many of their bourgeois Jewish contemporaries across Central and Western Europe, Kafka's parents aimed to establish themselves within the dominant gentile culture. In Kafka's childhood picture, in turn, this desire for assimilation is doubly displaced. Not only is it projected onto the child as the symbol of parental desires whose youth and innocence serve to attenuate the potentially transgressive nature of such aspirations, but these aspirations are also played out within an exotic setting, thus appropriating colonial codes of mastery for the purpose of Jewish assimilation. By evoking this colonial tradition, however, the picture also serves as an uncomfortable reminder of

[21] On the social function of childhood photography, see Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 87–108.

[22] As John Zilcosky argues, the photograph's exotic fantasy, an impossible utopia, might in fact be the source of its sitter's palpable melancholy (*Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 21).

photographic categorizations of racial otherness. Ultimately, then, its exotic iconography illustrates the dialectic of emancipation and oppression, of rebellion and conformity, which informs photographic portraiture around 1900.

Through its ambivalent codes of mastery and disempowerment, the childhood portrait provides a fitting allegory for Kafka's own writings, which are themselves highly aware of the ambiguities surrounding the photographic image. Not only do Kafka's own comments on this particular photograph stress its undercurrents of assimilation and parental coercion (see Chapter 4), but his writings more generally are concerned with the precarious mechanisms of photographic portraiture and identity construction. Benjamin's dualism of throne room and torture chamber alludes to this aspect in Kafka's works in general, particularly in *Der Proceß*, where such power dynamics are played out in a legal, disciplinary context. Not only does a literal throne feature in Titorelli's portraits of judges, but such practices of pompous self-display have, as we shall see, their counterparts in equally theatrical tableaux of punishment and execution.

Although Benjamin thus reads the image of the young Kafka as an emblem of social conditioning and constraint, he also mobilizes this image as part of a dialectical strategy. Indeed, Benjamin highlights those elements of the picture which counter its air of rigidity; in particular, he singles out Kafka's 'immeasurably sad eyes' as well as the 'auricle of a large ear' which is described as 'listening out' into the surrounding world.[23] Rather than just passively enduring the recording process, the young Kafka is here presented as an attentive observer of his stifling surroundings. In this final part of Benjamin's description, then, the sitter takes on a new kind of perceptual agency; indeed, the emphasis on eyes and ear entails a more striking reversal of photographic power dynamics. In Benjamin's account so far, the child had appeared as little more than a prop passively inserted into a predetermined setting; at this point, however, his eyes are said to

[23] On Benjamin's discourse on the body and the role of seeing and hearing in his autobiographical writings, see Gerhard Richter, *Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000). As Gabriel Josipovici notes, Benjamin's account 'brings out clearly both the horror of being looked at which was such an important element in Kafka's character, and the radiance of his eyes' (*The Lessons of Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 4).

'dominate the landscape predestined for them', a formulation which lifts the studio set beyond the level of stifling convention and lends it a more purposeful significance in relation to the young sitter.

Benjamin's argument concerning Kafka's melancholy gaze must be read against the backdrop of an argument developed in his study *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 1928), which posits melancholy as the emotional disposition characteristic of German baroque tragedy. As Benjamin argues, this dramatic genre embodies the perspective of the melancholy gaze which robs the perceived sights of any inherent life, transforming them into dead objects ready for aesthetic appropriation: 'Wird der Gegenstand unterm Blick der Melancholie allegorisch, läßt sie das Leben von ihm abfließen, bleibt er als toter, doch in Ewigkeit gesicherter zurück, so liegt er vor dem Allegoriker, auf Gnade und Ungnade ihm überliefert' (BGS I 359) ['If the object becomes allegorical under the melancholy gaze, which drains it of all inherent life, then it remains dead yet preserved for all eternity—preserved for the allegorian and passed on to him for better or for worse']. The melancholy gaze thus fixes and preserves the perceived reality in a manner akin to the photographic camera.[24] This conception of melancholy sheds light on Benjamin's description of Kafka's eyes; the boy's 'immeasurably sad' gaze is thus not merely a reflection of restrictive social conventions but also in turn the means by which the subject re-establishes his mastery over his 'predestined' surroundings. Alienated from his environment, he becomes in turn its melancholy photographer who arrests the encountered sights through his literary imagination.

For Benjamin, then, the studio photograph encapsulates both Kafka's conditioning by his socio-cultural context and his future literary vocation. Benjamin's analysis of the photograph does not simply reiterate the cliché of Kafka the eternal son; while illustrating the restrictive dynamics of bourgeois identity construction, the picture is also an emblem of receptivity and attentiveness, encapsulating the

[24] Indeed, Hubertus von Amelunxen claims that Benjamin's elaborations on melancholy and allegory in his *Trauerspiel* study 'come closer to the essence of photography than his explicit writings on the technical media' ('Skiagraphia—Silberchlorid und schwarze Galle: Zur allegorischen Bestimmung des photographischen Bildes', in Willem van Reijen (ed.), *Allegorie und Melancholie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), 90–108: 96).

writer's capacity to productively mobilize his encounters with a reifying reality.

RESISTING INTERPRETATION

By looking at Kafka through the photographic lens, his early critics thus bring out different facets of his writings. At the same time, though, they are united by their shared approach of exploring Kafka not through totalizing interpretative frameworks but through attentive close readings which present his texts in all their opaque detail. In this respect, the project of reading Kafka in the light of photography is not merely an attempt to situate his texts within a wider socio-cultural context, but also constitutes a reaction against a dominant strand of Kafka scholarship emblematized by critics such as Max Brod. In his 'Kafka' essay, Adorno dismisses any kinds of totalizing readings which abstract from the texts through overarching symbolic interpretations, stressing that Kafka's works must be taken literally at all costs: 'Jeder Satz steht buchstäblich, und jeder bedeutet' ['Each sentence is literal and each signifies'].[25] Building on this view, he remarks that Kafka's texts are never speculative or transformative; their 'gesture' is a constative 'So ist es' ['That's the way it is'][26] —an evidential tautology which would later be theorized by Roland Barthes as photography's constitutive feature.[27] Adorno's approach is shared by Kracauer and Benjamin; for all three thinkers, to read Kafka 'through the photographic lens' involves a confrontation with the heterogeneous, incongruous, and often opaque imagery of his writings without taking refuge in totalizing interpretations.

It is no coincidence, then, that both Kracauer's and Benjamin's essays on photography contain references to Kafka, a fact which illustrates how their anti-symbolic reading of Kafka and their anti-realist conception of photography form part of the same critical agenda. As

[25] Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen', 255; 'Notes', 246.
[26] Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen', 259; 'Notes', 249.
[27] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 76–7.

Kracauer argues, photography strips reality of the kind of synthesizing meaning which characterizes its representation in painting,[28] an effect mirrored in Kafka's narratives, which capture a world whose material, social, and ideological disparity can no longer be fused into a meaningful whole. Benjamin makes a similar point in relation to Kafka's childhood portrait. Just as the childhood photograph cannot ultimately 'decode' or 'explain' Kafka's works, Benjamin does not attempt to resolve the picture's inherent ambiguities; rather, his detailed discussion brings out the tensions and paradoxes which inform this picture. Indeed, Benjamin's various appropriations of the image in his critical and personal writings form part of a textual strategy which resists the fixed attribution of meaning, resorting instead to more associative modes of analogy and mutual correspondence.

In the aforementioned letter of 1934, Adorno singles out this particular aspect of Benjamin's approach. As he comments, 'Es ist kein Zufall, daß von den ausgelegten Anekdoten eine: nämlich Kafkas Kinderbild, *ohne* Auslegung bleibt. Dessen Auslegung wäre aber einer Neutralisierung des Weltalters im Blitzlicht äquivalent' ['It is no coincidence that, amongst all the interpreted anecdotes, one in particular, namely Kafka's childhood photograph, passes *without* interpretation. The interpretation of the latter, however, would be tantamount to the neutralization of the epoch in the glare of the photographic flash'].[29] By describing the photograph as an 'anecdote', Adorno aligns it with the other parables cited in the essay, but also with Kafka's own writings which, as Adorno would stress in his 1953 essay, likewise resist totalizing analysis. While the image encapsulates the culture of an age, its emblematic significance would be neutralized by a conventional form of interpretation. Revealingly, Adorno uses a photographic metaphor to describe this interpretative dynamic; the effect of synthesizing interpretation is likened to a photographic flash which, while illuminating the picture in its totality, would simultaneously neutralize its details, tensions, and ambiguities.

In his letter, Adorno thus attributes the role of photographer to both the critic and the author, whose texts he compares to a photograph recorded from the hereafter. While Kafka's photographic

[28] Kracauer, 'Photographie', 27; 'Photography', 52.
[29] Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel*, 92; *Correspondence*, 68.

gaze captures the world in all its complexity, the resulting images are vulnerable to reductive, superficial readings. Kafka's early critics counteract this risk through a critical practice which remains alert to the 'optical unconscious' in both photography and text. Of all the issues addressed in their writings, it is this overall strategy which most closely links their texts to Kafka's writings. For Kafka photography provides an impetus for commentary and narrative exploration. In a manner akin to Benjamin's essay, his texts testify to a sharp analytical gaze, but also to his deeply felt emotional engagement with the pictures in question. Like Benjamin, moreover, Kafka never neutralizes a picture's inner tensions through totalizing analysis; as we shall see, his detailed scrutiny of individual pictures in both the fiction and the personal writings undermines the possibility of interpretative synthesis. For Kafka as for Benjamin, then, photographs gain their allure through their tangible yet opaque presence which resists analysis. As Alexander Honold remarks, 'What compels linguistic exegesis in the image is precisely its apparent illegibility.'[30] Among the many central issues raised by Kafka's earliest critics, it is above all the medium's resistance to conclusive narrative interpretation which is prefigured in Kafka's own writings.

[30] Alexander Honold, *Der Leser Walter Benjamin: Bruchstücke einer deutschen Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2000), 317.

2

From Film to Photography: Constructing the Viewer in the Early Diaries

The concerns of Kafka the emerging writer are encapsulated in a dream of 1/2 October 1911 featuring the 'horrible apparition' of a visually impaired girl:

> Dieses blinde oder schwachsichtige Kind hatte beide Augen von einer Brille bedeckt, das linke unter dem ziemlich weit entfernten Augenglas war milchgrau und rund vortretend, das andere trat zurück und war von einem anliegenden Augenglas verdeckt. Damit dieses Augenglas optisch richtig eingesetzt sei, war es nötig statt des gewöhnlichen über das Ohr zurückgehenden Halters, einen Hebel anzuwenden, dessen Kopf nicht anders befestigt werden konnte als am Wangenknochen, so daß von diesem Augenglas ein Stäbchen zur Wange hinuntergieng, dort im durchlöcherten Fleisch verschwand und am Knochen endete, während ein neues Dratstäbchen heraustrat und über das Ohr zurückgieng. (TB 50–1)
>
> This blind or weak-sighted child had both eyes covered by a pair of glasses, the left, under a lens held at a certain distance from the eye, was milky-grey and bulbous, the other receded and was covered by a lens lying close against it. In order that this eyeglass might be set in place with optical correctness, it was necessary, instead of the usual support going behind the ears, to make use of a lever, the head of which could be attached to no place but the cheekbone, so that from this lens a little rod descended to the cheek, there disappeared into the pierced flesh and ended on the bone, while another small wire rod came out and went back over the ear. (ED 60–1)

So strong was the impression left by this dream that Kafka recounted it to his boss the following morning (TB 52/ED 61). The dream scenario testifies to the author's fascination with both vision and technology, but also to the profound anxieties which beset their relationship. Its

underlying sentiment is a fear not merely of blindness but also of the optical devices designed to supplement the limitations of the human gaze. To counteract her disability, the girl is fitted with a pair of glasses, yet their skewed angle merely reinforces the asymmetry of her eyes.[1] Even more disconcertingly, these spectacles are not just an external visual aid but penetrate the wearer's skin and flesh, creating a monstrous hybrid of human body and mechanical apparatus. The fact that they disappear inside the girl's head suggests that this prosthesis has the capacity to shape both her gaze and her mental state, her thoughts and her imagination.

The sentiment of Kafka's dream is echoed in Sigmund Freud's *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (*Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930), which addresses the impact of visual technologies from a cultural-psychological perspective. As Freud point out, technological progress has resulted in a range of inventions designed to expand the capacities of the human senses:

> Mit der Brille korrigiert [der Mensch] die Mängel der Linse in seinem Auge, mit dem Fernrohr schaut er in entfernte Weiten, mit dem Mikroskop überwindet er die Grenzen der Sichtbarkeit, die durch den Bau seiner Netzhaut abgesteckt werden. In der photographischen Kamera hat er ein Instrument geschaffen, das die flüchtigen Seheindrücke festhält.[2]
>
> By means of spectacles [man] corrects defects in the lens of his own eye; by means of the telescope he sees into the far distance; and by means of the microscope he overcomes the limits of visibility set by the structure of his retina. In the photographic camera he has created an instrument which retains the fleeting visual impressions.[3]

[1] Revealingly, the fear of blindness betrayed by the dream is underpinned by a biographical subtext which associates visual impairment with the feminine, maternal position. Kafka identifies the inspiration of the dream in the sight of his mother, 'die am Abend neben mir sitzt und unter ihrem Zwicker während des Kartenspiels nicht sehr angenehm zu mir herüberschaut. Ihr Zwicker hat sogar, was ich früher bemerkt zu haben mich nicht erinnere das rechte Glas näher dem Auge als das linke' (TB 52) ['who in the evening sits next to me and, while playing cards, looks across at me not very pleasantly under her eyeglasses. Her glasses even have, which I do not remember having noticed before, the right lens nearer the eye than the left' (ED 61)].

[2] Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud et al., paperback edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1999), xiv. 419–506: 450.

[3] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, paperback edn (London: Vintage, 2001), xxi. 57–145: 90–1.

All of these innovations are, however, characterized by a double bind: modern man emerges as 'eine Art Prothesengott … , recht großartig, wenn er alle seine Hilfsorgane anlegt, aber sie sind nicht mit ihm verwachsen und machen ihm gelegentlich noch viel zu schaffen' ['a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent, but those organs have not grown onto him and they still give him much trouble at times'].[4] For Freud, the incomplete fusion of the body and its prosthetic extensions exposes the limits of both technology and the human subject. In Kafka's dream, in contrast, the optical device has actually merged with the body, yet rather than assuaging such anxieties, this fusion reveals the traumatic implications of technological progress, which challenges the physical and mental boundaries of the individual, highlighting the inherent inadequacies of his sensory apparatus.

Kafka's dream is exemplary of his recurrent concern with vision and blindness. As early as December 1910, he notes his 'Befürchtungen, darüber, ob mein Augenlicht für mein ganzes Leben genügen wird' (TB 140) ['worries whether my eyesight would last all my life' (ED 34)], and fears about visual inadequacy continue to resurface throughout his personal writings. The dream of October 1911 illustrates this perennial anxiety while also giving it a particular spin; one recurrent theme in Kafka's early diaries is precisely the relationship between human perception and visual technology, in particular within the context of modern mass culture. Like the girl in his dream, Kafka recurrently draws on optical devices and technologies in order to enhance his visual experience and literary imagination, yet like the girl's spectacles, these inventions have an ambivalent—both enabling and disabling—effect.

The spectacles of the city and the attractions of mass entertainment provide an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the young writer. Kafka's early diaries recount and illustrate his search for visual technologies which could be productively mobilized for the sake of literary creation.[5] Indeed, encounters with photography, film,

[4] Freud, *Unbehagen*, 451; *Civilization*, 92–3.

[5] The importance of the early diaries for Kafka's literary development can hardly be overestimated. As Max Brod recalls, the diary Kafka kept in his daily life, and in particular on his travels, provided him with a training ground for description,

and stereoscopy not only yield ample thematic material, but also shape his literary style, as well as inspiring more general reflections about the relationship between vision and writing, literature and technology. Film harbours a particular fascination for Kafka less through particular motifs or storylines than because of its capacity to alter and expand human perception, offering a training ground for new modes of seeing. Yet Kafka's fascination with the vividness and dynamism of this new medium is not, as we shall see, entirely unequivocal. His attraction frequently gives way to an unsettling sense of exposure, and his fascination is interwoven with a latent anxiety: the fear of being conditioned and invaded by such spectacles as the girl in his dream. While Kafka's early diaries thus trace his undeniable fascination with the cinema, the ambiguity of these encounters in turn motivates the search for a visual paradigm more conducive to literary exploration. Indeed, it is through an incisive critique of film and its invasive, fragmenting effects that Kafka comes to embrace photography as a more productive and sustainable source of literary inspiration.[6]

MOBILIZING VISION—ARRESTING THE SPECTATOR

For all their tangible vividness, the visual sketches and observations that appear throughout Kafka's early diaries are often the result

commentary, and reflection, and several diary passages were subsequently published as part of his first collection, *Betrachtung* (Max Brod, *Über Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1966), 95). See also Peter von Matt's study of Kafka's diary sketches of the human face, … *fertig ist das Angesicht: Zur Literaturgeschichte des menschlichen Gesichts* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), 13–68.

[6] It is no coincidence that the unsettling dream about the blind girl occurs at a time when Kafka devotes extensive diary passages both to visual observations and to the underlying perceptual processes. Two days after the dream with the blind girl, on 4 October 1911, he records in great detail the different light effects projected onto the dark walls of his room by street lights and passing trams which he observes while lying on the sofa (TB 55–6/ED 62–3). In the following weeks, the aim of capturing such dynamic sights becomes a central concern as Kafka becomes entranced by the performances of a Yiddish theatre troupe in the Café Savoy, whose expressive bodily gestures and facial expressions he records in great detail.

of an intricate process of mediation. Indeed, even where media technologies are not explicitly thematized, they nonetheless provide a perceptual grid through which the encountered reality is experienced and recorded.

Kafka's earliest preserved diary entry, probably dating from 1909, provides a striking example of this mechanism: 'Die Zuschauer erstarren, wenn der Zug vorbeifährt' (TB 9) ['The spectators go rigid when the train goes past' (ED 9)]. This isolated sentence provides an intriguing and rather disorienting point of entry into Kafka's diaries; the reader is struck by its sudden, unmediated appearance on the page in a manner which mirrors the response of the described spectators. The sentence constructs a *mise en abyme*, whereby an external observer describes both a spectacle—the passing train—and the response of its audience. Although no context is provided, the scene recognizably echoes the famous anecdote about an early cinema audience which fled in panic during a showing of the Lumière brothers' short film *Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (1896), which shows a train entering a station.[7] Yet Kafka's phrase both evokes and differs from this episode. Not only does the train in his version pass the spectators rather than heading towards them, but the viewers freeze rather than flee at this sight, so that their response contrasts with the spectacle of the moving train. Indeed, Kafka's variation of this anecdote captures more accurately the fascination of early film—the dichotomy between the fast-moving images projected onto the screen and the stillness of an audience which is passively, almost hypnotically, exposed to this spectacle.[8] With its emphasis on the dynamics of vision and technology, the above sentence provides a fitting epigraph for Kafka's diaries. Even though the scene is not marked as cinematic, the

[7] Harro Segeberg claims that this anecdote is in fact a myth which was generated retrospectively, and that the audience rather enjoyed this cinematic spectacle. He cites an account of Maxim Gorky from 1896 in which the latter, after describing the initial shock effect of the shot, concludes that the projected train is merely a shadow. 'Von der proto-kinematographischen zur kinematographischen (Stadt-)Wahrnehmung: Texte und Filme im Zeitalter der Jahrhundertwende', in Harro Segeberg (ed.), *Die Modernisierung des Sehens: Zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte des Films in Literatur und Kunst* (Munich: Fink, 1996), 327–58: 350.

[8] In addition, Kafka's use of 'wenn' rather than 'als' to interlink spectacle and response lends this scene the character of a generally applicable mechanism, rather than of a singular occurrence.

term *Zuschauer* constructs the train as a spectacle to be observed, thus blurring the boundaries between real life and its technological simulation.

The sentiment of this first diary entry is reflected in subsequent passages which are more explicitly concerned with the medium of film. Kafka's account of a cinema visit in November 1913 betrays a deeply rooted ambivalence:

> Im Kino gewesen. Geweint. 'Lolotte'. Der gute Pfarrer. Das kleine Fahrrad. Die Versöhnung der Eltern. Maßlose Unterhaltung. Vorher trauriger Film 'Das Unglück im Dock' nachher lustiger 'Endlich allein'. Bin ganz leer und sinnlos, die vorüberfahrende Elektrische hat mehr lebendigen Sinn. (TB 595)
>
> Was at the cinema. Cried. 'Lolotte'. The good priest. The little bicycle. The reconciliation of the parents. Boundless entertainment. Before it, a sad film, 'The Accident on the Dock', after it, the gay 'Alone at Last'. Am entirely empty and insensible, the passing tram has more living feeling. (ED 238)

The titles of the viewed films are juxtaposed with brief references to individual scenes as well as with equally matter-of-fact comments on the writer's own response—a fragmentary account which in turn mirrors the montage style of early film and its dissociating effect on the viewer. As Kafka's entry suggests, the experience of film defies assimilation into a coherent narrative.

As in Kafka's earliest diary entry, visual experience is associated with technologies of transportation. Although the passing tram which Kafka encounters when coming out of the cinema is part of real life rather than projected onto the screen, this sight exemplifies the technological acceleration of visual experience.[9] The 'Elektrische' brings back the memory of the film screening and its overwhelming dynamism while also confronting the viewer with his inner sense of emptiness. Just as the audience in the earliest entry freezes in response to the spectacle of the train, Kafka likewise feels drained and lifeless as

[9] The association between film and modern transportation, which recurs at various points in Kafka's diaries, reflects conventions in cinematic practice at the time. Early film-makers such as the Lumière brothers not only depicted moving vehicles in their films to bring out the representational capacities of the new medium but also attempted to further enhance the dynamism of their recordings by positioning their film cameras on trams, trains, ships, elevators, and even in hot air balloons (Segeberg, '(Stadt-)Wahrnehmung', 345).

a result of cinema's 'boundless entertainment'. The medium of film thus brings about a more general mobilization of visual experience; yet this process is not without inherent downsides. Both of the above diary passages stress the dichotomy between the kinetic intensity of the encountered spectacle and the audience's passive exposure, which leaves the viewer with a sense of emptiness and disempowerment. As in Kafka's dream, then, visual technologies undermine, rather than enhance, perceptual synthesis and control.

To counteract this effect, Kafka's diaries attempt to adopt a mobile, rather than a passively static stance towards the encountered sights:

> Seit 2 Tagen konstatiere ich in mir Kühle und Gleichgültigkeit wann ich will. Gestern abend beim Spazierengehn war mir jedes kleine Straßengeräusch, jeder auf mich gerichtete Blick, jede Photographie in einem Auslagskasten wichtiger als ich. (TB 347)
>
> For two days I have noticed, whenever I choose to, an inner coolness and indifference. Yesterday evening, during my walk, every little street sound, every eye turned towards me, every photograph in a showcase, was more important to me than myself. (ED 165)

Kafka's prime focus in this diary entry of 5 January 1912 is on the process of viewing itself rather than on the encountered sights. The act of viewing here takes on an experimental character, in which increased perceptual capacity is achieved at the cost of reduced empathy and self-awareness.[10] In this state of emotional indifference, the ambulatory observer can process an unlimited stream of stimuli. The parallels between this stance and the perspective of the camera cannot be overlooked; appropriately, photography is listed among the stimuli encountered by the urban spectator. Whether the photographs in the shop window depict advertised goods or act as commodities in their own right, they are paradigmatic of a new way of looking, of the writer's detached, all-seeing gaze which is modelled on the

[10] On the same day, Kafka's diary also contains a sketch which is subsequently published in *Betrachtung* under the title 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang' ('The Sudden Walk'). Kafka's comment on his ability 'die schnellsten Veränderungen leicht zu bewirken und zu ertragen' (TB 348) ['to accomplish and bear effortlessly the swiftest of changes' (ED 165)] echoes his emphasis on his perceptual mastery and detachment in the other two scenarios and illustrates that his autobiographical reflections on questions of vision are closely intertwined with his literary production.

eye of the camera. Unlike after his cinema visit, Kafka here feels empowered rather than overwhelmed; his mobile position enables him to move from sight to sight at his own speed. That said, his sense of perceptual control is not entirely unchallenged. Alongside sounds and photographs, he also becomes aware of the gazes of other passers-by which are directed at him; in the urban world, the author's detached scrutiny is reciprocated by other watchful observers.

This double bind of mastery and exposure comes to the fore in a poem recorded during Kafka's 1910 trip to Paris:

moi je flâne
qu'on m'approuve ou me condamne
je vois tout
je suis partout (F 50)

I wander
whether they approve of or condemn me
I see everything
I am everywhere

The origin and authorship of this poem are unclear; the fact that it is written in French makes it difficult to decide whether Kafka composed it himself or whether he merely copied it from some unknown source. Its decontextualized character is typical of the 'montage technique' of Kafka's early diaries. As in the previous passage, the speaker is a mobile spectator who strolls the city as an all-seeing *flâneur*, and once again, visual receptiveness is coupled with an alleged indifference towards the reactions of others. Indeed, as in the previous diary entry, his detached, all-seeing stance makes the observer resemble the mechanical eye of the camera.

As Hanns Zischler points out, this poem might have a cinematic subtext. A French film poster from the Théâtre cinematographe Pathé on the Boulevard Montmartre from around 1910 shows an audience watching a film in which a Western explorer defends himself against a lion.[11] The accompanying slogan reads: 'Je ne tremblote pas | Je vois tout' ['I do not tremble | I see everything']—a motto which could equally apply to the explorer on screen and to the cinema audience.

[11] Hanns Zischler, *Kafka Goes to the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 128.

Early film constituted, in the words of Tom Gunning, a 'cinema of attractions', relying on optical tricks and effects to induce a sense of amazement, shock, or surprise.[12] This idea of an observer who is highly receptive and yet emotionally immune is echoed in Kafka's *flâneur* poem; indeed, the kind of detached, endlessly absorbing gaze which Kafka describes in this piece is exemplary of a new mode of seeing which is applicable far beyond the realm of the cinema. As Walter Benjamin argues, early film, with its montage effects and fast-changing camera angles, provides a perceptual training ground enabling viewers to adapt to the more general challenges of modern life (BGS I 505/BSW IV 281).[13]

As a result, the mobile position in Kafka's writings is appropriated by the observer who attempts to invest even static sights with a dynamic quality. This model is further developed in a letter to Felice Bauer:

> wenn ich auch selbst nur sehr selten ins Kinematografenteater gehe, so weiß ich doch meistens fast alle Wochenprogramme aller Kinematographen auswendig. Meine Zerstreutheit, mein Vergnügungsbedürfnis sättigt sich an den Plakaten, von meinem gewöhnlichen innerlichsten Unbehagen, von diesem Gefühl des ewig Provisorischen ruhe ich mich vor den Plakaten aus, immer wenn ich von den Sommerfrischen, die ja schließlich doch unbefriedigend ausgegangen waren, in die Stadt zurückkam, hatte ich eine Gier nach den Plakaten und von der Elektrischen mit der ich nachhause fuhr, las ich im Fluge, bruchstückweise, angestrengt die Plakate ab, an denen wir vorüberfuhren. (B2 132–3)

[12] Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (eds.), *Early Cinema: Space—Frame—Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56–62.

[13] The sociologist Georg Simmel anticipates this argument in his essay 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben' ('The Metropolis and Mental Life', 1903), which offers one of the first accounts of the perceptual challenges posed by the modern city. Simmel describes how the city's constantly changing stimuli, the 'raschen und ununterbrochenen Wechsel äußerer und innerer Eindrücke' ['the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli'], requires of the viewer a heightened level of mental response, a '*Steigerung des Nervenlebens*' [an 'intensification of nervous stimulation']. ('Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben', in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908*, vol. i, ed. Rüdiger Kramer, Angela Rammstedt, and Ottheim Rammstedt (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), 116–31: 116; 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), 174–85: 175).

although I myself rarely go to the cinematographic theatre, I usually know by heart almost all the weekly programmes in every one of them. My need for pleasure and distraction feeds on posters; when looking at posters I derive some relief from my habitual inner uneasiness, that feeling of perennial provisionality; whenever I returned to the city after the summer vacation, which invariably turned out to have been unsatisfactory, I felt a great thirst for posters, and, from the tram on my way home, swiftly and with some effort I used to read fragmentary snatches of posters we were passing. (EF 221)

On a tram ride through Prague, Kafka tries to compensate for the lack of visual stimuli during his holiday in the countryside. This mode of transport invests the film posters with a mobility resembling the cinematic experience itself. Thus the fragmentary viewing experience from inside the movie theatre is once again projected onto the world at large using the supplementary dynamism of modern transport technology. Yet unlike in previous examples, this mobile perspective does not afford the observer with a sense of mastery. Although the film posters are supposed to provide an escape from Kafka's 'feeling of perennial provisionality', their fleeting view in fact perpetuates this sense of instability and exposure. Thus the adoption of a 'filmic' mode of viewing, its projection into reality and its mobilization within writing, is an ambivalent undertaking, whereby the intensification of experience comes at the cost of reduced control and perceptual synthesis.

ARRESTING VISION: SNAPSHOT AND FILM STILL

Although Kafka remains interested in film throughout his life,[14] the fleetingness of the cinematic spectacle does not prove to be a sustainable source of literary inspiration, but rather resists detailed narrative recording and exploration. Yet Kafka is not yet ready to

[14] As late as January 1924, Kafka comments on Charlie Chaplin's film *The Kid*, which was shown in Berlin with great success but which he did not go to see himself. See his as yet unpublished note to Marie Wernerová in a letter to his sister Elli of January 1924 (reproduced in Zischler, *Kafka geht ins Kino*, 155; *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, 117).

give up on the medium entirely. In an entry of July 1913, he tries out a different mode of description: 'Der Millionär auf dem Bild im Kino "Sklaven des Goldes". Ihn festhalten! Die Ruhe, die langsame zielbewußte Bewegung, wenn notwendig rascher Schritt, Zucken des Armes' (TB 563–4) ['The millionaire in the scene from the film "Slaves of Gold". Arrest him! The calmness, the slow movement, conscious of its goal, a faster step when necessary, a shrug of the shoulder' (ED 222–3)]. Kafka attempts to provide a more coherent narrative account of the adventure film *Sklaven des Goldes* by focusing on one particular sequence which he in turn subdivides into individual segments. His injunction 'Arrest him!' underlines his attempt to impose a more rigid, controlled mode of perception even onto transient sights. It is no coincidence that Kafka uses the term *Bild* to frame his description; to textually record film, one must 'freeze' each sequence into distinct frames and thus dissect its overall motion into its underlying, static components.

In a letter to Felice Bauer of 4/5 March 1913, Kafka takes this approach a step further. This time, his subject is no longer an actual film but the photographic stills which advertise and announce this event. Here Kafka does not even enter the auditorium but remains in the foyer, poring over the posters and film stills on display:

> Im Vorraum des Kinematografenteaters … hängt eine Anzahl von Photographien aus dem Film 'Der Andere'. Du hast gewiß von ihm gelesen, Bassermann spielt darin, er wird nächste Woche auch hier gezeigt werden. Auf einem Plakat, wo B. allein im Lehnstuhl abgebildet war, hat er mich wieder ergriffen, wie damals in Berlin … Vor den Photographien schwächt sich schon meine Freude ab, es war doch zu sehn, daß es ein elendes Stück war, in dem er spielte, die aufgenommenen Situationen waren doch alte Filmerfindungen und schließlich sind Augenblicksaufnahmen eines springenden Pferdes fast immer schön, während Augenblicksaufnahmen einer verbrecherischen menschlichen Grimasse, selbst wenn es die Grimasse Bassermanns ist, leicht nichtssagend sein können. (B2 121)
>
> In the foyer of a cinematographic theatre … there are a number of photographs from the film 'The Other' on display. You must have read about it, Bassermann is in it, and it will be shown here next week. The sight of B. on a poster, alone and in an armchair, moved me as it had that time in Berlin … Faced with the photographs, my pleasure diminished at

once, for one can see it is a wretched piece; the situations featured were simply old-fashioned cinematic devices, and, after all, a snapshot of a jumping horse is almost invariably beautiful, whereas a snapshot of a criminal grimace on a human face, even Bassermann's, could well be meaningless. (EF 213)

Revealingly, even Kafka's most extensive reflection on the cinema, its representational mechanisms and its effect on actors and viewers, is conducted through an exploration of photographic film stills. Only once film has been dissected into its photographic components, it seems, does it become open to critical analysis. The fact, moreover, that the passage contains Kafka's only explicit critique of a particular film suggests that this response, like the associated more general reflections, is dependent on photography as the tool and subject of analysis.

Kafka's main interest in the film *Der Andere* (*The Other*, 1913), a 'Jekyll and Hyde' drama about a barrister who leads a nocturnal double life as a criminal, concerns its protagonist, the actor Albert Bassermann. In November 1910, Kafka had seen Bassermann in the title role of *Hamlet* in Berlin, and the memory of this theatre performance underpins his assessment of the various images on display. In his letter, Kafka draws on photography to explore the differences between theatre and film. Whereas the film poster—an image which at the time was usually drawn or painted—shows Bassermann sitting in an armchair, a pose recalling the iconography of the traditional portrait, the film stills show 'snapshots' of the actor's face. It is the more stylized poster which triggers a déjà vu effect in Kafka, who is just as 'moved' by the image as he was by Bassermann's theatre performance. The film stills, in contrast, have quite the opposite effect; despite their greater representational realism they merely emphasize for Kafka the discrepancy between theatre and cinema, between the actor's auratic presence on stage and the commodified products of the culture industry. In a puzzling crossover of genres, Kafka refers to *Der Andere* as a 'wretched piece' [*Stück*, also meaning 'play'], and to its stills as 'old-fashioned cinematic devices'. One might assume that the photographs of an actor's face would differ least from a theatrical performance, especially since the acting style in early film resembled that of the theatre in its use of expressive gestures and facial expressions—elements which, as Bela Balázs argues in his

2. Albert Bassermann in *Der Andere* (1913).

study *Der sichtbare Mensch* (*The Visible Man*, 1924), constitute the visual semiotics of silent film.[15]

On what grounds, then, does Kafka prefer Bassermann's theatrical to his cinematic performance? A possible hint is his comparison of the film stills to another photographic genre, namely to the snapshot of a jumping horse, which he judges to be more beautiful than the actor's clichéd grimace. Kafka here alludes to a groundbreaking moment in the history of photography. The reduction of exposure time in the late nineteenth century enabled the arrest and dissection of movement by means of so-called 'chrono-photography', a recording technique developed by Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey in the 1880s.[16] In serial photographs, Muybridge captured the individual stages of a horse's gallop, and although the initial emphasis was on the isolation of individual movements, these experiments paved the

[15] Indeed, a comparison between the film stills from *Der Andere* and a stage photograph depicting Bassermann in the role of Hamlet reveals a rather striking similarity of expression. See Zischler, *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, 66, 69.

[16] See Bernd Busch, *Belichtete Welt: Eine Wahrnehmungsgeschichte der Photographie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1995), 367–75, and Joel Snyder, 'Sichtbarmachung und Sichtbarkeit', in Peter Geimer (ed.), *Ordnungen der Sichtbarkeit: Fotografie in Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 142–67.

way for the invention of film, which reintegrated these individual frames into one, seemingly organic, continuum. Kafka's comparison between the film still and the snapshot of a jumping horse thus alludes to the origins of film in serial photography; yet it also highlights the differences between the two techniques, their applications and psychological effects on the observer.[17] While in the case of the jumping horse, this method of recording does not have any tangible effect on its animal subject, the film camera has a much more invasive impact on both actor and audience. In contrast to the theatre, where the actor's expressions and movements are directly communicated to the audience, the film camera dissects this performance into individual takes, shots, and camera angles, subsequently reassembling them into what is no longer a continuous, organic entity. The film audience, in turn, is compelled to adopt the camera's dissecting view; as Benjamin puts it, '*Das Publikum fühlt sich in den Darsteller nur ein, indem es sich in den Apparat einfühlt. Es übernimmt also dessen Haltung: es testet*' (BGS I 488) ['*The audience empathizes with the actor only by empathizing with the camera. Consequently, the audience adopts the camera's approach; its approach is that of testing*' (BSW IV 260)]. Thus the cinematic apparatus conditions both performer and viewer by imposing its fragmenting perspective onto visual reality.

Kafka's diary entries on his cinema visits echo this diagnosis; yet it takes the evidence of the film still for him to explicitly address this problem. Revealingly, Kafka explores the issue of filmic fragmentation from the perspective of the actor rather than the viewer. Bassermann is presented as the prototype of the artist disempowered by the apparatus, and Kafka pities him 'als wäre er der unglücklichste Mensch' ['as though he were the most unfortunate person'], explaining that 'Der Selbstgenuß des Spieles ist vorüber … , *der Film ist fertig, B. selbst ist von jedem Einfluß auf ihn ausgeschlossen*, … er wird älter, schwach, in seinem Lehnstuhl zur Seite geschoben und versinkt irgendwo in der grauen Zeit' (B2 121–2) ['The satisfaction of acting is over; *the*

[17] Muybridge's early experiments in particular counteracted any sense of coherence, creating instead a 'blunt dismantling of the apparent continuities of movement and time' (Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 140).

film is made; B. himself can no longer influence it in any way, … he grows older, weak, gets pushed aside in his armchair and vanishes somewhere in the mists of time' (EF 213)].

In Kafka's account, then, Bassermann's disempowerment stems not merely from the visual dissection of his performance but also from the recording technique as such, which creates a celluloid effigy which will outlive its referent. While Kafka's comments tie in with other contemporary voices on the cinema,[18] his instinctive empathy with the actor's plight nevertheless seems curious. A possible explanation emerges at the end of the letter where Kafka concludes, in a typical dialectical twist, that his account does not actually reflect the real situation but that it is merely the result of his own 'schiefe[s] Urteil' (B2 121) ['skewed judgement' (EF 213)], that is, the result of an act of projection. Indeed, Kafka's comments on Bassermann's disempowerment echo his own sense of emptiness triggered by visits to the cinema. What he means to recognize in Bassermann's photographs, in other words, is a shared experience—the artist's alienation from, and conditioning by, the technical media. Within Kafka's personal writings, however, this letter also highlights the crucial role of photography as a tool of analysis and critique which brings to light the underlying mechanisms of filmic representation. Indeed, while photography is here discussed in relation to film, as its basis and supplement, it gains an increasingly independent significance in other contexts, where it emerges as a medium not complicit with but opposed to the cinema and its aesthetic of fragmentation.

'INVISIBLE SIGHTS': TRAVEL AND PERCEPTION

Kafka's mounting mistrust of the cinema is also reflected in his travel diaries. As Max Brod recalls, the notes which Kafka took during and after his journeys provided him with a training ground for

[18] In his 'Kunstwerk' essay, Benjamin cites the Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello, who argues that the film actor feels as if he has been 'stripped of his reality … and has been turned into a mute image that flickers for a moment on the screen, then vanishes into silence' (BGS I 489/BSW IV 260).

observation, description, and reflection.[19] Unfamiliar sights trigger narrative exploration; yet their recording also brings out the perceptual and psychological dynamics which underpin the writing process. This double focus runs through all of Kafka's travel diaries, but becomes particularly important in his notes on the trip to Switzerland, Italy, and Paris which he undertook with Max Brod in the summer of 1911. Following Kafka's suggestion, both friends kept a diary to record and compare their respective impressions. When read alongside each other, their notes illustrate fundamental differences in outlook and approach, not least regarding the underlying issues of perception and experience. Brod later recalled how he and Kafka pitied those fellow travellers who recorded the encountered sights 'only' with their cameras.[20] In fact, however, the distinction between literary and technological modes of recording is less clear-cut than Brod suggests. While the accounts of both friends have a strongly visual theme and focus, Kafka goes a step further; in his diaries, he draws an analogy between the experiences of travel and the cinema, both of which turn out to resist a synthesizing mode of perception.

This idea emerges right at the beginning of the journey. During a brief stop in Munich, Brod and Kafka board a taxi to undertake a quick sightseeing tour of the city. Ironically, however, this journey has precisely the opposite effect. As Brod comments: 'In *München* Autofahrt durch die Stadt. Nacht und Regen. Wir sehn von allen Gebäuden nur den ersten Stock, da der große Schirm des Autos uns die Aussicht nimmt. Phantastische Vorstellung über die Höhe der Schlösser und Kirchen. Perspektive einer Kellerwohnung, sagt Kafka' (F 74) ['In *Munich* car ride through the city. Night and rain. We only see the ground floor of all the buildings since the large roof of the car blocks our view. Fantastical ideas about the height of castles and churches. Perspective from a basement flat, says Kafka']. Brod makes up for the restricted view from the taxi by imagining the height of the cropped buildings. Kafka, in contrast, limits himself to what he can actually see and—more importantly—hear: 'Automobil in München. Regen, rasche Fahrt (20 Min.) Kellerwohnungperspektive, Führer ruft die Namen der unsichtbaren

[19] Brod, *Über Franz Kafka*, 95. [20] Ibid., 103.

Sehenswürdigkeiten aus, die Pneumatiks rauschen auf dem nassen Asphalt wie der Apparat im Kinematographen' (TB 944) ['Rain, fast ride (20 min.), basement-flat perspective, the driver calls out the names of the invisible sights, the tyres hum on the wet asphalt like a film projector' (ED 433)].

Unlike Brod, who provides an essentially realist explanation for the restricted view, Kafka is not concerned with the external conditions of this experience but with its perceptual effects. The paradox of the 'invisible sights' directs his attention to aural sensations, namely to the sound of the tyres on the road which he associates with the sound of a film projector. As before, then, the cinematic experience is associated with modern, fast-moving means of transportation. Yet while in other contexts travel had invested reality with an enhanced vividness, here the opposite is the case. Although the two sightseers are by implication situated right inside the film projector, this prevents them from seeing or recording anything at all. Once again, then, film is here evoked as a vehicle of reduced rather than enhanced perception.

This episode points to the core dilemma of Kafka's travel diaries. Rich in details and observations, they are often informed by a sense of fragmentation which mirrors both the fleeting view from the train and the distracted gaze of the urban *flâneur*. The mobility of the observer, coupled with the sheer diversity of the encountered stimuli, results in a narrative unable to synthesize these impressions. This mechanism is apparent throughout Kafka's notes on the journey, as in the following passage: 'Geschäftliche Unternehmungen in Villen.—Viel Gesang in Lindau auf dem Bahnhof in der Nacht.—Patriotische Statistik: Flächeninhalt einer in der Ebene auseinandergezogenen Schweiz.—fremde Chokoladenfirmen—(Verlorengegangenes)' (TB 946–7) ['Businesses located in villas.—Much singing in Lindau station at night.—Patriotic statistics: the size of Switzerland if it were laid out flat.—foreign chocolate companies—(things that got lost)']. In the manuscript, these individual remarks are separated from each other by horizontal lines, thus further underlining their discontinuity. Particularly revealing is the final entry, which refers to all of those impressions which are lost to this cursory mode of description. In this respect, the movie projector whose sound is evoked right at the beginning of the journey becomes a vehicle for the author's travel

experience, whose sense of dispersal echoes Kafka's accounts of cinema visits.[21]

Upon his return to Prague, Kafka reflects on the socio-cultural causes of this perceptual dynamic, comparing his own travel experiences to those of a literary predecessor. As he writes on 29 September 1911:

Reisebeobachtungen Goethes anders als die heutigen, weil sie aus einer Postkutsche gemacht mit den langsamen Veränderungen des Geländes sich einfacher entwickeln und viel leichter selbst von demjenigen verfolgt werden können, der jene Gegenden nicht kennt. Ein ruhiges förmlich landschaftliches Denken tritt ein. Da die Gegend unbeschädigt in ihrem eingeborenen Charakter dem Insassen des Wagens sich darbietet und auch die Landstraßen das Land viel natürlicher schneiden als die Eisenbahnstrecken, zu denen sie vielleicht im gleichen Verhältnisse stehn wie Flüsse zu Kanälen, so braucht es auch beim Beschauer keine Gewalttätigkeiten und er kann ohne große Mühe systematisch sehn. Augenblicksbeobachtungen gibt es daher wenige. (TB 42–3)

Goethe's observations on his travels different from today's because they are made from a mail-coach, and with the slow changes of the region, develop more simply and can be followed much more easily even by one who does not know those parts of the country. A calm, so-to-speak pastoral form of thinking sets in. Since the country offers itself unscathed in its indigenous character to the passengers in a carriage, and since highways too divide the country much more naturally than the railway lines to which they perhaps stand in the same relationship as do rivers to canals, so too the observer need do no violence to the landscape and can see systematically without great effort. Therefore there are few observations of the moment. (ED 56)

Kafka discerns in Goethe's travel diaries an antidote to his own, fragmented mode of viewing. Their inner coherence is not, however, a mere testimony to Goethe's superior narrative mastery and control; rather, they point to the wider contextual factors which influence literary representation. Human perception is not a timeless, transhistorical stance but is shaped by factors both individual and collective, psychological and material. Kafka discerns in Goethe's writings the

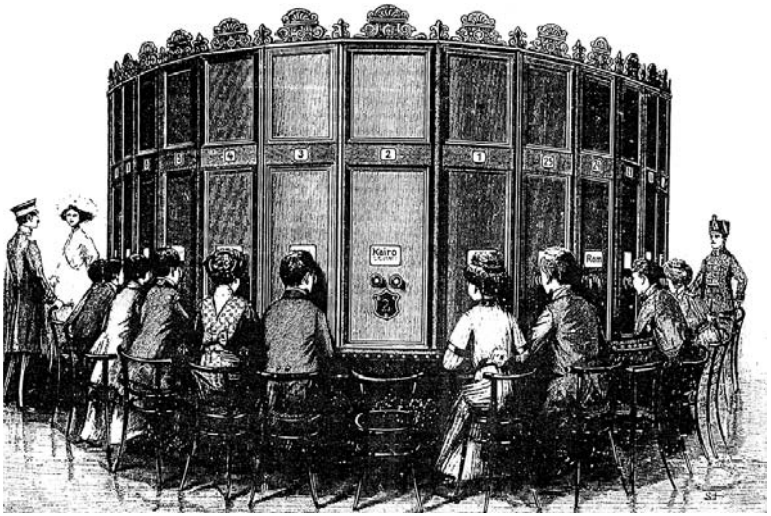
[21] In contrast, Kafka's subsequent entries, which are not recorded while travelling but which describe the friends' stays in particular places, and finally in Paris, display a greater sense of coherence.

merits of a pretechnological society as reflected in the experience of travel. The view from the mail coach presents the writer with a gradually transforming landscape, a sight which lends itself for a coherent narrative account. What is more, the traveller is able to adopt a contemplative stance, a 'pastoral form of thinking', which is in tune with the surrounding sights, thus highlighting a correlation between perception and reflection, between external sights and the viewer's internal disposition. This correlation continues to exist in modern life, but here produces a very different, destabilizing effect. The view from the mail coach gives way to the fleeting impressions gathered during the train journey, which preclude coherent narration or reflection. This visual fragmentation, which recurs in cinematic montage techniques, even impacts on reality itself: the landscape dissected by rail tracks has lost the organic unity of Goethe's time.

Kafka's reflections thus highlight the far-reaching changes which separate Goethe's writings from his own time and culture. Not that Kafka yearns for some idealized pretechnological era; although his accounts betray a certain ambivalence towards film and other modern visual media, these spectacles also harbour an undeniable attraction and fascination for the emerging writer. Nevertheless, what emerges from this and other diary passages is the desire for a visual paradigm which enables a more constructive, synthesized mode of perception and textual recording. Since the cinema does not offer a sustainable source of literary inspiration, Kafka turns to a precinematic medium on his search for a more constructive form of visual entertainment.

CONTINUITY AND CONTEMPLATION: THE KAISER PANORAMA

During a business trip to the north Bohemian town of Friedland in January 1911, Kafka pays a visit to an institution which is today largely forgotten: the Kaiser Panorama, a predecessor but also competitor of the cinema. Devised by the entrepreneur August Fuhrmann and first opened in 1880, the 'Kaiser Panorama'—not to be confused with the



3. The Kaiser Panorama.

painted panorama—was a cylindrical construction of about fifteen feet in diameter designed for the display of glass stereoscopic photographs which were illuminated from behind. The invention soon caught on; in 1883, the first Kaiser Panorama opened in Berlin Unter den Linden where it remained in use until its closure in 1939. At the height of its popularity, more than two hundred and fifty Kaiser Panoramas were in operation across Germany and Austria. To cater for his audience, Fuhrmann employed an army of photographers who took pictures of headline-making events and exotic places, gaining access to secluded locations such as the private apartments of the Pope or the harem of the Sultan of Turkey.[22] His project was to catalogue the sights and events of his time, an undertaking which marked, as the name of his invention suggests, the photographic equivalent of the political imperialism of his age. Up to twenty-five viewers could see the programme, which changed twice weekly and consisted of two sets of fifty images. In previous decades, stereoscopic photographs had been viewed through individual home-viewing devices;

[22] Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 230.

the invention of the Kaiser Panorama replaced this private, domestic context with a public, commercialized mode of display.[23] Although the images shown were individual stills not usually connected by an underlying narrative, the Kaiser Panorama nevertheless figures as a chief predecessor of film, which was invented only fifteen years later.

By the time Kafka visited the Kaiser Panorama in 1911, the popularity of this stereoscopic peep show had long been overtaken by the cinema. Interestingly, however, this anachronism only enhanced its attraction as an object of literary description. Only two years later, Brod published an essay on the Kaiser Panorama in which he contrasted its outdated charm favourably with the new, 'soulless' medium of film.[24] Indeed, Kafka and Brod were clearly engaged in a dialogue about the Kaiser Panorama, as is illustrated by a postcard which Kafka sent to his friend from his Friedland trip:

> Kannst Du Dir auch, wie ich, eine fremde Gegend dann am besten vorstellen, wenn Du von einer ruhigen, sonst in der ganzen Welt möglichen Beschäftigung hörst, mit der jemand in jener Gegend seine Zeit zugebracht hat? … Ich war im Kaiserpanorama u. habe Brescia, Mantua u. Kremona gesehn. (B1 132)

> Are you too, like me, best able to imagine an unfamiliar region when you have heard about a quiet occupation of the kind possible anywhere else in the world, which someone has practised somewhere in that region? … I went to the Kaiser Panorama and saw Brescia, Mantua, and Cremona. (EL 71)

[23] Busch, *Belichtete Welt*, 383.

[24] Brod's essay, entitled 'Panorama', was published in his essay collection *Über die Schönheit häßlicher Bilder* (*On the Beauty of Ugly Images*, 1913). Initially, Brod had tried to persuade Kafka to include his piece on 'Die Aeroplane in Brescia' ('The Aeroplanes at Brescia') in the volume, but Kafka resisted, noting in his diary: 'Er will in das Buch auch mein Brescia aufnehmen. Alles Gute in mir wehrt sich dagegen' (TB 242) ['He wants to include my Brescia in the book too. Everything good in me struggles against it' (ED 113)]. Twenty years later, Walter Benjamin returns to the Kaiser Panorama from a similarly sentimental perspective in his memoirs *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*. We cannot be sure whether Kafka's account influenced that of Brod or whether he was in turn already familiar with Brod's piece, but it is likely that Kafka would have shown his piece to his friend, as was his general practice at the time. For a detailed comparison of Kafka's, Brod's, and Benjamin's texts, see my '"Die Ruhe des Blickes": Brod, Kafka, Benjamin and the *Kaiserpanorama*', in Christian Emden and David Midgley (eds.), *Science, Technology and the German Cultural Imagination* (Oxford: Lang, 2005), 231–55.

Rather than writing about the town of Friedland or his experiences on the journey, Kafka focuses on his Panorama visit, an entertainment which, as he himself admits, would have been available in any larger town in Austria or Germany. What is more, the images of Italian cities displayed in the Kaiser Panorama are not actually new to Kafka or Brod but provide a common reference point between the two friends, who had visited these cities on an earlier holiday trip to Italy in September 1909.[25] As a result, Kafka's postcard, as well as the associated diary account, differs from his other travel writings: here the focus is not on new spectacles but on an interplay of memory and perception, whereby the recollection of previous experiences helps to mediate new, unfamiliar sights. Particularly significant is the description of the visit as a 'quiet occupation', suggesting a contemplative stance which will become essential in Kafka's diary account of the Kaiser Panorama. Indeed, the visit to this outdated institution enables him to formulate a critique of modern media culture but also to rethink his own stance as a writer and viewer.

On more than one level, Kafka's diary constructs the Panorama visit as a journey into the past. The only other visitors are three old ladies who have remained loyal to this spectacle of their youth. The old man, in contrast, who runs this establishment has moved on to more up-to-date forms of entertainment; he is reading an issue of the magazine *Illustrierte Welt*, a title which reflects the goals of Fuhrmann's invention while also underlining its obsolete status. Alongside film, illustrated magazines were a major source of competition as they provided more accessible and up-to-date coverage of events. The clearest indication of the Kaiser Panorama's outdated character, however, is provided by Kafka's own response:

> Kaiserpanorama. Einzige Vergnügung in Friedland. Habe keine rechte Bequemlichkeit darin, weil ich mich einer solchen schönen Einrichtung wie ich sie dort antraf, nicht versehen hatte, mit schneebehängten Stiefeln eingetreten war und nun vor den Gläsern sitzend nur mit den Fußspitzen den Teppich berührte. Ich hatte die Einrichtung der Panoramas vergessen und fürchtete einen Augenblick lang von einem Sessel zum andern gehn zu müssen. (TB 936–7)

[25] Brod, *Über Franz Kafka*, 91–2.

The Kaiser Panorama, the only amusement in Friedland. Didn't feel quite at ease because I hadn't been prepared for so elegantly furnished an interior as I found inside, had entered with snow-covered boots, and, sitting in front of the binoculars, touched the rug only with my boot toes. I had forgotten about the set-up of such places, and for a moment I was afraid I would have to walk from one chair to another. (ED 429–30)

Kafka's remark that he had forgotten about the 'set-up' (*Einrichtung*) of the Kaiser Panorama is an ambivalent formulation which could refer to either its display mechanism or its more general status as an institution. His inhibitions about entering this plush, antiquated interior with his snow-covered boots reveals a sense of dislocation which is reinforced when he takes up his seat and realizes that his feet barely touch the ground. Revealingly, however, Kafka is most worried about the prospect of having to get up again to look at the other images, a concern which turns out to be unfounded. The viewer's static position is a central feature of the Kaiser Panorama and anticipates the set-up of the cinema, where the stationary viewer is likewise confronted with moving images. Yet the Kaiser Panorama also differs from the cinema in two crucial respects; not only are the individual images static rather than animated but the viewing experience itself is an individual rather than a collective one, enabling a more intimate encounter between observer and image.

This intimacy is reflected in Kafka's account, which reveals as much about the images as about the writer's own underlying concerns:

Brescia, Kremona, Verona. Menschen drin wie Wachspuppen an den Sohlen im Boden im Pflaster befestigt. Grabdenkmäler: eine Dame mit über eine niedrige Treppe schleifender Schleppe öffnet ein wenig eine Tür und schaut noch zurück dabei. Eine Familie, vorn liest ein Junge eine Hand an der Schläfe, ein Knabe rechts spannt einen unbesaiteten Bogen. Denkmal des Helden Tito Speri: verwahrlost und begeistert wehen ihm die Kleider um den Leib. Bluse, breiter Hut. (TB 937)

Brescia, Cremona, Verona. People in them, like wax dolls, their feet fixed to the pavement. Tombstones: a lady dragging the train of her dress over a low step opens a door part way, looking backward all the while. A family, in the foreground a boy is reading, one hand at his brow; a boy on the right is tensing an unstrung bow. Statue of the hero Tito Speri: his clothes flutter in enthusiastic neglect about his body. Blouse, broad-brimmed hat. (ED 430)

4. Tombstone depicting a female figure. Stereoscopic slide from the Kaiser Panorama.

The photographs described here are linked through the theme of memory and commemoration. Time is suspended within these images, whose sitters are likened to wax dolls. In this respect, photography blurs the boundaries between the animate and inanimate, and even between life and death. In the Kaiser Panorama, pictures of real people are interspersed with those of tomb monuments, and Kafka's diary reinforces this uncanny effect; in his text, the difference between human beings and statues is eroded to the point where we cannot be sure whether the boy tensing his bow is alive or a sculpture. Thus Kafka's account reverses fundamental categories of perception and representation; while photography has a mortifying effect on living people, the memorials of the dead—the statue of the woman and the sculpture of Tito Speri—are invested with an animated, life-like quality.

While the writer's imagination thus brings some images back to life, this account also emphasizes photography's association with death and commemoration. This notion extends even to the depicted locations. The Italian cities of Brescia, Cremona, and Verona were part of the Austrian Empire only until 1859; the photographs on

display during Kafka's visit thus gesture back to a faded imperial glory. Yet the memorial function of the Kaiser Panorama is also a self-reflexive one; in a time dominated by ever more dynamic, fast-moving spectacles, the displayed images act as epitaphs for the Kaiser Panorama's own moribund technology.

However, it is precisely the outdated character of this institution which gives rise to a more general reflection about changing modes of perception:

> Die Bilder lebendiger als im Kinematographen, weil sie dem Blick die Ruhe der Wirklichkeit lassen. Der Kinematograph gibt dem Angeschauten die Unruhe ihrer Bewegung, die Ruhe des Blickes scheint wichtiger.… Warum gibt es keine Vereinigung von Kinema und Stereoskop in dieser Weise? (TB 937)

> The pictures more alive than in the cinema because they offer the eye all the repose of reality. The cinema communicates the restlessness of its motion to the things pictured in it; the repose of the gaze would seem to be more important.… Why can't they combine the cinema and stereoscope in this way? (ED 430)

Kafka is keen to defend the Kaiser Panorama against its apparently superior cinematic successor. His preference for the 'repose' of the Panorama photographs over the 'restlessness' of film makes explicit the sense of exposure which underpins all his diary accounts about the cinema. While film invests the depicted reality with a heightened, excessive dynamism, the Kaiser Panorama enables a more sustained viewing experience, allowing the observer to maintain a sense of perceptual control. Indeed, it is the viewer's input, rather than the medium alone, which elevates the Kaiser Panorama above the cinema. Despite the more advanced technology, Kafka argues that film images are less lively, and hence lifelike, than the Panorama photographs, because the latter are animated not by a machine but by the viewer's gaze and imagination.

That said, Kafka does not reject the cinema outright; in fact, he alludes to a possible fusion between film and stereoscopic photography, which could be combined to create a new viewing experience. Bettina Augustin has conjectured that Kafka here anticipates the idea of the tracking shot, a technique which replaced the sudden, disruptive cuts of early cinema about ten years after Kafka's Panorama

visit.[26] In fact, though, when we situate Kafka's comment within his wider discussions of cinema and photography, it becomes clear that there are three aspects which lend the Kaiser Panorama a particular significance for Kafka: the three-dimensional character of its images, their stasis, and their particular display mechanism.

Much like the cinema, the Kaiser Panorama is a multisensory, multimedia experience. The old man who runs the place plays music from an 'Ariston', a predecessor of the gramophone (TB 937),[27] to accompany the silent images. In addition, each photograph is accompanied by a caption which appears in a separate window above the binoculars and which resembles the intertitles in silent film. In contrast to film, however, the displayed images appear three-dimensional to the viewer, a feature which accounts for their crucial advantage in the eyes of Kafka. Stereoscopic images were viewed through a binocular apparatus which presented each of the observer's eyes with a photograph of the same scene; since the perspective of each image was slightly different, the three-dimensionality of unmediated vision was recreated.[28]

Kafka evocatively describes the effect of this optical technique. Because of their three-dimensional character, stereoscopic photographs appeal not only to vision but also to the more visceral senses of touch and taste. Both in his diary and in the postcard to Brod, Kafka mentions the 'Glatter Boden der Kathedralen vor unserer Zunge' (TB 937) ['smooth floors of the cathedrals in

[26] Bettina Augustin, 'Raban im Kino: Kafka und die zeitgenössische Kinematographie', *Schriftenreihe der Franz-Kafka-Gesellschaft*, 2 (1987), 37–69: 56.

[27] In the English edition of the diaries, 'Ariston' is falsely translated as 'magic-lantern slides' (ED 430).

[28] The stereoscope, an earlier nineteenth-century invention, derived from physiological research into human vision, and in particular from the insight that the brain synthesizes the two different images seen by each eye into a single three-dimensional impression. In the nineteenth century, stereoscopic photographs were viewed mainly through individual home-viewing devices; indeed, these devices represented one of the most popular modes of viewing photographs more generally. In the course of the century, however, the stereoscope became 'increasingly synonymous with erotic and pornographic imagery', leading to its 'social demise as a mode of visual consumption' (Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 127). Against this backdrop, the Kaiser Panorama contributes to the rehabilitatation of the stereoscope as a respectable form of public entertainment.

front of our tongues' (ED 430)], a description which encapsulates the tactile immediacy of this sight. It is no coincidence, moreover, that the tongue is also the organ of speech; by immersing himself in the multisensory spectacle laid out before him, the writer can successfully record and relate this encounter.[29]

That said, the Panorama visit also raises questions about the fundamental differences between vision and narrative: 'Plakate mit Pilsen Wihrer aus Brescia bekannt. Die Entfernung zwischen bloßem Erzählenhören und Panorama sehn ist größer, als die Entfernung zwischen Letzterem und dem Sehn der Wirklichkeit. Alteisenmarkt in Kremona' (TB 937) ['Posters reading ''Pilsen Wihrer'', familiar to me from Brescia. The gap between simply hearing about a thing and seeing Panorama images of it is greater than the gap between the latter and actually seeing the thing itself. Old-ironware market in Cremona' (ED 430)]. Having travelled to the locations depicted in the slides, Kafka is able to compare the Panorama images to his own experiences, as well as to possible narrative accounts. While the photographs trigger a sense of immediate recognition, bringing back the memories of a previous journey, Kafka stresses the gap between this medium and verbal forms of representation. Narrative and photography are here cast in contrast and competition, suggesting the superior immediacy of this optical technique. As it turns out, however, this hierarchy is only one side of the story. In fact, Kafka's comments above illustrate a narrative strategy founded on a correlation, rather than an opposition, between visual technology and its textual evocation.

In contrast to the continuous stream of images in the cinema, the Kaiser Panorama offers a compromise between movement and stasis, between spectacle and contemplation; each individual image, which is displayed for about two minutes,[30] can be explored in close detail, yet the slide-show mechanism also offers enough of a sense of diversity to keep the audience entertained. Most importantly, however, the individual images are separated from each other through blank slides, a set-up which provides room for intermittent reflection and recollection. This rhythm of seeing and not seeing is crucial for

[29] The fact that Kafka repeats this formulation in his postcard to Brod (B1 132/EL 71) underlines the importance he accorded it in evoking his Panorama experience.

[30] Crary, *Suspensions*, 136.

Kafka's account, setting his Panorama visit apart from more dynamic viewing experiences. In his diary, descriptions of the viewed scenes alternate with more general comments on the Kaiser Panorama, its representational technique, and its place in modern culture. Thus this seemingly outdated institution offers scope for narrative description, memory, and reflection—processes which are foreclosed by more fleeting spectacles such as the cinema.

If the Kaiser Panorama thus allows for a greater sense of perceptual mastery, this is only one effect of its display mechanism. Fuhrmann's invention contributes to a pervasive tendency in turn-of-the-century culture and society, namely the increasingly sophisticated conditioning of the viewer's response through visual technologies. Although its set-up offers greater scope for contemplation, it also predetermines, as Kafka's account so strikingly illustrates, the viewer's response through its automated display mechanism. In this respect, the Kaiser Panorama is exemplary of a more general tendency: the 'industrialization' of perception through a 'physical and temporal alignment of body and machine' which contributes to the conditioning of the subject as viewer.[31]

As Walter Benjamin has noted, in modernity the unmediated experience of reality becomes an unattainable ideal, a 'blauen Blume im Land der Technik' (BGS I 495) ['Blue Flower in the land of technology' (BSW IV 263)].[32] Tracing the complex interrelations between vision, technology, and narrative, Kafka's early diaries underline this observation. They illustrate that visual pleasure often goes hand in hand with a sense of exposure and vulnerability, as the modern spectacles challenge the viewer's perceptual control and synthesizing capacity. Goethe's travel writings provide an alternative to this fragmentary experience, bringing out the historically determined and hence variable nature of perception. Thus Goethe's works enable Kafka to formulate a critique of his own culture and its increasingly fragmented modes of experience in the wake of the cinema and other technologically enhanced spectacles. The Kaiser Panorama

[31] Crary, *Suspensions*, 138.

[32] On this metaphor and its significance for Benjamin's media theory, see Miriam Hansen, 'Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: "The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology" ', *New German Critique*, 40 (1987), 179–224.

appears to provide an alternative, pre-cinematic form of spectacle, approximating the Goethean ideal of an organic unity between vision and writing. Crucially, however, even this institution does not enable a return to a pre-technological era; although Kafka stresses its contemplative potential, his diary account, whose structure reflects the display mechanism, also illustrates the conditioning effect of modern technology. As a result, then, the Kaiser Panorama does not provide a way out of a technologically mediated form of perception; rather, it offers a compromise between Goethe's 'pastoral form of thinking' and the fragmentation inherent in cinematic, and quasi-cinematic, modes of experiences.

In this respect, however, the Kaiser Panorama lays the foundations for a more general shift in Kafka's literary development. Indeed, this experience and its diary account marks, as Hann Zischler puts it, an 'Archimedean point of rejection of cinematography'.[33] Increasingly it is the close, 'photographic' focus on particular sights, rather than a fleeting, cinematic stream of impressions, which informs Kafka's narrative style. In the literary texts, moreover, photography begins to feature as a textual motif, thus further underlining this shift in Kafka's visual orientation and narrative approach. Yet just as the contemplation enabled by the Kaiser Panorama is in turn the result of a rigidly determined display mechanism, the literary potential of photography soon becomes intertwined with its restrictive dimensions. As we shall see, this tension between the mobilizing power of photography and its capacity to arrest, fixate, and condition both viewer and object is played out in Kafka's first novel *Der Verschollene*.

[33] Zischler, *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, 28.

3

Der Verschollene: Visions of the New World

For the average European citizen of the early twentieth century, America was a distant dream, a country accessible only through second-hand images and reports. Landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty, Brooklyn Bridge, or the skyscrapers of New York nonetheless played a central part in the collective imagination, acting as icons of modernity and progress even for those who had never crossed the Atlantic. Within the burgeoning field of modern mass culture, photography was essential in shaping European understandings of the United States. Travel photography was a thriving cultural activity in Kafka's time, with German, Austrian, and Czech photographers venturing to cater for the public's desire for new, unfamiliar sights.[1] Images of America were widely disseminated through magazines, newspapers, postcards, and illustrated travelogues, as well as through the medium of film.[2]

Kafka's decision to set his first novel *Der Verschollene* (*The Man Who Disappeared*, 1912–14) in the United States testifies to his fascination with both America and the technical media through which it was represented. Although several of his relatives emigrated to the United

[1] On Czech travel photography in Kafka's time, see Jaroslav Anděl, *Česká fotografie 1840–1950: Příběh moderního média* (Prague: Galerie Rudolfinum, 2004), 26–9.

[2] On the turn-of-the-century European reception of photographs of the New World, see David E. Haberstich, 'American Photographs in Europe and Illusions of Travel', in David E. Nye and Mike Gidley (eds.), *American Photographs in Europe* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), and Wolfgang Hellbich, 'Different, But Not Out of This World: German Images of the United States between Two Wars, 1871–1914', in David E. Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt (eds.), *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions: Germany and America since 1776* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 109–29: 122.

States,[3] Kafka himself never left Europe and thus had to rely on the images and accounts of others for literary inspiration. Yet this lack of first-hand experience was not an obstacle for the conception of the novel; on the contrary, it provided Kafka with a unique opportunity to put his ideas about modern media culture into literary practice.

As I shall argue, *Der Verschollene* is profoundly influenced by Kafka's autobiographical reflections on the technical media and their impact on the stance of the observer. Although the novel is set in the United States, its discourse on vision is inspired by the author's European travels and by his encounters with the visual culture of his time.[4] Rather than providing a mimetic depiction of American life, *Der Verschollene* enables Kafka to explore his personal concerns about vision, technology, and writing within a fictional context. In particular, the text negotiates the tension between photographic and filmic modes of viewing which, as we have seen, informs Kafka's early diaries and which is now played out in a fictional context. Film is closely associated with the conception of the novel; on 25 September 1912, Kafka notes:

Vom Schreiben mich mit Gewalt zurückgehalten. Mich im Bett gewälzt.… Heute abend mich vom Schreiben weggerissen. Kinematograph im Landesteater. Loge. Frl. Oplatka, welche einmal ein Geistlicher verfolgte. Sie kam ganz naß von Angstschweiß nachhause. Danzig. Körners Leben. Die Pferde. Das weiße Pferd. Der Pulverrauch. Lützows wilde Jagd. (TB 463)

By force kept myself from writing. Tossed in bed.… This evening tore myself away from my writing. Films in the National Theatre. Box. Fräulein Oplatka, whom a clergyman once pursued. She came home soaked in cold sweat. Danzig. Life of Körner. The horses. The white horse. The smoke of gunpowder. Lützow's Wild Hunt. (ED 214)

[3] Anthony Northey, *Kafka's Relatives: Their Lives and his Writing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 51–67.

[4] See Hans Christoph Buch, '*Ut pictura poesis*': *Die Beschreibunsgliteratur und ihre Kritiker von Lessing bis Lukács* (Munich: Hanser, 1972), 261, and Mark Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg 'Fin-de-Siècle'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, repr. 2002), 102. Hartmut Binder argues that Kafka's trips to Paris in 1909 and 1911 particularly inspired his depiction of the American city (*Kafka in Paris: Historische Spaziergänge mit alten Photographien* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1999), 20, 62, 114).

The entry immediately following these remarks is 'Der Heizer' ('The Stoker'), the novel's first chapter. Thus the creative conception of *Der Verschollene* is immediately preceded by a cinema visit, and yet this visit is figured in opposition, rather than correlation, to the writing process. Not once but twice does Kafka stress the need to tear himself forcibly away from writing, a restrictive measure perhaps intended to increase the creative flow. In any case, the visual media and writing are both associated and dissociated in this passage, entering into an ambivalent relationship which is exemplary of the novel as a whole.

In both its style and structure, *Der Verschollene* has often been compared to early film; indeed, Kafka's portrayal of the United States contains various cinematic features, such as the prominent role of gestures and other non-verbal elements.[5] However, it is Kafka's depiction of the American city as a perpetually moving, highly unstable spectacle which most closely reflects his own experience of film, as it puts into practice the fragmented style of perception which in the diaries is associated with the cinema. Yet although film thus continues to underpin Kafka's writings, this medium is now, as in the diaries, juxtaposed with a second, contrasting visual paradigm: with a more sustained, photographic gaze which stalls the cinematic flux of the narrative, subjecting particular scenes to close scrutiny and exploration.[6]

This textual strategy marks a continuation of Kafka's autobiographical writings at the time, in that it maintains his preference for photographic over filmic modes of viewing; in particular, the novel builds on his engagement with the Kaiser Panorama, where he first develops his ideal of a more sustained, focused mode of visual description. *Der Verschollene* puts Kafka's Panorama experience into literary practice by capturing the protagonist's—and the reader's—attention through its photographically detailed narrative

[5] Wolfgang Jahn is the first critic to draw a connection between *Der Verschollene* and the cinema in his article 'Kafka und die Anfänge des Kinos', *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 6 (1962), 353–68 and again in *Kafkas Roman 'Der Verschollene' ('Amerika')* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965), 49–67. This argument is then further developed by Mark Anderson, who relates the filmic perspective to the motif of traffic (*Verkehr*) in Kafka's writings (*Kafka's Clothes*, 117–22).

[6] John Zilcosky remarks on the 'double effect of cinematic speed and photographic motionlessness' which characterizes Kafka's style at the time (*Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 13).

tableaux. Indeed, Kafka's novel could be more profitably compared to a slide-show or photo album, presenting the reader with a succession of self-contained scenes which are only loosely connected through a sense of narrative progression and which in fact bring out the circular, repetitive character of the protagonist's journey.

While the Kaiser Panorama episode thus illustrates Kafka's general turn towards photographic modes of writing, it also prefigures the novel's more specific narrative conception. In this outdated form of entertainment, photography figures as a medium of imaginary travel, a substitute for the personal experience which might enable the visual exploration of remote sights and cultures;[7] the visitor remains fixed behind the binoculars within a secluded domestic interior as the images of exotic places move past him. In this respect, the Kaiser Panorama anticipates the narrative of *Der Verschollene*, which likewise draws on photography as a substitute for immediate perception and experience. In his novel, Kafka makes ample use of photographic material which he transplants into his text, presenting the reader with his own narrative version of a photographic slide-show. Thus *Der Verschollene* not only reflects the turn-of-the-century vogue for travel writing and the exploration of new territories, but also offers a literary reflection on the process of cultural and technological mediation whereby exotic sights become incorporated in the Western imagination.

Kafka displayed a keen interest in photographic depictions of the New World, which he encountered both privately and in his wider cultural context. His family had received several picture postcards from relatives who had emigrated to the United States,[8] and in June 1912 Kafka visited a slide-show about North America by the Czech photographer František Soukup. His library contained Arthur Holitscher's travelogue *Amerika: Heute und morgen* (*America: Today and Tomorrow*, 1912), a book whose photographic illustrations inspired many descriptions in Kafka's novel.[9] Although

[7] Likewise, nineteenth-century home stereoscopic devices were also used to view travel photographs (Peter D. Osborne, *Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 52–68).

[8] Northey, *Kafka's Relatives*, 50.

[9] Kafka's library contains the 1913 edition of Holitscher's book but several striking parallels between his novel and Holitscher's illustrations imply that he already

photographs of the United States do not appear to have featured in the particular programme seen by Kafka, such images were also a regular feature of the Kaiser Panorama's repertoire.[10] Kafka, like his contemporaries, was thus surrounded by a vast range of public and private, popular and academic representations of American life.

Yet while Kafka's depiction of America is shaped by such travel photographs from various sources, the actual motif of photography within the text is associated with a very different photographic tradition. After all, *Der Verschollene* is not just a modernist travelogue but also a family saga which traces the protagonist's continued attachment to his European roots, and to this end Kafka draws on another set of images, adapting private portraits taken from his own family album in order to bring out his novel's second major theme. Karl's physical journey from Europe to the United States encapsulates a symbolic shift from tradition to modernity, from stability to social degradation, and from family networks to an ever-changing field of social relations. Photography both demarcates and undermines this contrast; while Karl is fascinated by the spectacles of the New World, he remains emotionally attached to private family portraits which he can scrutinize in a more focused and contemplative manner. In the course of the novel, however, the opposition between Europe and America becomes increasingly blurred, as photography highlights the visual as well as psychological continuities between these two domains. Rather than demarcating an absolute dichotomy of old and new, tradition and modernity, photography mediates between these two cultural and geographical domains, highlighting a dialectic of change and continuity.

knew the original 1912 edition when writing *Der Verschollene*. For a more detailed account of these and other sources used by Kafka, see Jahn, *Kafkas Roman* and Alfred Wirkner, *Kafka und die Außenwelt: Quellenstudien zum 'Amerika'-Fragment* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1976).

[10] In 1914, two-thirds of all Kaiser Panorama programmes were dedicated to travel photography (Erhard Senf, *Kaiser-Panorama* <http://www.tbk.de/3dstereo/kpvskp.htm> accessed 15 December 2006). Out of a total of 160,000 photographs, 12,000 images are preserved in the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin. They include series about San Francisco before and after the 1906 earthquake, about California, and about a journey from Mexico to Texas (Erhard Senf, *Die Stereoskopie* <http://www.tbk.de/3dstereo/sbkpb.htm> accessed 15 December 2006).

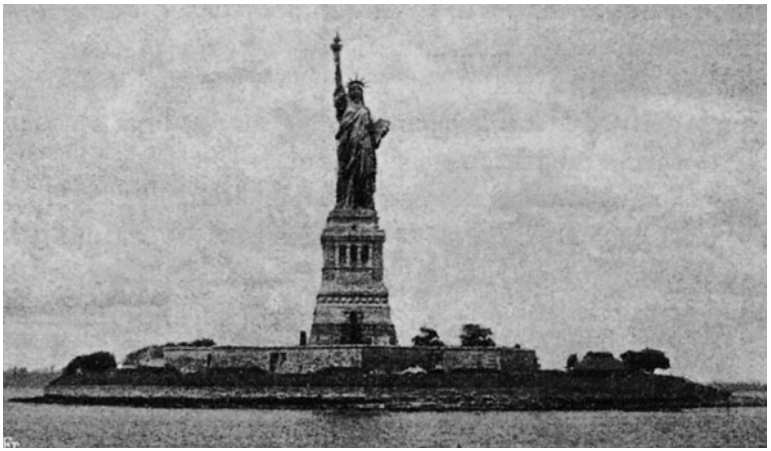
RUPTURES AND BEGINNINGS

The opening scene of *Der Verschollene* exemplifies both Kafka's idiosyncratic adaptation of actual photographs and his turn towards photography as an underlying narrative principle. Karl Rossmann's first arrival in the United States coincides with a radical change in perception; when his ship enters New York harbour, he sees 'die schon längst beobachtete Statue der Freiheitsgöttin wie in einem plötzlich stärker gewordenen Sonnenlicht. Ihr Arm mit dem Schwert ragte wie neuerdings empor und um ihre Gestalt wehten die freien Lüfte' (GV 7) ['the Statue of Liberty, which had already been in view for some time, as though in an intenser sunlight. The sword in her hand seemed only just to have been raised aloft, and the unchained winds blew about her form' (EA 3)]. Karl's previous, sustained observation of the Statue of Liberty is supplanted by a sudden heightening of his visual capacities which mirrors his growing excitement. The sudden increase in sunlight which appears to highlight the statue resembles a photographic flash disrupting Karl's and the reader's mode of perception; as Heinz Politzer puts it, 'the stream of life is interrupted by the light and recorded forever in its startled suspension'.[11] This opening scene is emblematic of the novel's overall narrative strategy: repeatedly the textual flow is disrupted by photographically detailed static tableaux which are thrown into sharp relief. This narrative strategy, furthermore, takes on a psychological dimension: vision in Kafka's first novel does not demarcate a clear contrast between subject and object, but rather signifies the collapse of the boundaries between subjective perception and objective reality.

While photographic modes of perception thus shape the narrative, such scenes are frequently based on extra-textual sources. One of Kafka's principal inspirations, Holitscher's travelogue *Amerika: Heute und morgen*, depicts the Statue of Liberty in its very first photograph. Here as elsewhere, however, Kafka does not merely reproduce this image, but rather subjects his photographic material to a complex

[11] Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox*, extended and revised edn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 122.

process of adaptation and transformation. Alfred Wirkner's claim that Kafka draws on photography 'as an incorruptible medium of information which provides objectively accurate evidence'[12] therefore misses the point; in fact, Kafka alters his photographic sources to bring out narrative patterns or psychological dynamics.



5. Statue of Liberty; in Arthur Holitscher, *Amerika: Heute und morgen*, 11.

Kafka's idiosyncratic adaptation of Holitscher's photograph is a case in point; not only does he curiously refer to the statue as a 'goddess', but he also changes her raised torch into a sword, thus investing this supposedly liberating sight with a castrating authoritarian power. Within the novel, this tableau has both a retrospective and an anticipatory function, underlining the continuity between Karl's traumatic past—his expulsion by his parents—and the fate which awaits him in the New World. In this respect, the opening scene is exemplary of Kafka's idiosyncratic use of photography for his portrayal of the United States, an approach characterized by a mixture of realism and distortion. The photographic flash illuminating this scene disrupts not only the protagonist's but also the reader's acquired cultural knowledge; as Kafka puts it in a deleted variant, Karl 'sah

[12] Wirkner, *Kafka und die Außenwelt*, 17.

zu [der Statue] auf und verwarf das über sie Gelernte' (GVA 123) ['looked up [to the Statue] and discarded what he had previously learnt about it'].

In Holitscher's book, the photograph of the Statue of Liberty is reproduced opposite the first page, thus providing an iconic point of entry into his travelogue. Kafka adapts this photograph into a kind of frontispiece which signifies his departure from the conventions of realism. His publisher, however, had a different frontispiece in mind, one diametrically opposed to Kafka's literary agenda. During his lifetime, only the novel's first chapter 'Der Heizer' was published in a separate volume, where it was accompanied by an engraving chosen by the publisher. In a letter to his editor, Kurt Wolff, of 25 May 1913, Kafka expresses his reservations about this picture and its effect on his potential readers:

> Als ich das Bild in meinem Buche sah, bin ich zuerst erschrocken, denn erstens widerlegt es mich, der ich doch das allermodernste New Jork dargestellt hatte, zweitens war es gegenüber der Geschichte im Vorteil, da es vor ihr wirkte und als Bild koncentrierter als Prosa und drittens war es zu schön. (B2 196)
>
> When I saw the picture in my book, I was at first alarmed. For in the first place it refuted me, since I had after all presented the most up-to-date New York; in the second place, the picture had an advantage over my story since it produced its effect before my story did, and a picture is naturally more concentrated than prose; and thirdly, it was too pretty. (EL 98)

Kafka's concern that the frontispiece might predetermine the reception of his text implies a competition between verbal and visual representation in which the latter is attributed a superior effectiveness. Yet Kafka's reservations about the image are more specific; the frontispiece is a nineteenth-century engraving of New York harbour, and while its setting corresponds to the opening passage, its representational nature is diametrically opposed to Kafka's literary agenda.[13] As Kafka stresses, this pre-photographic frontispiece clashes with the text's core concern, the depiction of 'the most up-to-date New

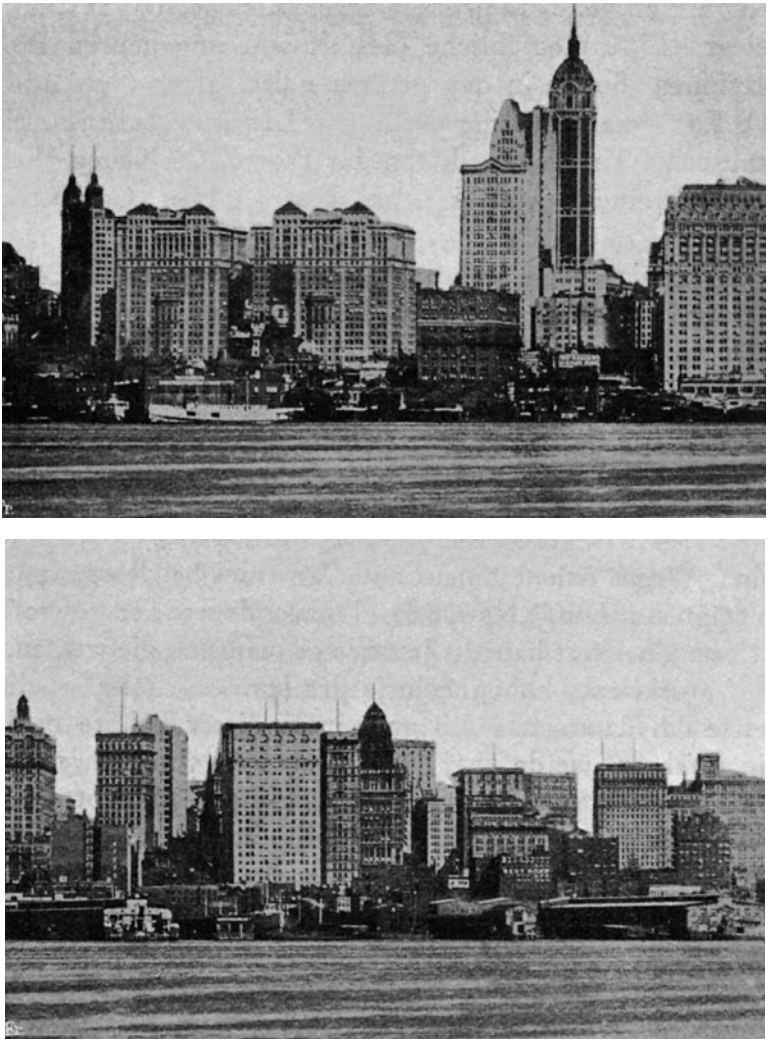
[13] The engraving, entitled 'The Ferry at Brooklyn, New York', is by William Henry Bartlett and first appeared around 1840 in various English and German volumes (DA 125). It shows in central perspective a steam vessel entering the harbour; only a few sailing ships and a modest 'skyline' with a few church steeples are visible in the background.

York' through narrative techniques which are influenced by more advanced, technological forms of representation. As we shall see, his own portrayal of New York City develops not only this technological modernity of vision but also its underlying psychological component.

VISUAL PLEASURE—DISCIPLINING VISION

Kafka's personal fascination with new sights and spectacles is both reflected and refracted in his protagonist, Karl Rossmann. Karl's role in the text is above all that of an observer, his access towards reality predominantly visual rather than analytical. Even though he is not very well equipped for his journey—he carries neither a camera nor a travel guide with him—his arrival in the United States coincides with a sudden heightening of his visual faculties, and this photographic perspective continues to underpin his subsequent encounters with American culture, though with varying effects.

Symbolically, Karl first views New York City not from the deck of the ship but framed by the 'aperture' of the window in the Captain's cabin which lends the scene a reassuring stability. When he enters the cabin together with the stoker, his attention is captured by the busy traffic in the harbour which is, however, cast against the backdrop of the city's skyline: 'Hinter alledem aber stand Newyork und sah Karl mit den hunderttausend Fenstern seiner Wolkenkratzer an. Ja in diesem Zimmer wußte man, wo man war' (GV 20) ['And behind it all stood New York, looking at Karl with the hundred thousand windows of its skyscrapers. Yes, you knew where you were in this room' (EA 10)]. Like the opening passage, this passage is again based on two photographs in Holitscher's book which provide the model for this panoramic scene. Karl associates the framed view of the skyline with a sense of stability and orientation, disregarding the sense of exposure which underlies the scene. Subsequently, even this fragile sense of stability gives way to disorientation; when Karl next looks out of the window in the middle of the stoker's negotiations, he is confronted with a very different scene:



6. New York City, harbour panorama; in Arthur Holitscher, *Amerika: Heute und morgen*, 40–1.

eigentümliche Schwimmkörper tauchten hie und da selbständig aus dem ruhelosen Wasser, wurden gleich wieder überschwemmt und versanken vor dem erstaunten Blick … Eine Bewegung ohne Ende, eine Unruhe, übertragen von dem unruhigen Element auf die hilflosen Menschen und ihre Werke. (GV 26–7)

strange floats surfaced occasionally from the turbulent water, only to become swamped again and sink astonishingly from sight … All was endless movement, a restlessness communicated by the restless element to the helpless men and their works. (EA 13)

As the stoker progressively loses control in his discussion with the captain, the reassuring stasis of the city panorama gives way to the instability of this moving spectacle. The changing emphasis of Karl's gaze mirrors the development within the cabin, as the photographic stasis of the earlier scene is replaced by a sight whose perpetual movement lends it a filmic character.[14] Drawing on his personal reflections on the technical media, Kafka thus mobilizes photographic and filmic paradigms of perception to convey an underlying psychological disposition. In this respect, the episode is exemplary of Kafka's use of visual tableaux in *Der Verschollene*; although these scenes seem only loosely related to the main plot, they provide an acute reflection of its underlying psychological dynamics.[15] In particular, the dialectical switching between photographic and filmic modes of perception is a recurrent feature of the novel which highlights the protagonist's changing outlook and position.

The harbour view of New York is not the only photographically mediated sight of the city in the text. Following his miraculous adoption by his uncle, Karl's attention is captured by another panorama. From a balcony in the uncle's house, he observes urban life, yet even from this vantage point Karl is unable to recreate the reassuring stability of the earlier sight:

Was aber in der Heimatstadt Karls wohl der höchste Aussichtspunkt gewesen wäre, gestattete hier nicht viel mehr als den Überblick über eine Straße, die zwischen zwei Reihen förmlich abgehackter Häuser gerade und darum wie

[14] Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 117.

[15] See Jahn, *Kafkas Roman*, 55, and Jörgen Kobs, *Kafka: Untersuchungen zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten*, ed. Ursula Brech (Bad Homburg: Athenäum, 1970), 152–6.

fliehend in die Ferne sich verlief, wo aus vielem Dunst die Formen einer Kathedrale ungeheuer sich erhoben. Und morgen wie abend und in den Träumen der Nacht vollzog sich auf dieser Straße ein immer drängender Verkehr, der von oben gesehn sich als eine aus immer neuen Anfängen ineinandergestreute Mischung von verzerrten menschlichen Figuren und von Dächern der Fuhrwerke aller Art darstellte, von der aus sich noch eine neue vervielfältigte wildere Mischung von Lärm, Staub und Gerüchen erhob, und alles dieses wurde erfaßt und durchdrungen von einem mächtigen Licht, das immer wieder von der Menge der Gegenstände zerstreut, fortgetragen und wieder eifrig herbeigebracht wurde und das dem betörten Auge so körperlich erschien, als werde über dieser Straße eine alles bedeckende Glasscheibe jeden Augenblick immer wieder mit aller Kraft zerschlagen. (GV 55)

But what would probably have been the highest vantage point in Karl's hometown here did not afford much more than a view of a single street, which ran in a dead straight line between two rows of cropped houses until it vanished in the distance where the massive forms of a cathedral loomed out of the haze. In the morning and evening, and in his dreams at night, that street was always full of swarming traffic. Seen from above, it appeared to be a swirling kaleidoscope of distorted human figures and the roofs of vehicles of all kinds, from which a new and amplified and wilder mixture of noise, dust and smells arose, and all this was held and penetrated by a mighty light, that was forever being scattered, carried off and eagerly returned by the multitude of objects, and that seemed so palpable to the confused eye that it was like a sheet of glass spread out over the street that was being continually and violently smashed. (EA 28–9)

This passage is again based on one of Holitscher's photographs of New York City, although in Kafka's novel its ordered composition undergoes a radical transformation. In contrast to Holitscher's picture, which captures the city from an elevated perspective, Karl is unable to adopt a similar controlling vantage point. His view of the surrounding buildings is cropped in a way reminiscent of a photograph; yet this visual frame only heightens the spectacle's overwhelming intensity. The passage, with its long sentences, evokes a multisensory, impressionistic tableau whose montage character resists perceptual synthesis.[16] To underline this point, the description abounds with

[16] For a detailed analysis of this passage and its implications for Kafka's literary style more generally, see Kobs, *Kafka: Untersuchungen*.

7. New York City; in Arthur Holitscher, *Amerika: Heute und morgen*, 49.

images of fragmentation and dispersal; the 'cropped houses' correspond to the 'swirling kaleidoscope' of human figures and vehicles, a sight which is further atomized into the 'mixture of noise, dust and smells'.

The scene's most powerful feature, however, is the light which encapsulates this overall effect: while it covers the panorama like a pane of glass, it is also repeatedly shattered, unable to contain the wealth of heterogeneous detail. As in the case of the Statue of Liberty, where Karl's heightened attention coincides with an increase in sunlight, light is here situated at the interstices between external reality and the viewer's subjective experience. Thus the shattering of the glass conveys not merely an external impression but is also a reflection of Karl's inner disposition, symbolizing the fraught boundaries between inside and outside, psychology and perception. As Walter Benjamin argues using Freud's theory of psychological defence mechanisms, the individual's *Reizschutz*, his or her 'protection against stimuli', is constantly challenged in the modern city (BGS I 615/BSW IV 319).

However, the shattered glass has a second, self-reflexive significance; it points to Kafka's strategy of textual adaptation whereby the stasis of Holitscher's photographic scene is shattered by the scene's uncontainable dynamism. On one level, this narrative animation of the picture puts into practice Kafka's ideal of a merging of photographic and filmic modes of perception. Within the novel, however, the protagonist's indulgence in such animated and animating sights is soon curtailed by his uncle, who stresses the dangerous side-effects of such spectacles. He recommends that Karl

> sollte wohl alles prüfen und anschauen, aber sich nicht gefangen nehmen lassen.… Er selbst habe Neuankömmlinge gekannt, die z. B. statt nach diesen guten Grundsätzen sich zu verhalten, tagelang auf ihrem Balkon gestanden und wie verlorene Schafe auf die Straße heruntergesehen hätten. Das müsse unbedingt verwirren! Diese einsame Untätigkeit, die sich in einen arbeitsreichen Newyorker Tag verschaut, könne einem Vergnügungsreisenden gestattet und vielleicht, wenn auch nicht vorbehaltslos angeraten werden, für einen der hier bleiben wird sei sie ein Verderben. (GV 56)

> was to absorb and examine, but not allow himself to be captured by it.… He himself had known new arrivals, who, instead of sticking by these useful guidelines, would for instance stand on the balcony for days on end, staring down into the street like lost sheep. That was certain disorientation! Such

solitary inactivity, gazing down on an industrious New York day, might be permitted to a visitor, and perhaps even, with reservations, recommended to him, but for someone who would be staying here it was catastrophic. (EA 29)

The uncle here contrasts two modes of viewing, pitting the carefully probing, disengaged stance of the prudent observer against the mindless absorption of the ignorant newcomer. His warning about the 'solitary inactivity' which results from such a lack of perceptual detachment echoes Kafka's diary accounts of cinema visits and similar spectacles. At the same time, the uncle's response also contains an underlying disciplinary agenda which gives his comments a particular slant. He declares that this kind of indulgence, which might be acceptable for a tourist or visitor, will be the downfall of Karl, who will have to make a living in the new continent. This advice points to the intertwinings between capitalism and visual consumption. As Jonathan Crary has argued, many technical media were derived from scientific research into human perception designed to explore, channel, and control the attention of the observer.[17] Susceptibility to distraction and a leisurely, undirected mode of viewing must be countered in the interest of capitalist productivity and the associated goal of social conformity. This process is illustrated in the uncle's firm where employees are physically and mentally inserted into machines which require exclusive attention for maximum efficiency (GV 66–7/EA 34). The uncle's criticism of Karl's visual indulgence thus forms part of a wider disciplinary agenda: the observer's transformation into a productive and docile member of capitalist society.

In Karl's case, even this one slip proves to be beyond redemption; soon afterwards he is expelled, yet the uncle's warning continues to have an effect far beyond their separation. In the course of the novel, Karl is increasingly subjected to the imperatives of efficiency, obedience, and capitalist productivity. However, even his final view of New York City bears the imprint of the uncle's disciplinary agenda. After his expulsion, Karl meets the dubious pair of Robinson and Delamarche, who persuade him to accompany them on their journey. On this walk, Karl casts one final look over New York, whose panorama stretches out beneath them. This scene could, however, not

[17] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 136–8.

be more different from the earlier, hyper-vivid spectacle seen from the balcony:

Die Brücke, die New York mit Boston verbindet hieng zart über den Hudson und sie erzitterte, wenn man die Augen klein machte. Sie schien ganz ohne Verkehr zu sein und unter ihr spannte sich das unbelebte glatte Wasserband. Alles in beiden Riesenstädten schien leer und nutzlos aufgestellt. Unter den Häusern gab es kaum einen Unterschied zwischen den großen und den kleinen. In der unsichtbaren Tiefe der Straßen gieng wahrscheinlich das Leben fort nach seiner Art, aber über ihnen war nichts zu sehen, als leichter Dunst, der sich zwar nicht bewegte, aber ohne Mühe zu verjagen schien. Selbst in dem Hafen, dem größten der Welt, war Ruhe eingekehrt und nur hie und da glaubte man, wohl beeinflußt von der Erinnerung an einen früheren Anblick aus der Nähe, ein Schiff zu sehn, das eine kurze Strecke sich fortschob. Aber man konnte ihm auch nicht lange folgen, es entgieng den Augen und war nicht mehr zu finden. (GV 144)

The bridge that connected New York with Boston lay slender across the Hudson, and trembled if you narrowed your eyes. It seemed to be carrying no traffic at all, and below it was the smooth unanimated ribbon of water. Everything in both metropolises seemed empty, useless construction. There was almost no distinction to be drawn between the big buildings and the little ones. In the invisible canyons of the streets, life probably continued on its way, but above them there was nothing to be seen except a thin haze which didn't move, but seemed easy enough to dispel. Even in the harbour, the world's largest, peace had returned, and only sporadically did one have the impression, probably influenced by earlier, closer views, that one could see a ship sliding forward a little. But it was impossible to trace, because it eluded one's eyes and couldn't be found again. (EA 74)

While the earlier, cinematic street scene had defied the fixity of its photographic model, this passage, which is based on a photograph of Brooklyn Bridge in Holitscher's book, maintains the stasis of the original. Yet unlike in the case of the skyline which Karl saw from the ship, this panoramic overview does not entail a sense of mastery and stability; on the contrary, it symbolizes the observer's profound alienation from the perceived world.

In the balcony scene, the shattered pane of glass illustrated the fraught boundaries between self and reality. The mist which covers Brooklyn Bridge has precisely the opposite effect, reinforcing Karl's physical and emotional detachment from the scene. The panorama of

8. Brooklyn Bridge; in Alfred Holitscher, *Amerika: Heute und morgen*, 55.

the city is characterized by an eerie stasis, with both the bridge—which Kafka falsely assumes to connect New York and Boston—and the river entirely empty of the incessant traffic which had such a powerful, disorienting effect on Karl in the earlier scene. Devoid of any trace of life, the city takes on the character of a two-dimensional photograph in which any spatial differences have been eroded. In this capacity, however, the city panorama becomes a screen for the viewer's memories and projections; in a manner reminiscent of Kafka's diary formulation about the 'invisible sights', Karl imagines that life must still carry on in the invisible streets, thus projecting the earlier view into this eerily quiet scene. Yet even the one sign of life, a ship in the harbour, disappears before his very eyes like an optical illusion.[18]

On the whole, then, Karl's journey through the United States follows a paradoxical pattern; although he 'travels forward physically, at each challenge he regresses psychologically'.[19] This process is reflected and enforced within the field of vision. Karl's travels heighten his perceptual faculties and enhance his visual sensitivity; yet he remains unable to adopt a balanced, emancipatory stance towards the

[18] Buch, '*Ut pictura poesis*', 232. Delamarche and Robinson, in contrast, are able to distinguish even small details such as squares and gardens, and they cannot believe that Karl had never seen anything of the city apart from the one street outside his uncle's house (GV 144–5/EA 74–5). The visual faculties of both Karl and his companions are thus shaped by their previous experiences.

[19] Elizabeth Boa, 'Karl Rossmann, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up: The Flight from Manhood in Kafka's *Der Verschollene*', in Mary Orr and Lesley Sharpe (eds.), *From Goethe to Gide: Feminism, Aesthetics and the Literary Canon in France and Germany 1770–1930* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), 168–83: 168.

encountered spectacles. This instability is exemplified by various city tableaux, which oscillate between excessive, uncontainable animation and detached photographic stillness.[20] Ultimately, however, both stances are two sides of the same coin; *Der Verschollene* presents the predicament of the modern viewer whose perpetual exposure to the surrounding stimuli eventually collapses into indifference.[21]

In Karl's encounter with Brunelda, this theme of visual regression is taken to a further extreme. Although he is imprisoned in Brunelda's flat, he can look down at the surrounding street from the balcony; yet just as during his stay with the uncle, the opportunities inherent in this vantage point, its potential for visual pleasure and entertainment, are undermined by external interference. This time, however, this interference comes in the guise of visual enhancement rather than restriction. An election campaign is unfolding on the streets, and the former singer Brunelda uses a pair of opera glasses to survey this spectacle. Karl, however, when offered this device, emphatically rejects it with the remark, 'Ich habe gute Augen … ich sehe alles' (GV 327) ['I have sharp eyes … I see everything' (EA 170)]. Indeed, when Brunelda imposes the binoculars onto Karl despite his resistance, they do not have the desired effect. Karl claims to be unable to see anything, stubbornly resisting Brunelda's interference:

'Ich sehe ja nichts', sagte er und wollte den Gucker loswerden, aber den Gucker hielt sie fest und den auf ihrer Brust eingebetteten Kopf konnte er weder zurück noch seitwärts schieben.
'Jetzt siehst du aber schon', sagte sie und drehte an der Schraube des Guckers.
'Nein, ich sehe noch immer nichts', sagte Karl.…

[20] Karl's melancholy stance is also mirrored in the slightly trembling bridge, a sight which appears to be seen through eyes filling with tears (Ronald Speirs and Beatrice Sandberg, *Franz Kafka* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 49).

[21] Kobs, *Kafka: Untersuchungen*, 205. Despite the high attention to visual details, Karl's perspective, and that of the narrative as a whole, often appears rather flat and two-dimensional, resulting in a strangely de-psychologized mode of narrative. As Jacqueline Sudaka-Bénazéraf puts it, 'le regard de Karl, support d'une réflexion optique, nous renvoie le réel sous forme de spectacle, sans que s'exprime jamais aucune émotion, conscience ou intériorité' (*Franz Kafka: Aspects d'une poétique du regard* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 120). Mark Anderson makes a similar comment about the characters in the novel, arguing that they 'emerge in vivid, "sharp" detail—often "present" like photographic likenesses as they execute some striking gesture—but only as partial, flat surfaces without the depth of a past history or individual psychology' (*Kafka's Clothes*, 107).

'Wann wirst Du denn endlich sehen?' sagte sie und drehte—Karl hatte nun sein ganzes Gesicht in ihrem schweren Atem—weiter an der Schraube. 'Jetzt?' fragte sie.
'Nein, nein, nein!' rief Karl, trotzdem er nun tatsächlich, wenn auch nur sehr undeutlich, alles unterscheiden konnte. Aber gerade hatte Brunelda irgend etwas mit Delamarche zu tun, sie hielt den Gucker nur lose vor Karls Gesicht und Karl konnte, ohne daß sie es besonders beachtete, unter dem Gucker hinweg auf die Straße sehen. Später bestand sie auch nicht mehr auf ihrem Willen und benützte den Gucker für sich. (GV 328)

'I can't see a thing', he said, and tried to remove the glasses, but she held them in place, while his head was so cushioned on her breast he could move it neither sideways nor back.
'But now you can see', she said, and turned the screw on the glasses.
'No, I still can't seen anything', said Karl.…
'When are you going to be able to see?' she said, and went on—Karl now had his whole face in her heavy breathing—turning at the screw. 'Now?' she asked.
'No, no, no!' cried Karl, even though in fact, he could, still dimly, begin to make out the scene. But just then Brunelda had some business with Delamarche, she held the glasses more loosely in front of Karl's face, and Karl could, without her particularly noticing, look out from under the glasses down on to the street. After that she no longer insisted on having her way, and used the glasses for herself. (EA 170)

Although apparently aimed at the opposite effect, Brunelda's interference is reminiscent of the warnings of Karl's uncle. In both cases, the vantage point of the balcony is counteracted by authority figures aiming to confine, condition, and restrict Karl's unmediated gaze under the pretext of greater perceptual efficiency. Unlike in Kafka's account of the Kaiser Panorama, however, the binoculars do not lead to a greater sense of visual mastery but rather signify the observer's subordination to a disciplinary regime. Thus the exchange on Brunelda's balcony exemplifies Karl's more general development as an observer whose initial confidence—'I see everything'—gives way to a pervading sense of alienation and disempowerment: 'I can't see a thing'. Ultimately, then, Karl's only defence lies in his refusal to comply with the externally imposed visual regime. Insisting on his blindness, he momentarily escapes from Brunelda's grip and gets a brief glimpse of the election campaign below; on the whole, however, the binoculars symbolize Karl's failure to become an emancipated

observer, as they 'block rather than enhance his vision of democracy in action'.[22]

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS: MEMORIES OF AN OEDIPAL CHILDHOOD

Karl's encounters with the American city illustrate his progressive disempowerment as a viewer. In the course of the novel, however, his attention is also captured by a very different sight which harks back to his European origins; following his expulsion by the uncle, Karl turns to private family photographs which figure as both sentimental souvenirs and objects of visual scrutiny. Like the spectacles of the New World, however, these private portraits underline the precarious psychological disposition of their observer. They act as reminders of Karl's upbringing, whose Oedipal power dynamics continue to determine his experiences in the United States. Despite their traditional character, then, these family photographs establish a connection between Karl's European origins and American exile, highlighting the continued effect of the past on the present.

The family photograph is a recurrent motif in Kafka's writings, and dates back to his earliest literary experiments. Max Brod recounts that in his youth Kafka wrote some short dramatic sketches, one of which, entitled 'Photographien reden' ('Photographs Talk'), was based on 'family pictures standing on a chest of drawers'.[23] Although this early text has not been preserved, it anticipates one of the most prominent themes within Kafka's discourse on photography: the role of the portrait photograph and its capacity to institute, replicate, and enforce social identity and power relations. This issue is first extensively explored in *Der Verschollene*, and it remains a recurrent concern in Kafka's writings throughout his life.

[22] Boa, 'Karl Rossmann', 181.

[23] Max Brod, *Über Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1966), 21. As we shall see, *Der Verschollene* contains a very similar arrangement of photographs on a chest of drawers.

Deleuze and Guattari have drawn attention to the particular significance of the family photograph, a type of image which they regard as paradigmatic of the restrictive, 'territorializing' effect of Oedipal structures in Kafka's texts:

> Memory of an Oedipal childhood? The memory is a family portrait or a vacation photo showing men with bent heads, women with their necks circled by a ribbon. The memory blocks desire, makes mere carbon copies of it, fixes it within strata, cuts it off from all its connections.[24]

Family snapshots do not merely provide a testimony of family history but come to metonymically represent, or even replace, childhood memories. The photographic arrest of the family scene echoes the rigidity with which early experiences are inscribed into the unconscious, from where they continue to determine the individual's adult self. Once recorded within the mind, such Oedipal snapshots can be endlessly replicated, as they act as blueprints for future interpersonal relations. This photographic process of replication is at work in *Der Verschollene*. The family photographs featured within the text are emblematic of a familial power dynamic which shapes the protagonist's identity, underpinning his subsequent encounters and relations.

Among the possessions which Karl brings with him in his suitcase is a photograph of his parents which harbours a great symbolic and emotional significance. It represents one of his few remaining connections to the past; yet although this image is Karl's most cherished possession, it also highlights the restrictive power dynamics of his upbringing, anticipating the trauma of his expulsion. Having left Herr Pollunder's country villa, Karl is stranded in an inn outside New York with nothing but the suitcase with which he first arrived in America. Unpacking it, he comes across 'eine Taschenbibel, Briefpapier und die Photographien der Eltern' (GV 131) ['a pocket Bible, writing paper and the photographs of his parents' (EA 67)]. Curiously, although the narrator here refers to 'photographs' in the plural, the subsequent account reveals that Karl possesses only one such photograph, while another picture has been retained by his parents. While this inconsistency might be a mere mistake on Kafka's part, the change

[24] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, fore. Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 4.

from plural to singular is nevertheless suggestive. The grammatical shift from several photographs to a single image anticipates Karl's subsequent loss of the one picture he does own, thus anticipating the pattern of loss and displacement to which the photographs in the novel are subjected. Indeed, even this particular image is itself already a substitute for the wider archive of family photographs and other personal possessions which Karl had to leave behind.

Before he turns to the picture in his suitcase, Karl recalls one of these other, unattainable photographs:

> Es gab auch eine Photographie, auf welcher Karl mit seinen Eltern abgebildet war, Vater und Mutter sahen ihn dort scharf an, während er nach dem Auftrag des Photographen den Apparat hatte anschauen müssen. Diese Photographie hatte er aber auf die Reise nicht mitbekommen. (GV 134)
>
> There was another photograph that depicted Karl and his parents together, one in which his father and mother were both glaring at him, while he had been instructed to look into the camera. But he hadn't been allowed to take that photograph with him on the journey. (EA 69)

This remembered photograph is emblematic of the Oedipal dynamics in Karl Rossmann's family and, indeed, in Kafka's works more generally. Karl is passively exposed to the sharp gaze of his parents, which he is unable to return, a quasi-juridical set-up which prefigures his accusation and condemnation. In this respect, the image exemplifies one of the novel's central themes: the fact that the protagonist's guilt is always already taken for granted. In this case, the accusing gaze of mother and father is enforced by a third agency—that of the camera, which both parents and photographer compel Karl to face. The camera not only records this tableau of parental power, then, but it actively contributes to the son's subjugation to this disciplinary regime.

As Walter Benjamin remarks with reference to early photography: 'Was an der Daguerreotypie als das Unmenschliche, man könnte sagen Tödliche mußte empfunden werden, war das (übrigens anhaltende) Hereinblicken in den Apparat, da doch der Apparat das Bild des Menschen aufnimmt, ohne ihm dessen Blick zurückzugeben' (BGS I 646) ['What was inevitably felt to be inhuman—one might even say deadly—in daguerreotypy was the (prolonged) looking into the camera, since the camera records our likenesses without returning our gaze' (BSW IV 338)]. Confronted with the camera, the sitter thus

must adopt the kind of focused, unwavering gaze which Karl fails to achieve in relation to the spectacles of the American city and for whose lack he is reprimanded by the uncle. The family photograph of Karl and his parents thus prefigures a disciplinary regime which is reinforced during Karl's American exile: the conditioning of the observer through optical frameworks which arrest his gaze by means of a restrictive social machinery.

The second family photograph, which Karl gets to take with him to America, exerts an even stronger impact on his imagination. This picture is far less monolithic than the first portrait in its display of parental authority; yet the power dynamics between mother and father again highlight Karl's entrapment in Oedipal structures:

Dann nahm er die Photographie der Eltern zur Hand, auf der der kleine Vater hoch aufgerichtet stand, während die Mutter in dem Fauteuil vor ihm ein wenig eingesunken dasaß. Die eine Hand hielt der Vater auf der Rückenlehne des Fauteuils, die andere zur Faust geballt, auf einem illustrierten Buch, das aufgeschlagen auf einem schwachen Schmucktischchen ihm zur Seite lag. (GV 134)

Then he picked up the photograph of his parents, in which his little father stood very tall, while his mother sat shrunken in the armchair in front of him. One of his father's hands was on the back of the armchair, the other, making a fist, rested on an illustrated book which was open on a fragile ornamental table beside him. (EA 69)

The father's upright posture contrasts with the mother's hunched appearance, an indicator of her general dependence and powerlessness. This dichotomy of strength and weakness is also echoed in the sight of the father's fist, which rests on an illustrated book placed on a decorative table. Although this arrangement suggests the father's symbolic control over the realm of texts and images, the fragile, effeminate nature of the table undermines this display of masculinity. Moreover, the father's latently aggressive pose serves to counterbalance his lack of height, suggesting that his formidable appearance has been adopted specifically for the photograph.[25] This discrepancy between image and reality is confirmed by Karl's more detailed scrutiny:

[25] Meno Spann, *Franz Kafka* (London: Prior, 1976), 81. This oscillation between power and impotence is a recurrent feature of Kafka's father figures, for instance, Georg Bendemann's father in 'Das Urteil' and Herr Samsa in *Die Verwandlung*.

[Er] suchte von verschiedenen Seiten den Blick des Vaters aufzufangen. Aber der Vater wollte, wie er auch den Anblick durch verschiedene Kerzenstellungen änderte, nicht lebendiger werden, sein wagrechter starker Schnurrbart sah der Wirklichkeit auch gar nicht ähnlich, es war keine gute Aufnahme. (GV 135)

[He] tried to catch his father's gaze from various angles. But try as he might, even moving the candle to different points, his father refused to become any more alive, his heavy horizontal moustache didn't look anything like the real thing, it was not a good likeness. (EA 69)

Although Karl uses various perceptual techniques such as lighting, movement, and change of perspective, he fails to invest his father's sight with a more lifelike character. The fact that he cannot meet his father's gaze points to their flawed personal relationship in which the father takes on the role of an inaccessible authority figure. Revealingly, however, Karl projects his inability to relate to the picture onto the photographic medium rather than onto its sitter; he judges the image to be 'not a good likeness', thus attributing its imposing effect to the photographic recording. Here Karl instinctively discerns a central aspect of turn-of-the-century portrait photography, namely the staged, stereotypical techniques it uses to confer a sense of dignity and authority onto the sitter. As a result, photography contributes to the more general reification of personal relations not just within the family but also within society at large, where such photographic displays of authority reinforce social hierarchies and prevent emotional closeness.

While photographic conventions thus prevent Karl from establishing an emotional connection with his father, the sight of his mother offers more scope for empathy and identification:

Die Mutter dagegen war schon besser abgebildet, ihr Mund war so verzogen, als sei ihr ein Leid angetan worden und als zwinge sie sich zu lächeln. Karl schien es, als müsse dies jedem der das Bild ansah, so sehr auffallen, daß es ihm im nächsten Augenblick wieder schien, die Deutlichkeit dieses Eindrucks sei zu stark und fast widersinnig. (GV 135)

His mother had been better caught, her mouth downdrawn as though she'd suffered some injury, and forcing a smile. Karl thought that that must be so obvious to anyone looking at the picture, that a moment later, it seemed to him that it was too blatant and almost nonsensical. (EA 69)

Karl's judgement that his mother is captured 'better' than his father derives not from a concept of photographic realism but rather from his mother's partial resistance to photographic conventions. Her appearance is more complex than her posture of female submission might suggest, revealing a tension between her external composure and her inner, emotional state. His mother's forced smile marks an incomplete subordination which, for Karl, brings out the restrictive and inauthentic character of the photographic set-up. The image of the mother thus offers more scope for identification as it articulates Karl's own submission to social conventions and power structures. Yet this moment of recognition subsequently gives way to an interpretative paradox, as Karl is faced with the impression that his mother's hidden grief appears to be 'too blatant' and therefore 'almost nonsensical'. As a result, he wonders, 'Wie könne man von einem Bild so sehr die unumstößliche Überzeugung eines verborgenen Gefühls des Abgebildeten erhalten' (GV 135) ['How could a picture give one such an irresistible sense of the concealed feelings of its subject' (EA 69)]. Karl's impression that anyone could have come to the same conclusion belies his own privileged access to the image; indeed, his question sums up the underlying paradox of photographic interpretation more generally, namely the attempt to extrapolate hidden layers of meaning from an irreducibly two-dimensional, superficial image.[26]

Even in the case of the mother, then, the act of interpretation ultimately increases, rather than reduces, the distance between viewer and image. After his paradoxical interpretation of her smile, Karl averts his gaze from the picture; when he returns to it his gaze is drawn to his mother's hand 'die ganz vorn an der Lehne des Fauteuils herabhieng, zum Küssen nahe' (GV 135) ['dangling from an armrest in the very foreground of the picture, close enough to kiss' (EA 69)]. The hand functions as a Barthesian *punctum*, that element within a photograph which captures the viewer's gaze and invests the picture with a personal significance exceeding its overall cultural or historical meaning.[27] Indeed, the hand lends the photograph a

[26] Roland Barthes comments on this paradox of photographic interpretation, arguing that 'what is hidden is for us Westerners more "true" than what is visible' (*Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 2000), 100).

[27] Ibid., 25–7.

tactile, three-dimensional character which appeals more to Karl's emotional than to his analytical capacities. Ultimately, however, even this hand is a deeply ambivalent detail. Karl's impulse to kiss it breaks down the emotional barriers which separate him from his parents, yet even this moment of emotional closeness is bound up within Oedipal power structures; to kiss his mother's hand, Karl would have to kneel in front of his parents in a gesture of supplication.[28]

Karl's response to the photograph thus illustrates the double bind which informs his relationship to his parents. He responds to his father's likeness with considerable acuity, rejecting the latter's appearance with reference to the distorting effect of photographic identity constructions. With the impulse to kiss his mother's hand, however, Karl's critical stance regresses into a state of passive submission.

Like the sights of New York, this family portrait is modelled on a genuine photograph, in this case an image of Kafka's paternal grandparents Jakob and Franziska.[29] As in the case of the city scenes, moreover, Kafka subjects this picture to a process of adaptation, for despite the overall similarities, the photograph in the novel departs from the original in several decisive respects. There is no illustrated book on the table on which Jakob Kafka rests his fist; its inclusion in the novel suggests the father's symbolic power over the realms of both literature and visual representation. In addition, Kafka's grandfather was a tall, imposing man and thus Karl's father, who has to compensate for his lack of height through his upright posture, has been shrunk in Kafka's imagination to bring out the staged character of paternal authority. The most revealing alterations, however, concern the female sitter; the hand of Kafka's grandmother does not hang from the side of her chair but rests in her lap, so that Kafka had to change this detail to create the emotional climax

[28] Speirs and Sandberg, *Franz Kafka*, 36. Indeed, the sight of the hand triggers a memory in Karl which underlines this submissive desire; before his departure, the parents had strictly instructed him to write to them, and while Karl at the time refused this order, he now considers obeying it as a way of reconciling himself with his parents: 'Und lächelnd prüfte er die Gesichter der Eltern, als könne man aus ihnen erkennen, ob sie noch immer das Verlangen hatten, eine Nachricht von ihrem Sohn zu bekommen' (GV 136) ['Smilingly he interrogated his parents' faces, as though one might tell from them if they still craved news of their son' (EA 70)].

[29] See Jahn, *Kafkas Roman*, 125, and Northey, *Kafka's Relatives*, 55–6.

of the scene. Most importantly, however, the mother's forced and ambivalent smile, which for Karl illustrates the paradoxical nature of photographic interpretation, cannot be found in the original picture. On the whole, then, Kafka's alterations invest the original portrait with a greater sense of ambiguity;[30] of course, the fact that Kafka

9. Kafka's grandparents, Jakob and Franziska Kafka.

[30] Wolfgang Jahn argues that Kafka merges the figures of his father and grandfather to create a composite image 'from which all individual and real features have been erased, an impression shared by Karl Rossmann himself' (*Kafkas Roman*, 125).

chooses a photograph of his grandparents rather than his parents as a model for this passage counters any straightforwardly Oedipal, biographical interpretations.[31]

UNIQUENESS, LOSS, DISPLACEMENT

In contrast to the dynamic, ever-changing spectacles of the American city, the photograph of his parents enables Karl to employ his visual faculties in a more controlled, reflective manner. In this respect, the photograph exemplifies Kafka's concept of a 'repose of the gaze', a contemplative stance which cannot be maintained in the face of more mobile, cinematic, sights. As it turns out, however, this alternative mode of perception does not have an outright emancipatory effect for the viewer; once again, Karl's response is tied up within a precarious dialectic of proximity and estrangement, mastery and subjugation which also informs his more general experiences of the New World. The family photograph does not actually lead Karl to a better understanding of his past and, therefore, of his present situation; despite his scrutiny of the picture's power dynamics, he is unable to apply his insight to his encounters in the United States where the Oedipal pattern of oppression, punishment, and expulsion is replicated time and again.[32] This pattern is prefigured at the end of the photography episode; having scrutinized the photograph, Karl falls asleep over it (GV 136/EA 70), losing the critical insights gained from it in a state of unconscious oblivion.

What is more, the following morning Karl discovers that he has lost the picture altogether, a realization to which he reacts with devastation. He declares that the photograph is 'unersetzlich, ich

[31] Indeed, in *Der Verschollene* Jakob is not the name of Karl's father but of Karl's uncle; thus the biographical subtext of the family photograph is further displaced within the fictional context.

[32] To start with, Karl's uncle Jakob acts as a substitute father figure, while the effeminate Herr Pollunder can be seen to take on the position of the mother. Subsequently, the roles of lenient mother and punishing father are adopted by head cook and head waiter; the couple of Brunelda and Delamarche could be seen as the third manifestation of this configuration, yet here the gender-specific power dynamics have been blurred and reversed.

bekomme keine zweite', as it was 'das einzige Bild, das ich von meinen Eltern besaß' (GV 167) ['irreplaceable, you see, I'll never get another one.... It's the only picture of my parents that I had' (EA 86)]. This emphatic claim, however, is somewhat contradicted when Karl comes across another set of photographs which come to take the place of the lost picture.

After he has been taken in by the head cook in the Hotel Occidental, Karl finds a set of framed photographs on display in what is aptly described as his host's 'Repräsentationszimmer' (GV 177) ['salon', literally 'representation room' (EA 91)]. Even though he does not dare pick them up to read the labels on their back, Karl assumes these images to be of European origin and instinctively establishes an equivalence between these pictures and the photograph of his parents: 'So wie diese Photographien hier standen, so hatte er auch die Photographie seiner Eltern in seinem künftigen Zimmer aufstellen mögen' (GV 178) ['He would have liked to display the picture of his parents in his own future room in just as the same way as these photographs were displayed here' (EA 92)]. Indeed, the connection between these anonymous photographs and the portrait of Karl's parents is supported by an extra-textual reference. One of the head cook's photographs, the portrait of a young soldier, is modelled on a portrait of Kafka's uncle Heinrich, his father's brother and thus the son of the grandparents whose picture inspired the portrait of Karl's parents.[33] Heinrich's son Emil, in turn, emigrated to the United States in 1904.[34] Like the image of Kafka's grandparents, Heinrich's photograph adds to the biographical subtext of the novel; yet it also counters a straightforward Freudian reading through the greater complexity of the underlying family ties.

At first sight, the pictures in the head cook's room do not bear much resemblance to the photograph of Karl's parents. On closer inspection, however, many features of the lost photograph are echoed in these pictures, which again trigger a mixture of distance and identification in the viewer:

Es waren meist alte Photographien und stellten in der Mehrzahl Mädchen dar, die in unmodernen unbehaglichen Kleidern, mit locker aufgesetzten

[33] Northey, *Kafka's Relatives*, 65–6. [34] Ibid., 61.

10. Kafka's uncle Heinrich Kafka.

kleinen aber hochgehenden Hüten, die rechte Hand auf einen Schirm gestützt, dem Betrachter zugewendet waren und doch mit den Blicken auswichen. Unter den Herrenbildnissen fiel Karl besonders das Bild eines jungen Soldaten auf, der das Käppi auf ein Tischchen gelegt hatte, stramm mit seinem wilden schwarzen Haar dastand und voll von einem stolzen aber unterdrückten Lachen war. Die Knöpfe seiner Uniform waren auf der Photographie nachträglich vergoldet worden. (GV 177)

For the most part they were old photographs, and they were mainly of girls in uncomfortable old-fashioned clothes, with little hats perched on their heads,

their right hands resting on parasols, facing the viewer but still somehow avoiding his glance. Among the male portraits, Karl was particularly struck by a picture of a young soldier who had set his cap down on a little table, standing there upright with his wild black hair, and a proud but repressed laugh. The buttons of his uniform had been retouched in gold on the photograph. (EA 91–2)

Once again, photography mirrors the gender hierarchies within society at large. The girls' stuffy clothes and contrived poses echo the forced smile of Karl's mother; however, while the mother's image offered Karl a screen for empathy and identification, the girls in these images evade his gaze. As a result, Karl's attention is captured by the male portrait which both reflects and reverses elements of his father's image. The upright posture of the young soldier resembles that of his father, yet achieves a sense of power without the need for a compensatory performance. The soldier exudes a natural inner confidence which is diametrically opposed to the father's contrived pose of authority. Indeed, the soldier's smile is not a concession to photographic conventions but, on the contrary, a barely repressed expression of individuality and defiance.

In contrast to Karl's own submissive pose in the family photograph, this image offers a compromise between social integration and personal freedom; its sitter is not an oppressed son but a confident individual in control of the photographic space. At the same time, however, the photograph's attraction for Karl is also derived from its participation in a pre-regulated framework of masculinity. The soldier's confidence is the result not of his complete freedom and independence but of his place within a military hierarchy.

For Karl, this photograph acts as an image of identification, harbouring the promise of confidence, acceptance, and self-respect. Indeed, he soon gets an opportunity to emulate his photographic role model when he is employed as a lift-boy in the Hotel Occidental. As Karl soon realizes, however, imitating the photograph's facade of authority does not get him any closer to his ideal; although the trimmings on Karl's new attire resemble and even surpass the ornaments on the photograph, its tight, restrictive character is more reminiscent of the young women's stuffy costumes, an association underlined by Kafka's use of the feminized term *Röckchen*. Concealed beneath this ornate surface is a history of oppression:

Beim Hotelschneider wurde ihm die Liftjungenuniform anprobiert, die äußerlich sehr prächtig mit Goldknöpfen und Goldschnüren ausgestatten war, bei deren Anziehn es Karl aber doch ein wenig schauderte, denn besonders unter den Achseln war das Röckchen kalt, hart und dabei unaustrockbar naß von dem Schweiß der Liftjungen, die es vor ihm getragen hatten. (GV 184–5)

At the hotel tailor's, he tried on the lift-boy's livery, which looked very splendid, with gold braid and gilt buttons, but Karl shuddered a little as he put it on, because the little jacket was cold and stiff and at the same time chronically damp under the arms from the sweat of the lift-boys who had worn it before him. (EA 95)

The only way in which the uniform conveys a sense of collective identity is through his predecessors' sweat, which has become soaked into the fabric as a legacy of their exploitation. Thus the real uniform and the photograph's gilded surface fulfil the same function, acting as a deceptive surface which conceals the underlying mechanisms of power, the individual's implication within the hierarchies of modern existence. Karl's 'model son syndrome',[35] his unflinching acceptance of oppression and exploitation, is the result of his inability to draw connections between different photographic images and their shared patterns of conformity and de-individualization.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THEATRICALITY: THE BACKDROP OF POWER

Written in 1914, two years after the rest of the novel, the episode describing Karl's entry into the mysterious Oklahoma theatre returns to the theme of photography and power on both an explicit and an implicit, intertextual, level. Karl's admission into the theatre is structured around a number of photographs which undercut the apparent optimism of the episode. This photographic subtext is implied in a verbal pun. When he arrives at the racecourse, Karl

[35] Manfred Engel, 'Außenwelt und Innenwelt: Subjektivitätsentwurf und moderne Romanpoetik in Robert Walsers *Jakob van Gunten* und Franz Kafkas *Der Verschollene*', *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 30 (1986), 533–70: 544.

applies for his 'Aufnahme' ['entry'] into the Oklahoma theatre; following his literal admission, however, he is confronted with a photographic 'Aufnahme' ['image'] which sheds a sinister light onto his future career, anticipating Karl's insertion into a gallery of victims of the American dream.

After their admission, the newly recruited members are given a first impression of the theatre through some images which are passed around during dinner. Karl gets to see only one of these, but this picture immediately captures his attention:

> Dieses Bild stellte die Loge des Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten dar. Beim ersten Anblick konnte man denken, es sei nicht eine Loge, sondern die Bühne, so weit geschwungen ragte die Brüstung in den freien Raum. Diese Brüstung war ganz aus Gold in allen ihren Teilen. Zwischen den wie mit der feinsten Scheere ausgeschnittenen Säulchen waren nebeneinander Medaillons früherer Präsidenten angebracht, einer hatte eine auffallend gerade Nase, aufgeworfene Lippen und unter gewölbten Lidern starr gesenkte Augen. Rings um die Loge, von den Seiten und von der Höhe kamen Strahlen von Licht; weißes und doch mildes Licht enthüllte förmlich den Vordergrund der Loge, während ihre Tiefe hinter rotem, unter vielen Tönungen sich faltendem Sammt der an der ganzen Umrandung niederfiel und durch Schnüre gelenkt wurde, als eine dunkle rötlich schimmernde Leere erschien. Man konnte sich in dieser Loge kaum Menschen vorstellen, so selbstherrlich sah alles aus. (GV 412–13)
>
> This picture showed the box of the President of the United States. At first sight, one might think it wasn't a box at all, but the stage, so far did the curved balustrades jut out into empty space. The balustrades were entirely made of gold. In between little pillars that might have been cut out with the minutest scissors, there was a row of portraits of former presidents, one had a strikingly straight nose, thickish lips and stubbornly lowered eyes under bulging lids. The box was brightly lit from all sides and from above; white and yet somehow mild light laid bare the front of the box, whereas its recesses, deepening pleats of red velvet falling full length and swagged by cords, appeared as a darkly glimmering void. It was hardly possible to imagine people in this box, so sumptuously self-sufficient did it look. (EA 215)

This picture is both more alluring and more ambivalent than the photographs Karl has previously encountered;[36] terms such as 'auffallend'

[36] Kafka's use of the term *Bild* leaves it unclear whether Karl is looking at a photograph or a manually produced image such as a drawing or painting; in this

['strikingly'], 'enthüllte' ['laid bare'], and 'erschien' ['appeared as'] invest the viewing process with an epiphanic character which is heightened by the dazzling interplay of surface and depth, foreground and background, light and darkness. With its red velvet draperies and golden railings, this scene seems to be at odds with modern American culture, as its pompous decor transports the viewer back to a previous, pre-modern era of absolutism.[37] In fact, however, this set-up is only superficially opposed to modern culture as it reflects its underlying strategies of self-fashioning and self-display.

The picture's decor echoes that of turn-of-the-century photographic studios, which employed drapes, fake plinths, and other theatre props in an attempt to emulate the style of the traditional painted portrait. Indeed, the President's box offers a heightened reflection of the semi-private space of the studio where bourgeois fantasies of status and social advancement find their expression. As we saw in Chapter 1, traditional portrait photography is heavily reliant on such theatrical backdrops which insert the sitter into a stereotyped visual iconography. With their clichéd display of gender roles and Oedipal power dynamics, the photographs in *Der Verschollene* are prime examples of this mechanism.

respect, it is the first in a series of similarly indeterminate pictures which pervade Kafka's texts. Its description as an 'Abbildung' (GV 413) ['reproduction' (EA 215)] has photographic connotations; furthermore, a deleted sentence in the manuscript states that its 'Lichtquellen lagen ausserhalb des Bildausschnittes' (GVA 269) ['light sources lay outside the margins of the image'], a formulation which, in its evocation of an arbitrary segment of reality, also has photographic connotations. A possible counter-argument is the fact that the image is in colour, as colour photography only became widely available in the mid-1930s. However, more expensive procedures, such as the Autochromate technique, already existed in the early twentieth century and the retrospective colouring of photographs was common practice in Kafka's time. See Gerhard Kemner and Gelia Eisert, *Lebende Bilder: Eine Technikgeschichte des Films* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2000), 57–8, and Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd edn (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 448–50; indeed, a similar technique is employed in the case of the soldier photograph with its retrospectively applied golden buttons.

[37] Indeed, the colours red and gold also feature in two painted portraits of judges in *Der Proceß*—written simultaneously with this chapter—which likewise aim to evoke the iconography of classical portraiture in their display of judicial power (see Chapter 6). These portraits are exposed for their manipulative and deceptive character, although this does not diminish their effect on the viewer.

Yet if the image of the Oklahoma theatre illustrates this practice of bourgeois self-fashioning, it also reveals its inherent contradictions. When he first looks at the picture, Karl assumes it to depict the stage itself rather than a section, however important, of the auditorium. As Karl instinctively realizes, the lavishly decorated theatre box offers a stage of self-display for the country's most powerful individual, just as the photographic studio serves the same purpose for its bourgeois sitters. The actual President, however, is conspicuously absent from his designated scene of power; indeed, the longer Karl looks at the picture, the more the box begins to resemble a spectacle in its own right. Its 'darkly glimmering void' appears almost hostile to the presence of an actual person, 'so sumptuously self-sufficient did it look'.

The image described by Kafka evokes an iconic moment within American history. The empty President's box recalls Abraham Lincoln's assassination by John Wilkes Booth in the Ford's Theater in Washington less than half a century previously, on 14 April 1865. After the assassination, photographs of Lincoln's Presidential box were disseminated in stereoscopic form, thus opening this site to the collective imagination. Given the similarities between the box and the photographic studio, however, the absence of the President points beyond this specific historical moment. Indeed, this photograph literalizes Benjamin's description of the studio as a site of 'execution and representation'; rather than merely evoking an actual assassination it also points to another process of obliteration: the symbolic annihilation of the individual sitter from the stage of photographic representation.[38]

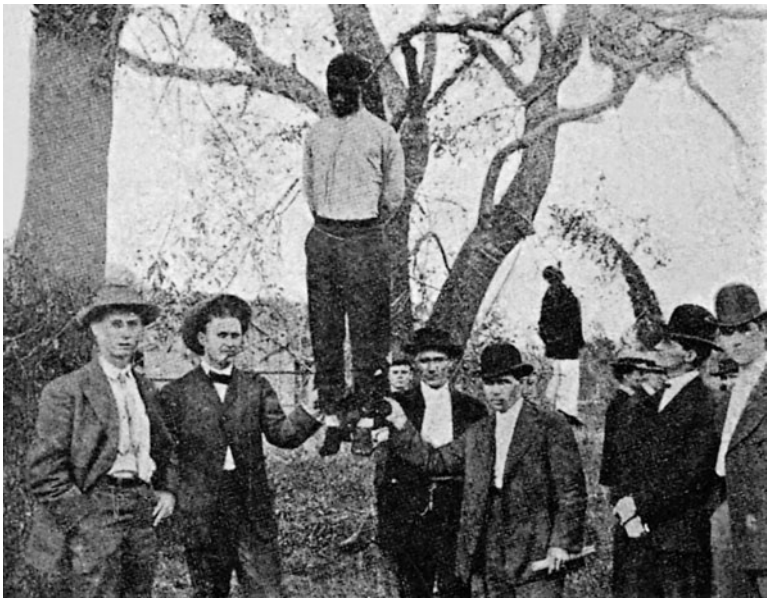
What, then, are the implications of the theatre image for Karl's American odyssey? The last in a series of images of masculine authority, the empty President's box exposes the mechanisms at work throughout Kafka's first novel, suggesting that all such displays,

[38] The substitution of the individual by the type is a process that can be traced within the actual image. The President's box is itself a memorial site not only for Lincoln but also for previous American Presidents who are depicted on the medallions inserted into the balustrade. Only one of these coins is described in more detail; its 'stubbornly lowered eyes' are reminiscent of the averted gaze of Karl's father and expose this image as yet another lifeless stereotype of paternal authority. Alfred Wirkner argues that this coin depicts the contemporary President Woodrow Wilson; however, a comparison with Wilson's photograph fails to confirm this claim (*Kafka und die Außenwelt*, 41, 104).

11. President's box in the Ford's Theater, Washington DC. Stereoscopic photograph.

whether photographic or otherwise, are based on carefully staged backdrops, clichés, and conventions. By disclosing the empty backdrop of such frameworks of power, the image uncovers the void at the centre of patriarchy and shows authority to be a mere pompous charade. A symbol of political patricide, the image might be read as an image of filial emancipation, although this is not necessarily how Karl responds to it. For him, the empty box, as an image of the absent father figure, encapsulates his disconnection from personal ties and family networks and his more general status as a 'Verschollener' in the American continent.

Indeed, if the Oklahoma theatre stages the annihilation of patriarchal authority, this deletion of identity extends even to its most junior member. When he joins the theatre, Karl adopts the pseudonym 'Negro', his 'Rufnamen aus seinen letzten Stellungen' (GV 402)



12. Lynching; in Arthur Holitscher, *Amerika: Heute und morgen*, 367.

['nickname on his last jobs' (EA 210)], a non-name which signifies—in the 'racialized terms of the turn of the century'—the obliteration of individual identity as well as a more general sense of social oppression, discrimination, and exclusion.[39] Within the photographic context of the novel, however, this pseudonym not only illustrates Karl's complicity in his own subjugation; it also suggests that Kafka had an even more sinister fate in mind for his protagonist. An illustration in Holitscher's book brings together Karl's new identity and his future workplace in one horrific scenario. It contains a photograph of the lynching of a black man sarcastically subtitled 'Idyll in Oklahama'. The misspelling of Oklahoma in this caption, and in Holitscher's book more generally, is mirrored by Kafka, who in the manuscript consistently uses the term 'Oklahama'. In the light of this orthographic flaw, the image of the lynching emerges

[39] Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels*, 68.

as the episode's underlying photographic subtext, encapsulating not only Karl's new (non-)identity but also the sinister consequences of this adopted role.

Karl Rossmann's American odyssey thus ends with not one but two images of death which radically challenge the iconography of the American dream. Sights of modernity are undercut by scenes of trauma and violence which belie the facade of progressive democracy. At the same time, these pictures do not radically change the novel's overall atmosphere; rather, they close the circle of Karl's journey through the New World—a journey overshadowed, from his first arrival, by photographic sights of punishment and oppression.[40]

[40] Contrary to Max Brod's claims that Kafka had envisaged a happy ending for the novel (*Über Franz Kafka*, 120), Kafka's own diary suggests that he had a more sinister fate in mind for his protagonist. As he writes about the protagonists of *Der Verschollene* and *Der Proceß*, 'Roßmann und K., der Schuldlose und der Schuldige, schließlich beide unterschiedslos strafweise umgebracht, der Schuldlose mit leichterer Hand, mehr zur Seite geschoben als niedergeschlagen' (TB 757) ['Rossmann and K., the innocent and the guilty, both executed without distinction in the end, the innocent one with a gentler hand, more pushed aside than struck down' (ED 344)].

4

Photographic Metamorphoses: *Die Verwandlung*

In *Der Verschollene*, photography underpins the spatial and thematic diversity of Kafka's narrative. In the manner of a photographic slide-show, the novel presents us with a wide range of different settings, scenarios, and tableaux, and photographs taken from different sources underlie this literary travelogue, creating manifold connections between Europe and America, the family and the city, past and present. Written in parallel with *Der Verschollene*, *Die Verwandlung* (*Metamorphosis*, 1912) seems to be based on a very different premise. Here, the vast terrain of the American continent gives way to the claustrophobia of a small flat and the concomitant restrictions of family life. Both texts, however, are linked through the theme of photography; not only is one of the photographs of *Der Verschollene* replicated within the narrative of *Die Verwandlung*, but the photographic medium emerges once again as a tool of normativity and control. On another level, however, the two texts make rather different use of the theme. Whereas photography in *Der Verschollene* brings together a wide range of different sources and contexts, its appearance in *Die Verwandlung* is restricted to just two images. That said, these two images act as crucial nodal points both within the narrative and beyond. Despite their seemingly inconspicuous nature, they encapsulate the trajectory of the narrative and the fate of its protagonist; at the same time, they link the story to intertextual sources from within Kafka's writings and elsewhere. Photography thus opens up the text towards a wider context, while also underlining its carefully crafted inner structure.

'THE APE OF MY PARENTS': SOCIALIZATION AS DEFORMATION

Photographs in *Der Verschollene* frame Karl's journey of social decline. In the European family portrait, his dual exposure to the gaze of the parents and that of the camera prefigures his increasing subjection to, and expulsion by, authoritarian structures. Karl's later adoption of the name 'Negro' replays this dynamic in racial terms as the subtle coercion of the family portrait tacitly gives way to the brutality of Holitscher's lynching scene. In *Die Verwandlung* the twin themes of familial power structures and social exclusion are once again explored through the photographic lens; here, however, the theme of racial otherness is recast in evolutionary terms, as a regressive flight from human identity as such. However, the association between photography and transformation is not limited to the story itself but emerges from Kafka's personal engagement with his childhood portraits. On 28 November 1912, he writes to Felice Bauer:

> Wie alt ich hier bin, weiß ich gar nicht. Damals gehörte ich wohl noch vollständig mir an und es scheint mir sehr behaglich gewesen zu sein. Als Erstgeborener bin ich viel photographiert worden und es gibt also eine große Reihenfolge von Verwandlungen. Von jetzt an wird es in jedem Bild ärger, Du wirst es ja sehn. Gleich im nächsten Bild trete ich schon als Affe meiner Eltern auf. (B1 280)
>
> I don't know how old I am in this one. At that time I think I still belonged completely to myself, and I seem to have been very comfortable with it. As the eldest, I was constantly being photographed and so there exists a long succession of transformations. From now on it gets worse in every picture, but you'll see. In the very next one I already appear as the ape of my parents. (EF 73–4)

By 're-reading' several of his childhood photographs from an adult perspective, Kafka integrates these images into a narrative sequence, investing them with a quasi-filmic continuity. Importantly, however, socialization is here not understood in Rousseauist terms as the realization of the child's natural potential; rather, it is figured as a deforming and conditioning process based on the child's imitation of the parental model.

13. Kafka as a baby, *c*.1884.

Kafka contrasts an early image which shows him in a state of comfortable oblivion with the subsequent loss of innocence which is likewise documented photographically. In this respect, his comments follow a well-worn nostalgic tradition; as Anne Higonnet puts it, childhood photographs 'give testimony to an imaginary time when we were perfect and innocent, when we were, we would like to believe, our original and therefore real selves. Any fall from grace can be measured against the child snapshot standard.'[1] At the same time, Kafka's use of modifying formulations such as 'I think' and 'I seem' suggest that the 'comfortable' state which he discerns in his earliest photograph might in fact be the result of a retrospective projection, the attempt to

[1] Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 95.

delineate an idyllic early state from the subsequent process of decline. Yet this approach is not without inherent contradictions. Although Kafka constructs the first picture as distinct from all the subsequent images, this 'before-and-after' opposition already subsumes the first image into the later development. The initial, idealized state thus becomes visible only against the backdrop of later decline.

Kafka's central concern becomes apparent only in his engagement with these later photographs. Here he discerns a development which he describes, in vague but evocative terms, as 'a long succession of transformations'. Even in the following photograph, Kafka finds evidence for this process; this portrait depicts the child not as a self-contained, comfortable individual but as an altogether different figure, namely as 'the ape of my parents'. This formulation encapsulates Kafka's fundamental critique of photographic portraiture which underpins his literary engagement with the medium. By casting himself as an ape, Kafka comments on the mechanisms of social coercion inherent in photographic portraiture, a genre which inserts the individual sitter into a predetermined array of gestures, poses, and backdrops. Although we cannot be sure that Kafka is here commenting on the same image as Benjamin twenty years later, he refers to the same phenomenon: the studio portrait's erosion of individuality.

Kafka thus describes a fundamental principle of socialization—the child's imitation of adult behaviour—to which his animal metaphor gives a particular twist. The ontogenetic model of socialization is here expressed in phylogenetic terms, associating personal acculturation with an inverted version of Darwinian evolution. The child–ape metaphor suggests that the emulation of adult values and behaviours is achieved only at the cost of a figurative regression to an earlier evolutionary stage. However, this image also raises more complex questions about agency; the ape is not only anterior to human society in biological terms, but also metaphorically secondary to it, in its role as imitator. This ambiguity is mirrored in Kafka's genitive construction; as ape 'of' his parents, Kafka is both his parents' possession—a passive screen onto which they can project their ideals and aspirations—and an active agent replicating the parental model.

While photography provides a record of this development, Kafka's conclusion, '*and so* there exists a long succession of transformations' (my emphasis), attributes a causal role to the medium in this process.

The carefully staged studio photograph is situated on the interface between realist representation and imaginary construction, and as such actively contributes to the imposition of normative models of identity.[2] As I argued in Chapter 1, the child, and in particular the first-born son, provides a privileged screen for the projection of parental ideals and social norms—a mechanism which gains particular significance for a Jewish family seeking assimilation into the dominant Gentile culture. Kafka's use of the ape as a figure of human socialization is of course reminiscent of his later story 'Ein Bericht für eine Akademie' ('A Report to an Academy', 1917). Its simian protagonist Rotpeter develops, like the child Kafka, into a fully acculturated subject by mimicking human behaviour.[3] Yet while the ape's transformation has been read as a satire on Jewish assimilation,[4] it is difficult to tell to what extent the ape's performance is one of uncritical imitation or self-conscious parody. Kafka's letter about his own childhood picture raises similar questions. His preoccupation with the ape as a model of socialization is uncannily reminiscent of the use of Darwinian theories in turn-of-the-century anti-Semitic discourse which saw the Jew as a buffer between man and ape.[5]

Yet if Kafka seems to echo such anti-Semitic stereotypes, he does not do so uncritically. The ape as a model of socialization is tied

[2] Bernd Busch, *Belichtete Welt: Eine Wahrnehmungsgeschichte der Photographie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1995), 307.

[3] Gerhard Neumann draws attention to the parallels between 'Ein Bericht für eine Akademie' and Kafka's letter, arguing that in the latter Kafka diagnoses his own failed socialization by associating 'the behavioural deficiencies of the child with those of the mimicking animal' ('"Ein Bericht für eine Akademie": Erwägungen zum "Mimesis"-Charakter Kafkascher Texte', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift*, 49 (1975), 166–83: 182).

[4] Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 164–71.

[5] George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 143. A very different approach was pursued by Charles Darwin, in whose name such claims were often made. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Darwin used photographic plates not only to illustrate the continuities between humans and animals but also to counter theories about the superiority of the 'white race'. The photographic experiments of Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, in contrast, were aimed not at the extrapolation of connections and similarities but at the establishment of clear-cut eugenicist divisions along the lines of class and race. See Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001), 70, 74–7.

up with another element which subverts a straightforward process of assimilation. This is the notion of performance which is central to the adoption of predetermined models of identity[6] and which links Rotpeter's report—itself a parodic performance of academic discourse—and Kafka's account of his childhood photographs. His use of the verb *auftreten* invests the image with a theatrical dimension, again raising questions about the individual's complicity with his own subordination.

As we have seen, the turn-of-the-century photographic studio provides a privileged terrain for the theatrical construction of bourgeois identity. Yet if photography provides a platform for such prescriptive mechanisms, it can also act as a springboard for resistance. The viewing of studio photographs can raise awareness of their de-individualizing, formulaic character, and childhood photographs in particular can provide a vehicle of critique. Children often make reluctant sitters, and the sight of them posing in stuffy costumes in kitsch surroundings exposes the humiliating and ridiculous character of this photographic masquerade.[7] The child as ape parodies parental authority by investing notions of lineage, genealogy, and socialization with a regressive character which counteracts and distorts the transition of identity constructions from one generation onto the next. In this respect, Kafka's account prefigures Judith Butler's concept of gender performance and its destabilizing effect on normative, naturalized concepts of identity. As Butler argues,

> The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-forming or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction.[8]

[6] Margot Norris argues that Kafka in 'Ein Bericht für eine Akademie' 'directly links animal mimicry and theatrical performance as evolutionary strategies in the struggle for survival' ('Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, and the Problem of Mimesis', *Modern Language Notes*, 95 (1980), 1232–53: 1233).

[7] The same tendency underlies, in a radicalized form, the photographs of apes posing as humans in Carl Hagenbeck's memoirs which served Kafka as an inspiration for 'Ein Bericht für eine Akademie' (Hartmut Binder, *Kafka: Der Schaffensprozeß* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), 295–6).

[8] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 141.

The child's photographic mimicry is not just a passive imitation of pre-existing models but a resignified performance which parodies its original and exposes the arbitrariness of such constructions. Yet in contrast to Butler's notion that there is no identity prior to its performative construction, Kafka maintains a distinction between the deforming effect of socialization and a previous, self-contained state which too is recorded in the photographic medium.[9] In his account, then, photography is a medium which depicts not only the deforming mechanisms of socialization but also their opposite, the child's pre-cultural self.

The fact that Kafka figures the process of socialization in terms of a metamorphosis from man to animal creates a striking parallel between his letter and his story. Kafka wrote this letter while he was working on *Die Verwandlung*,[10] and this temporal proximity, as well as the recurrence of the motif of transformation, calls for a closer analysis of the links between letter and literary text. While it is impossible to determine whether his letter was inspired by his fictional work or vice versa, the links between the two are far-reaching.

DIE VERWANDLUNG: UNIFORMITY AND MONSTROSITY

A comparison between *Die Verwandlung* and Kafka's letter reveals both parallels and differences. Both texts describe the transformation of a human being into an animal, and in both cases the subject of this process is a son whose existence is determined by parental demands and desires.[11] Yet while Kafka's photographic transformation is the result of his assimilatory adoption of the parental model, Gregor's metamorphosis entails his exclusion from the family and

[9] According to Butler, such a state 'before the law' of acculturation would of course be illusory, a retrospective construct.

[10] Kafka began work on *Die Verwandlung* on 17 November 1912, at a time when he encountered difficulties with his main project *Der Verschollene* and after a period of silence from Felice Bauer. He completed the text on 6 December.

[11] Gregor is forced to remain in his current, subjugated position as a salesman because of his parents' debt to his employer.

from human society more generally. His transformation is immediate and irreversible, whereas Kafka's photographic metamorphosis is a gradual process which unfolds over the course of several pictures. In evolutionary terms, the step from human being to insect is considerably larger than that from man to ape, and Gregor's transformation can thus be seen as a radical withdrawal from dominant culture and its normative models of identity. The ape, in contrast, is a more ambiguous figure whose performance is situated between sameness and otherness, mimicry and parodic imitation.

Despite these differences, Gregor's transformation is, like that of the child Kafka, framed by images, and his fate is equally associated with the transformative power of photography. The one remnant of his human existence is a photograph which stands in stark contrast to both his animal self and his human existence as an exploited salesman. This portrait is strategically placed opposite the door through which Gregor first emerges, revealing his new body to his family:

> Gregor trat nun gar nicht in das Zimmer, sondern lehnte sich von innen an den festgeriegelten Türflügel, so daß sein Leib nur zur Hälfte und darüber der seitlich geneigte Kopf zu sehen war, mit dem er zu den anderen hinüberlugte.… Gerade an der gegenüber liegenden Wand hing eine Photographie Gregors aus seiner Militärzeit, die ihn als Leutnant darstellte, wie er, die Hand am Degen, sorglos lächelnd, Respekt für seine Haltung und Uniform verlangte. (D 134–5)

> Gregor did not go now into the living room, but leaned against the inside of the firmly shut wing of the door, so that only half of his body was visible and his head above it bending sideways to look at the others.… Right opposite Gregor on the wall hung a photograph of himself in military service, as a lieutenant, hand on sword, a carefree smile on his face, demanding respect for his uniform and posture. (ES 100–1)

This juxtaposition of Gregor's two framed bodies highlights the radical nature of his transformation and his concomitant loss of control and authority. While his animal body is partially hidden behind the door, his photographic self projects an air of presence and determination. This portrait dates from Gregor's military service which presumably preceded his current position as a salesman; indeed, his posture and expression command a respect which he lacks in his civilian existence. The soldier's confident, carefree appearance is

underscored by his sword and uniform, the insignia of male power.[12] The manuscript highlights the impact of this charismatic image on the observer; it describes how Gregor 'lächelnd dem Beschauer Respekt für seine Haltung und Uniform abverlangte' (DA 212) ['smilingly exacted respect for his posture and uniform from the observer'].

While the photograph thus illustrates the empowering effect of Gregor's military service, it also gestures towards the possible downsides of such an existence. After all, the army is characterized by the same hierarchical, de-individualizing structures which also underpin Gregor's salesman existence. Indeed, while his uniform and pose draw on a recognizable semiotic framework, they also highlight the conformist character of such self-displays. It thus remains ambiguous whether Gregor's outward confidence corresponds to a genuine inner reality or whether it is merely a facade adopted for the camera. In this respect, Gregor's photograph is reminiscent of the portrait of the young soldier which exercises such an attraction on Karl Rossmann in *Der Verschollene*. In both cases, the sitter's military attire conveys an alluring air of confidence and self-respect; yet as Karl comes to realize, the imitation of this photographic ideal does not yield the desired result as it merely uncovers the deceptive character of such displays of masculinity. A comparable sense of disillusionment underpins *Die Verwandlung*. Although the protagonist is himself the sitter of such a commanding portrait, this display of male authority bears no resemblance to his day-to-day existence. What is more, the formulaic character of this picture contains the seeds of its subsequent subversion when Gregor, the model son, is recast as society's monstrous other.

This mechanism is alluded to in the opening scene where Gregor's gaze rests first on his own body and then on the 'Musterkollektion von Tuchwaren' (D 115) ['collection of cloth samples' (ES 89)] on the table. As Andrew Webber argues, the conjunction of Gregor's animal body with the display samples reveals the text's underlying logic, in that 'the parading of models always involves its inverse, the parading of monstrosity, and Kafka's text suggests that this is the logic

[12] In an earlier version, Gregor's rank is described as that of a 'Reserveleutnant' (DA 212) ['a reserve lieutenant'], a variant which extends his military service into his current existence.

of commodity culture, indeed arguably of the modern condition as such'.[13] Just as the child Kafka, adopting the model of his parents, emerges as his parents' ape, Gregor's performance as model son and soldier prefigures his transformation into the monstrous other of this ideal. In both cases, the photographic portrait and its representational conventions do not merely implement normative identity but act as the harbinger of the sitter's deviation from this norm.

FETISHISM AND DISPLAY

Another example of this link between exemplarity and monstrosity is provided by the text's second portrait, the magazine picture of a woman dressed in furs which adorns the wall of Gregor's bedroom. Following his own body and the textile samples, this image is the third sight which catches Gregor's eye after he wakes up:

> Über dem Tisch … hing das Bild, das er vor kurzem aus einer illustrierten Zeitschrift ausgeschnitten und in einem hübschen, vergoldeten Rahmen untergebracht hatte. Es stellte eine Dame dar, die, mit einem Pelzhut und einer Pelzboa versehen, aufrecht dasaß und einen schweren Pelzmuff, in dem ihr ganzer Unterarm verschwunden war, dem Beschauer entgegenhob. (D 115–16)
>
> Above the table … hung the picture which he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put into a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the observer a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm has vanished. (ES 89)

As in the case of the soldier photograph, the narrative focuses on the sitter's posture and attire, highlighting their central role in photographic identity construction. The lady's upright pose and raised arm are, as various critics have noted, rather intimidating; Walter Sokel, for instance, interprets them as a 'hostile gesture', a

[13] Andrew Webber, 'Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*', in Peter Hutchinson (ed.), *Landmarks in German Short Prose* (Oxford: Lang, 2003), 175–90: 183. Mark Anderson makes a similar point about the link between *monstrare* and 'monstrosity' in *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg 'Fin-de-Siècle'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, repr. 2002), 142.

'posture of rejection and defensiveness', concluding that Gregor 'has hung the unapproachability of woman as an emblem in his room'.[14] Yet while the magazine image thus acts as a female equivalent to the posed virility of Gregor's portrait, it is even harder to pin down and categorize.

The picture's role within the text is complicated by a number of open questions and ambiguities which concern both its content and its representational status. Although many critics take the picture to be a photograph,[15] Kafka uses only the non-specific term *Bild*, which he elsewhere employs in both photographic and non-photographic contexts. The fact that in the story he uses the term *Photographie* in relation to the soldier portrait suggests a deliberate distinction between the two images. That said, the picture is cut out of an illustrated magazine and thus shares with Gregor's photograph its mechanically reproduced character. The gilded frame, in turn, a stock element of traditional art and its petit-bourgeois appropriation, invests the magazine image with an aura of uniqueness and respectability.

The picture's content adds to its ambiguous status between high art and mass culture. The woman dressed in fur forms part of the established pictorial iconography of the femme fatale, with examples ranging from Rubens and Titian to the late nineteenth-century artist Franz von Stuck;[16] as we shall see, Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz*, a vital intertext for Kafka's story, also inscribes itself into this art-historical tradition. At the same time, however, the picture can also be traced to the realm of popular culture; in 1912, fur was at the height of fashion, and photographs of models sporting fur coats, muffs, stoles, and hats were a stock feature of fashion magazines. Given his father's haberdashery business and his personal interest in fashion, Kafka would certainly have been aware of this trend and its photographic manifestations. A photograph from the December

[14] Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka: Tragik und Ironie. Zur Struktur seiner Kunst* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1964), 94.

[15] See, for instance, Ruth Angress, 'Kafka and Sacher-Masoch: A Note on *The Metamorphosis*', *Modern Language Notes*, 85 (1970), 745–6; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, fore. Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 47, and Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 135–6.

[16] Frank Möbus, *Sünden-Fälle: Die Geschlechtlichkeit in Erzählungen Franz Kafkas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1994), 79.

issue of *Elegante Welt* (*Elegant World*) bears striking similarities to the picture described in *Die Verwandlung*.[17] Importantly, however, Kafka's text does not specify the origin of the picture, thus increasing its multivalence and ambiguity; although its assemblage of fur items points in the direction of a fashion image designed, like Gregor's cloth samples, for the display of commodity items, its materialism is undercut by an erotic undertone which points in the direction of pornography. Thus there are two forms of fetishism at play here, as the picture's commodity fetishism fuels Gregor's private, erotic fixation.

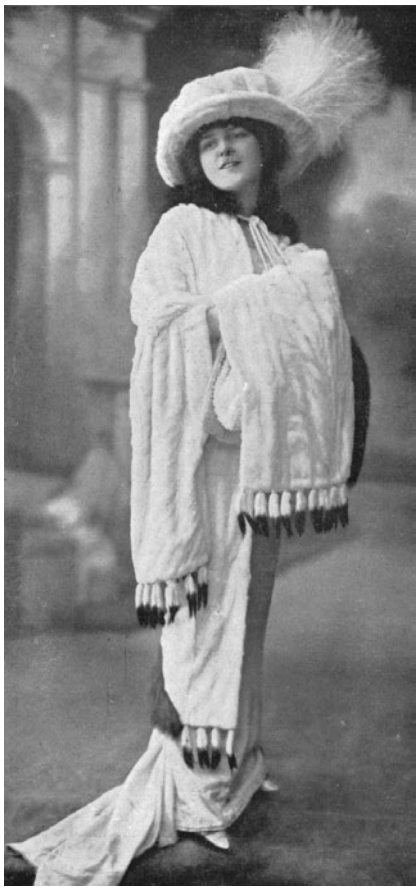
This fetishistic ambiguity is crucial for the story. Curiously, despite its erotic undertones, Gregor does not keep the picture secret from his parents; on the contrary, his mother even proudly refers to it in her conversation with the chief clerk, describing the frame which Gregor has made for it in his free time (D 126–7/ES 96). As proof of Gregor's harmless pastime activities, the image might at first sight appear comically inappropriate; in fact, however, the mother's comment touches on a more insidious mechanism of sublimation. As fashion image, the image partakes in the sphere of commerce, travel, and exchange which determine Gregor's working life; as pornographic pin-up, in contrast, it provides an outlet for his sexual drives which might otherwise be channelled into a relationship, thus assuring his continued dedication as the family's breadwinner.[18]

Even before Gregor's transformation, then, the picture has a highly ambivalent status, as is suggested by the frame in whose creation he

[17] The picture was first reprinted in Möbus, *Sünden-Fälle*, 85.

[18] Ironically, the use of photographs as fetishistic substitutes for physical closeness is a central feature of Kafka's correspondence with Felice Bauer. Indeed, it is during his work on *Die Verwandlung* that Kafka and Felice begin to exchange their first pictures, and Kafka's response echoes the situation of his protagonist. When he receives the first photograph of Felice on 25 November 1912, Kafka is about to go on a business trip and takes the photograph with him as a travel companion (B1 267/EF 65). And while Kafka's account of his strenuous train journey and the lonely stay in a hotel echoes Gregor's complaints about his salesman existence, Felice's photograph makes this ordeal easier to bear, especially as it is placed, like Gregor's magazine image, within sight of Kafka's bed (B1 271/EF 67). Both Felice's picture and the magazine photograph thus complement their owners' unstable, travelling lifestyles and act as substitutes for personal relationships. The fact that Felice's photograph is a childhood portrait underlines its sublimatory character. I will return to the significance of this photograph in the following chapter.

has invested so much effort.[19] If the function of a picture frame is to demarcate the boundary between the work of art and its context, then Gregor's construction of the gilded frame marks an attempt to dissociate the image from its original, mass-produced context, that is, from the realm of commodification which also underpins



14. 'Der königliche Pelz' ('Regal Furs'). Fashion photograph from the magazine *Elegante Welt*, 49 (1912), 34.

[19] In an earlier version, he merely buys it (DA 192).

his own professional life. However, the function and effect of the frame are ambiguous; while it establishes a boundary between viewer and image, it also heightens the picture's auratic allure. A similar ambivalence applies to the process of its construction which takes place in the living room, under the watchful eyes of Gregor's parents, thus forming part of his externally regulated existence. That said, the construction of the frame is an expression (albeit modest) of Gregor's creative potential and thus marks an escape from his instrumentalized, regimented existence; indeed, the making of the frame is described as a 'Zerstreuung' (D 126) ['distraction' (ES 96)] from his regular activities, the reading of the newspaper and the studying of railway timetables, both of which partake of the sphere of commerce and traffic.[20]

The frame is thus a complex symbol within the text, as it both establishes and problematizes the distinctions between image and context, high and mass culture, work and leisure. As we shall see, these dialectical relations recur on a more abstract narrative level; the pictures within the story evoke various intertextual sources, creating a network of citations which underlines the text's dual theme of photography and transformation.

INTERTEXTS I: *VENUS IM PELZ*

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's erotic novel *Venus im Pelz* (*Venus in Furs*, 1869) has long been recognized as a subtext for *Die Verwandlung*, and the various links between the two texts have been well explored.[21] It tells the story of the narrator Severin's enslavement by the Russian

[20] Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 135.

[21] See, for instance, Angress, 'Kafka and Sacher-Masoch'; Franz M. Kuna, 'Art as Direct Vision: Kafka and Sacher-Masoch', *Journal of European Studies*, 2 (1972), 237–46; Peter B. Waldeck, 'Kafka's "Die Verwandlung" and "Ein Hungerkünstler" as Influenced by Leopold Sacher-Masoch', *Monatshefte*, 64 (1972), 147–52; Mark M. Anderson, 'Kafka and Sacher-Masoch', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis* (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 117–33; Robert S. Leventhal, '*Versagen*: Kafka und die masochistische Ordnung', *German Life and Letters*, 48 (1995), 148–69; and Holger Rudloff, *Gregor Samsa und seine Brüder: Kafka—Sacher-Masoch—Thomas Mann* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1997).

countess Wanda who impersonates his fetishistic idol, the eponymous Venus. Importantly, however, Wanda's adoption of this role is only one of numerous manifestations of this figure within the text. Among its multifarious appearances, it is a photograph which first entices Severin's desire:

> Welcher Zufall! ein Jude, der mit Photographien handelt, spielt mir das Bild meines Ideals in die Hände; es ist ein kleines Blatt, die 'Venus mit dem Spiegel' von Tizian, welch ein Weib! Ich will ein Gedicht machen. Nein! Ich nehme das Blatt und schreibe darauf: '*Venus im Pelz*'.[22]
>
> What a coincidence! a Jew trading in photographs hands me an image of my ideal; it is a small reproduction of Titian's 'Venus with the Mirror'—what a woman! I will write a poem. No! I take the image and write on it: '*Venus in Furs*'.

Both Severin's fixation and Wanda's erotic performance are thus founded on this photographic reproduction of a painting by Titian. Itself a copy, this image is re-staged in a variety of different contexts;[23] indeed, this principle of replication is thematized within the picture itself, which shows Venus holding a mirror. Kafka's adaptation takes up this logic, transplanting the theme and its 'original' photographic manifestation into his text. While Sacher-Masoch's protagonist has to rely on a travelling salesman to supply him with photographic material,[24] Gregor can draw on the more advanced dissemination of erotic images through the mass media.

If Gregor's magazine image is thus a 'cut-out' in more than one sense,[25] the picture of the lady in furs is not the only image

[22] Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus im Pelz* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1968), 17.

[23] Within the text, the photograph is preceded by a marble Venus statue which Severin sees in the garden, and by a painting of the same motif which the narrator of the frame narrative sees in Severin's house.

[24] Curiously, the text specifies the Jewish identity of the salesman, a detail which might draw on the stereotype of the Wandering Jew whose geographical uprootedness mirrors the displacement and dissemination of works of art through photographic reproduction. Another anti-Semitic stereotype is the Jew's uncanny ability to assimilate himself into Gentile society by cunningly imitating existing models of behaviour. In this respect, the Jew raises anxieties because he, just like photography, is perceived to challenge the distinction between original and copy, between 'authentic' identity and imposture.

[25] Isolde Tröndle, *Differenz des Begehrens: Franz Kafka, Marguerite Duras* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1989), 72.

in *Die Verwandlung* which is prefigured in *Venus im Pelz*. When Severin becomes Wanda's slave, he adopts the name 'Gregor' and dons a uniform. Both the submissive and the dominant roles in Sacher-Masoch's novel thus recur within Kafka's text as mechanically reproduced images; although Gregor's photograph projects a sense of authority, its masochistic intertext reminds us that the appearance of mastery relies on the concomitant submission to a dominant order.

INTERTEXTS II: 'HOCHZEITSVORBEREITUNGEN AUF DEM LANDE'

Venus im Pelz is not the only text which inspired the theme of photography in *Die Verwandlung*. Both Gregor's transformation into an insect and the role of photography in this process are anticipated in one of Kafka's earliest texts, the fragment 'Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande' ('Wedding Preparations in the Country').[26] Faced with the dreaded prospect of his own wedding, its protagonist Eduard Raban imagines sending his clothed body so that he himself can stay in bed in 'Gestalt eines großen Käfers, eines Hirschkäfers oder eines Maikäfers' (N1 18) ['the shape of a big beetle, a stag beetle or a cockchafer' (ES 56)]. While the horror of *Die Verwandlung* derives from the protagonist's very real and irrevocable metamorphosis, Raban's transformation is merely a wishful fantasy, creating an imaginary split between social duty and selfish pleasure.[27] Raban's plan to send his clothed body to meet his obligations thus suggests a concept of social identity as a mere sartorial surface devoid of any underlying psychological core.[28] Echoes of this idea can be discerned in *Die Verwandlung*, where Gregor's animal body is strategically contrasted with his photographic portrait; as with Raban's imagined

[26] Version A, to which I am referring here, was written between August 1906 and the end of 1907.

[27] Thomas Anz, *Franz Kafka* (Munich: Beck, 1989), 81.

[28] This equation of social identity and sartorial appearance is reflected in the text's opening sequence which mainly consists of detailed accounts of Raban's and other characters' clothing and accessories—elements which vary in each of the three different versions of the text, thus illustrating their importance for the story.

alter ego, the sartorial signifiers of clothing construct and even supplant the identity of the wearer.

Yet Kafka's early text anticipates not only the motif of metamorphosis but also its association with photography. While he is waiting for the tram, Raban takes out a photograph of his fiancée as if to remind himself of her appearance:

'Wie gebückt sie ist', dachte Raban, als er das Bild jetzt ansah, 'niemals ist sie eigentlich aufrecht und vielleicht ist ihr Rücken rund. Ich werde viel darauf achten müssen. Und ihr Mund ist so breit und die Unterlippe ragt ohne Zweifel hier vor, ja ich erinnere mich jetzt auch daran. Und das Kleid. Natürlich ich verstehe nichts von Kleidern, aber diese ganz knapp genähten Ärmel sind sicher häßlich, wie ein Verband sehn sie aus. Und der Hut, dessen Rand an jeder Stelle mit anderer Biegung in die Höhe aus dem Gesichte gehoben ist. Aber ihre Augen sind schön, sie sind braun, wenn ich nicht irre. Alle sagen, daß ihre Augen schön sind.' (N1 21–2)

'How hunched she is', Raban thought when he looked at the picture now. 'She's never really upright and perhaps her back is round. I shall have to pay much attention to this. And her mouth is so wide, and here, beyond doubt, the lower lip protrudes, yes, now I remember that too. And what a dress! Of course, I don't know anything about clothes, but these very tight-sewn sleeves are ugly, I am sure, they look like bandages. And the hat, the brim at every point turned up from the face in a different curve. But her eyes are beautiful, they're brown, if I'm not mistaken. Everyone says her eyes are beautiful.' (ES 58)

The photograph does not arouse any feelings of love or intimacy in Raban; on the contrary, it provokes in him a profound sense of alienation and even repulsion. His merciless scrutiny of his fiancée's physical flaws is mellowed only by his concluding compliments about her eyes. Even this moment of affection, however, is undermined by the fact that Raban cannot quite remember their colour (which would in any case be indiscernible on a black-and-white photograph) and thus must rely on the opinion of others for his appreciation of this one positive feature.

Raban's detailed scrutiny serves as a substitute for emotional closeness, but only reinforces his sense of detachment and alienation. Indeed, his examination of the image brings to light the irregularity and even disfigurement of the sitter's appearance. The sleeves of her dress are not only 'ugly', but their resemblance to bandages also

invests the image with a latently pathological character. The only features which Raban remembers with any certainty are his fiancée's broad mouth and her protruding lower lip—an irregularity which is in turn highlighted by the asymmetrical hat. This negative impression is rounded off by her hunched back and bad posture which take on an almost obsessive quality for Raban, who concludes that 'I shall have to pay much attention to this'. The fiancée's appearance is thus diametrically opposed not only to a conventional image of female beauty but more specifically to the ideal of the lithe and naturally graceful female body unrestricted by tight clothing which was propagated by turn-of-the-century health movements.[29] In this respect, the photograph suggests a correlation between physical constraints and equally restrictive social conventions which are imposed onto the female sitter and the male viewer alike.

Although the two pictures are taken from very different contexts, the photograph of Raban's fiancée shares various features with Gregor Samsa's magazine image. In both cases, the male viewer dissects the image into a fragmentary array of body parts and sartorial items, adopting a fetishistic gaze which effectively blurs the difference between personal photograph and anonymous pin-up. What is more, Eduard Raban and Gregor Samsa both focus on similar aspects of their pictures, such as the sitter's hat and her arms which are concealed and yet emphasized by sartorial items. Most importantly, however, the photograph in 'Hochzeitsvorbereitungen' reflects the one in *Die Verwandlung* in its depiction of a hybrid bodily identity. With her rounded back, the fiancée seems monstrous, a kind of beetle woman, and as such she anticipates Raban's own imaginary transformation into an insect. In this respect, moreover, her photograph prefigures the magazine image in *Die Verwandlung* which suggests a similar hybridity; it shows a woman whose body is encased, covered, and, it appears, consumed by fur, a sight which blurs the boundaries between human and animal, between the acculturated self and its monstrous, bestial other.

In different ways, then, both pictures draw on stereotypes of femininity which permeated turn-of-the-century culture. As Reiner Stach has argued, Kafka's works both reflect and refract misogynistic

[29] On the impact of this movement on Kafka, see Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 50–73.

discourses of the time,[30] and the female portraits in 'Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande' and *Die Verwandlung* are a case in point. They are emblematic of theories which identified femininity with animality and the uncontrollable forces of nature, constructing it as the extreme opposite of masculine rationality and self-control. That said, Kafka's images of female 'otherness' also harbour an underlying identificatory potential for their male viewers; Raban's scrutiny of his fiancée's body anticipates his own imaginary transformation into a beetle and, as we shall see, a similar mechanism also informs Gregor Samsa's engagement with the magazine image. Yet Raban's scrutiny of the photograph is also revealing in another respect. As Sander Gilman has demonstrated, Kafka's texts reflect the insidious impact of anti-Semitic theories and stereotypes, many of which were internalized by the contemporary Jewish population. Raban's response to his fiancée's photograph echoes such stereotypes of Jewish degeneracy through its general emphasis on physical deformity and in particular through its obsessive focus on her disproportionate lips, a stock feature of anti-Semitic caricatures.[31] Thus Raban's viewing of the photograph involves an act of projection and identification, reflecting his own subliminal self-image which becomes manifest in his fantasies of a regressive transformation.

'A LONG SUCCESSION OF TRANSFORMATIONS'

Both 'Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande' and Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz* contain photographs which are closely related to the transformation of their male protagonists, and in both texts, these images are invested with an uncanny capacity to undermine their viewers' supposedly stable identity. As we shall see, a similar mechanism is at work in *Die Verwandlung*. The two images featured in this text relate not only to the metamorphosis of the protagonist but also to other transformations within his family, thus putting into

[30] Stach, *Kafkas erotischer Mythos*.

[31] Sander Gilman, *Franz Kafka: The Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 128.

narrative practice Kafka's notion of a 'succession of transformations' triggered and encapsulated by photography.

The cut-out magazine picture bears an allusive and mysterious relation to Gregor's metamorphosis. On the one hand, the image encapsulates his subjugated human existence at work and at home, acting, as I have argued, as a sublimatory substitute for a real sexual relationship. By projecting his desire onto the remote picture, Gregor casts himself in a subjugated position, as images by definition 'preclude fulfilment'[32]—a sado-masochistic dynamic which is enforced not only by the woman's aggressive posture but also by the intertextual links to *Venus im Pelz*. Yet while the magazine photograph thus reflects the protagonist's professional and familial subordination, it also contains a second, more subversive dimension. The picture of a woman whose body is covered and indeed consumed by fur—her arm has already disappeared into the muff—blurs the very boundary between human and animal existence which Gregor transgresses through his metamorphosis. The picture is thus a monstrosity in its own right, and as such it mediates between Gregor's two bodies, his photographic portrait and his insect self. In this respect, it provides a *mise en abyme* of the kind of transitional state which Deleuze and Guattari describe as 'becoming animal',[33] that is, a process of transformation which resists predetermined frameworks of identity. It is no coincidence that in the opening scene, the magazine image is situated right opposite Gregor, thus acting as a distorted mirror image of his monstrous body. The fact, moreover, that he had cut it out only recently (D 115/ES 89) puts it in close temporal proximity to his transformation.[34]

After his metamorphosis, Gregor remains attached to this photograph in a way which underlines its significance for his new state. One of the text's most dramatic scenes results in direct physical contact between his animal body and the magazine image. Gregor's

[32] Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 137. [33] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 35

[34] Hartmut Binder points out the parallels between *Die Verwandlung* and Dostoyevsky's *The Double*, whose protagonist Golyadkin feels like a beetle at the sight of a young, trim officer (*Kafka: Der Schaffensprozeß*, 172). This passage mirrors the scene where Gregor is confronted with the photograph of his former self. Following the logic of this intertextual reference, both the image of the lady in furs and Gregor's soldier photograph are in some way associated with his transformation.

investment in this cherished picture is illustrated when he sets out to defend it against the interference of his mother and sister who plan to empty his room of his human possessions:

> Und so brach er denn hervor … , wechselte viermal die Richtung des Laufes, er wußte wirklich nicht, was er zuerst retten sollte, da sah er an der im übrigen schon leeren Wand auffallend das Bild der in lauter Pelzwerk gekleideten Dame hängen, kroch eilends hinauf und preßte sich an das Glas, das ihn festhielt und seinem heißen Bauch wohltat. Dieses Bild wenigstens, das Gregor jetzt ganz verdeckte, würde nun gewiß niemand wegnehmen. (D 165)

> And so he burst out … and four times changed his direction, since he really did not know what to rescue first, then on the wall opposite, which was already otherwise cleared, he was struck by the picture of the lady muffled in so much fur and quickly crawled up to it and pressed himself to the glass, which was a good surface to hold on to and comforted his hot belly. This picture at least, which was now entirely hidden beneath him, was going to be removed by nobody. (ES 118)

Revealingly, the one object which Gregor ventures to protect from his family's interference is the cheap and anonymous pin-up and not, for instance, the desk at which he used to do his homework. Rather than being deterred by the frame as a symbol of separation, Gregor now crawls onto the picture, covering its cool glass with his hot belly.[35] Although this is a rather comical moment, Gregor's mounting of the image also has a grotesquely erotic character, resulting in the 'impossible intercourse' between a beetle man and a furry woman.[36]

Gregor's defence of this cherished possession marks the only moment of overt rebellion against his family. Through its depiction of a hybrid, part-human, part-animal identity, the image is emblematic of his own escape from the de-individualizing parameters of his human identity as they are expressed in his soldier photograph, and his defence of it underlines the symbolic value of this picture for his new state. What is more, by mounting the picture, Gregor 'usurps the space previously occupied by [the] gilt-framed photograph'[37] and

[35] The picture's coolness is reminiscent of *Der Verschollene*, where Karl, having failed to meet his father's gaze in the photograph, rests his face on the picture (GV 136/EA 70). In both cases, visual contact is replaced by the sensation of touch.

[36] Webber, 'Kafka, *Die Verwandlung*', 184. See also Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox*, ext. and rev. edn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 72.

[37] Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 123.

replaces this sight of the animal-woman with his own monstrous body. Through this move, he inserts himself into a chain of images which underpin his metamorphosis; following his conformist soldier portrait and the hybrid magazine image, Gregor's defiantly displayed body becomes the endpoint in a series of body images which reflect and prefigure his own transformation.[38]

Gregor's self-display thus marks the climax of his 'becoming animal', as his protection of the picture coincides with the uninhibited display of his new body. Yet this move in turn triggers a number of responses within the family, most notably two other transformations which, while likewise modelled on photographs, undermine Gregor's momentary liberation. His self-display causes immediate chaos; not only does his mother faint at his sight, but his sister Grete is transformed from his devoted carer into an avenging defender of her parents: '"Du, Gregor!" rief die Schwester mit erhobener Faust und eindringlichen Blicken' (D 166) ['"Gregor!" cried his sister, with a raised fist and a penetrating glare' (ES 119)]. Grete's aggressive stance mirrors that of the woman in the picture, whose raised arm and upright posture likewise suggest a latent threat. As Gregor covers this image of female domination with his own body, his sister takes over its role of female authority, thus reinstating Gregor's previous subjugated position and undermining the picture's liberating potential. Indeed, the sister's change of mind also reveals an underlying psychological dynamic; as Gregor openly displays his erotic fixation on the photograph, Grete breaks the emotional, latently incestuous bond which connected her and her brother. After this turning point, she sides with her parents and actively pushes for Gregor's extinction.

However, the sister's imitation of the magazine photograph is not the only change within the familial power dynamics. Gregor's rebellion is even more severely crushed by his father who now re-emerges, having himself undergone a dramatic transformation:

Nun aber war er recht gut aufgerichtet; in eine straffe blaue Uniform mit Goldknöpfen gekleidet, wie sie Diener der Bankinstitute tragen; über dem hohen steifen Kragen des Rockes entwickelte sich sein starkes Doppelkinn;

[38] As Anderson puts it, the magazine image inspires Gregor 'to merge with his mirror image, to descend the evolutionary ladder into an animal state, to become an animal-artwork' (*Kafka's Clothes* 136).

unter den buschigen Augenbrauen drang der Blick der schwarzen Augen frisch und aufmerksam hervor; das sonst zerzauste weiße Haar war zu einer peinlich genauen, leuchtenden Scheitelfrisur niedergekämmt.… [I]mmerhin hob er die Füße ungewöhnlich hoch, und Gregor staunte über die Riesengröße seiner Stiefelsohlen. (D 169–70)

But now he was standing firmly upright, dressed in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons, such as bank messengers wear; his strong double chin bulged over the stiff collar of his jacket; from under his bushy eyebrows his black eyes darted fresh and penetrating glances; his onetime tangled white hair had been combed flat on either side of a shining and carefully exact parting.… At any rate he lifted his feet uncommonly high, and Gregor was dumbfounded by the enormous size of his shoe soles. (ES 121)

While the sister's threatening gesture is an imitation of the magazine image, the father's transformation from a pathetic old man to a terrifying patriarch is modelled on another photograph: that of his son during his military service. The creaseless uniform with its gold buttons invests the father with an air of authority which mirrors Gregor's own confidence as it is displayed in the portrait. Indeed, as Theodor Adorno has argued, the father's transformed appearance is presented as if through the photographic lens. From Gregor's subjugated position, the father appears like a towering tyrant: 'So groß aber müßten einem Kind die Erwachsenen aussehen und so verschoben … , wenn der kindliche Blick des Schreckens ganz isoliert, festgebannt würde; mit schräger Kamera läßt sich das photographieren' ['Adults must appear this big to the child, and this distorted … were one to capture and isolate the child's terrified vision; it could be photographed with an oblique camera'].[39] In Adorno's reading, photography captures reality not from a familiar, 'objective' perspective but through the eyes of the terrified, disempowered child, bringing out the underlying familial and social power dynamics through the skewed camera angle.[40] Yet while Kafka's texts expose

[39] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, paperback edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), x. 254–87: 266; 'Notes on Kafka', in *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Weber and Samuel Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 243–71: 255.

[40] Adorno's interpretation echoes his letter to Benjamin in which he describes Kafka's texts as recorded with an 'obliquely angled camera' (see Chapter 1). Yet while

such mechanisms at work within and through photography, they also gesture towards their possible subversion.

Images such as Gregor's soldier portrait and its counterpart in *Der Verschollene* present authority as a photographic construct which is subsequently replicated within society at large. As in *Der Verschollene*, however, such photographic displays of power turn out to be highly ambivalent and deceptive. For Gregor's father, as for Karl, the wearing of a uniform does not bring the desired emancipatory effect, as the authority it conveys is based on the wearer's own submission to the dominant order.[41] Even at home, the father refuses to take off his uniform, sitting in his chair 'als sei er immer zu seinem Dienste bereit und warte auch hier auf die Stimme des Vorgesetzten' (D 173) ['as if he were ready for service at any moment and even here only at the beck and call of his superiors' (ES 123)]. Even the golden buttons which first so dazzled Gregor now merely highlight the faded and stained condition of the uniform.

As Eric Santner has argued, *Die Verwandlung* tells the story of a crisis in patriarchal authority, revealing impotence to be 'one of the most disturbing attributes of power'.[42] In his double existence as raging patriarch and servant of his superiors, Gregor's father highlights both the gulf between appearance and reality and their inherent, inextricable interrelation. Even more clearly than in *Der Verschollene*, impotence and submission are exposed as the basis of patriarchal authority;[43] in *Die Verwandlung* as elsewhere in Kafka's writings, masculine power can only be projected as a momentary, photographic display whose aura of authority is both transient and deceptive. While photography as a means of self-fashioning perpetuates

in the letter, these photographs are said to be taken from a 'redeemed', transcendental perspective, the narrative snapshot of the father merely highlights the protagonist's utterly unredeemed, downtrodden position.

[41] In this respect, the father's new guise is more reminiscent of Severin's transformation into his masochistic persona, Gregor, a role which also involves the sporting of a servant's uniform.

[42] Eric L. Santner, *My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 131.

[43] Correspondingly, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Oedipal power structures in Kafka's texts are not the reflection of underlying psychological mechanisms, but of more general social or political mechanisms of oppression which are projected back into the family (*Kafka*, 10).

such power structures it also paves the way for their dismantling, subversion—and parodic appropriation.

In its use of photography as theme and self-reflexive narrative structure, *Die Verwandlung* both mirrors and reverses Kafka's letter on his childhood photographs. In Kafka's personal account, the child sitter is photographically transformed into his parents' ape; yet in *Die Verwandlung* this model is diversified into a more ambiguous 'succession of transformations'. Gregor's metamorphosis marks his deviation from his role as model son; yet his own appropriation of the monstrous magazine photograph triggers in turn the responses of father and sister, in whose displays of authority these two images come to life. As Kafka's story demonstrates, photographs shape the identity not only of the sitter but also of those who look at them. Yet whereas in Kafka's letter, the son is forced to emulate the parental model, in *Die Verwandlung* it is the father who apes his son's portrait and who is thereby drawn into its deceptive double bind of authority and subjugation. As the photographic performances of father *and* son demonstrate, photographic models of identity remain ultimately ambivalent, as their aura of power and authority is undercut by their inherent theatricality.

5

Fetishistic Exchange: Kafka's Letters to Felice Bauer

Kafka's encounter with Felice Bauer on 13 August 1912 initiated one of the most epic correspondences in world literature; extending over five years, it runs to over seven hundred pages in the printed edition of Kafka's letters—the only extant part of the correspondence. Kafka's relationship with Felice, which included two aborted engagements, coincided with his literary breakthrough and his two most productive periods as a writer. Moreover, the correspondence contains Kafka's most extensive and sustained engagement with the photographic medium. Felice's photographs, and those pictures which Kafka sent in return, acted as an inexhaustible source of commentary, analysis, and reflection. In his letters, Kafka emerges as one of the most original and thought-provoking commentators on photography in the twentieth century. While his writings on the medium tie in with wider contemporary debates, this engagement also has a vital impact on his own literary development and imagination. As we have already seen in relation to *Die Verwandlung*, Kafka's autobiographical writings on photography yield a reservoir of frameworks, images, and ideas which is then mobilized in the fiction, while literary motifs and approaches in turn shape his personal response.

The significance of photography for Kafka and Felice's relationship becomes apparent during their very first encounter. When Kafka met Felice Bauer on 13 August 1912 in the house of Max Brod, photographs played a major part in their conversation and in the ensuing correspondence. A cousin of Brod's brother-in-law, Felice held the prestigious and—for a woman at the time—unusual position of chief clerk at Carl Lindström A.G., a Berlin company specializing

in office machinery. Kafka, who had come to discuss with Brod the manuscript of *Betrachtung*, was at first not too pleased by this unexpected intrusion, although the evening would turn out to be a turning point in both personal and creative terms.

Although Kafka did not write to Felice until five weeks later, his diary testifies to the profoundly ambivalent impression she made on him. In an entry from the following week, he recalls Felice's appearance in rather cold and unflattering terms (TB 431–2/ED 207), employing, as Reiner Stach puts it, 'the classic male weapon of cold observation' in order to distance himself from his nascent fascination with her.[1] The photographic precision of Kafka's memory of the encounter becomes fully apparent in the ensuing correspondence where, in a letter of 27 October 1912, Kafka subjects their first meeting to a second 'exposure'; this account displays a minute attention to detail which, as Elizabeth Boa remarks, is not just astonishing but 'positively threatening'.[2] Amongst the many details which Kafka recollects about the encounter, one incident gains a particular significance; in the course of the evening Kafka shows Felice some photographs of a trip to Weimar which he had undertaken with Brod just a month earlier. As Kafka comments:

> Brachte ich in Abrechnung, daß ich mit Max das Manuscript nicht durchsehn konnte, so war das Hinreichen der Thaliaphotographien eine sehr hübsche Abwechslung. (Für dieses Wort, das sehr gut den damaligen Eindruck beschreibt, könnte ich mich heute, wo ich so weit von Ihnen bin, schlagen.) Sie nahmen das Anschauen der Bilder sehr ernst und sahen nur auf, wenn Otto [Brod] eine Erklärung gab oder ich ein neues Bild reichte. Einem von uns, ich weiß nicht mehr wem, passierte bei der Auslegung eines Bildes irgendein komisches Mißverständnis. (B1 193)
>
> Having once accepted the fact that I could not go through the manuscript with Max, the handing around of the Thalia photographs made for a very pleasant diversion. (Now that I am so far away from you, I could kick myself for using the word which describes so well the impression I had at the time.) You took the viewing of the pictures very seriously, and glanced up only when Otto [Brod] gave some explanation or when I handed another picture.

[1] Reiner Stach, *Kafka: Die Jahre der Entscheidung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002), 101.

[2] Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 69.

A comic misunderstanding arose when one of us, I don't remember who, began explaining a picture. (EF 14)

Felice appears as both the dedicated viewer of Kafka's photographs and the attentive addressee of his explanatory remarks. In this respect, the conversation acts as a kind of 'primal scene' for the ensuing correspondence, in which the discussion and interpretation of photographs will play a crucial role. At the same time, Kafka's account also anticipates another, more troubling aspect of this dialogue. Even on the first evening, the viewing of photographs involves a humorous misunderstanding; error, confusion, and miscommunication will become defining features of the written exchange about photography.[3]

MELANCHOLY SNAPSHOTS

In the six months between their first encounter and their second meeting in Berlin in March 1913, Kafka and Felice exchange approximately twenty photographs—a traffic of images which included studio portraits and childhood pictures, family snapshots and group photographs, and even cut-outs from brochures and magazines.[4] In these first formative months of their relationship, photographs thus become the screen onto which Kafka and Felice—two lovers who are in fact virtual strangers—project their divergent expectations, hopes, and desires. Indeed, although the photographs are exchanged during these first months in order to create a sense of familiarity, they often have precisely the opposite effect. The images which Kafka receives from Felice prompt feelings not only of love and desire but also of anxiety, solitude, and alienation. In relation to his own photographs, in turn, Kafka develops a kind of paranoia, accusing Felice of the same ambivalent stance which underpins his own letters. Throughout the

[3] Indeed, the fact that Kafka only later admits that it was he who caused the above misunderstanding illustrates his investment in the position of interpretative authority (B1 268/EF 65).

[4] Of the about forty photographs which they exchanged in total, about half were thus exchanged in the first six months. An exact figure cannot be established, as Kafka repeatedly uses an unspecific plural when he refers to the photographs he sends or receives.

correspondence, then, photographs are subject to conflicting expectations; rather than fostering intimacy, these images become the site where the correspondents' divergent desires come to the fore.

Soon after they take up their correspondence, Kafka starts to press Felice for a picture. Yet the first photograph which he receives from her falls outside the typical category of images exchanged by lovers; instead of a recent portrait, Felice sends a childhood snapshot. Kafka's enthusiastic response, however, reveals that this image has in fact struck a chord, and triggered a highly emotive process of identification:

Wie ich Dir gestern schrieb, fahre ich heute abend weg, allein, in der Nacht, ins Gebirge und da schickst Du mir ohne daß Du es ausdrücklich wüßtest, die liebe kleine Begleiterin. Was für ein liebes kleines Mädchen ist das! Die schmalen Schultern! So schwach und leicht zu fassen ist sie! Bescheiden ist sie, aber ruhig. Damals hat sie noch niemand geplagt und zum Weinen gebracht und das Herz schlägt wie es soll. Weißt Du, daß man leicht Tränen in die Augen bekommt, wenn man das Bild länger ansieht. Gelegentlich soll ich das Bild zurückschicken? Gut, das wird geschehn. Vorläufig aber wird es in dieser vermaledeiten Brusttasche eine kleine unbehagliche Reise in Eisenbahnen und durch Hotelzimmer machen, trotzdem das Mädchen, wie es behauptet, ohne es bisher erklärt zu haben, sich in Hotelzimmern zu ängstigen pflegt. Ja, das Uhrschnürchen sieht man, die Brosche ist hübsch, das Haar so gewellt und fast zu ernsthaft frisiert. (B1 267)

As I told you yesterday, I am going away this evening, alone, at night, into the mountains, and though you couldn't have known, you send me this charming little companion. What a delightful little girl! The narrow shoulders! So fragile and easy to hold! She is so modest, but calm. No one had worried her in those days, and made her cry, and her hearts beats the way it should. Looked at for any length of time, you know, the picture could easily bring tears to one's eyes. You want me to return it some time? All right, I will. But meanwhile, hidden in my confounded inside pocket, it will take a brief, uncomfortable trip in trains and through various hotel rooms. Yes, one can see the little watch chain, the brooch is pretty, the hair waved and almost too seriously arranged. (EF 65)

Although this childhood picture might not be particularly suited to bring back the memory of the woman he met a few weeks ago, Kafka is quick to assure Felice that her picture does in fact remind him of their first encounter. As it turns out, however, its chief appeal stems not from its similarity to the adult Felice but from its openness for

projection; in Kafka's account, the photograph becomes the site of a fantasy of male protectiveness and female fragility. Although he initially describes the image as his talisman and travel companion, Kafka then reverses this dynamic; recalling Felice's fear of hotel rooms, he constructs himself as the protector of both image and referent. Kafka's image of Felice as a weak and dependent little girl stands in stark contrast to his first impression of her as a confident and independent businesswoman. The photograph thus serves as an antidote to this recollection, enabling its viewer to reinstate the threatened gender hierarchy. In a revealing juxtaposition, Kafka draws a comparison between the photograph's materiality and the disposition of its referent, both of which, he asserts, are 'so fragile and easy to hold'. That said, the childhood photograph also provides an outlet for a less traditionally masculine response; Kafka is moved to tears by the image, a fact which he uses to stress his emotional affinity with Felice who, as he claims, is fragile and cries easily.

In subsequent letters, Kafka systematically develops and expands on this image of Felice as a *femme fragile*; picking up on her complaints about headaches and physical exhaustion, he maintains this impression despite evidence to the contrary. Felice's second photograph, which he receives a few days after her childhood portrait, brings out this clash between reality and imagination:

> Mit der neuen Photographie geht es mir sonderbar. Dem kleinen Mädchen fühle ich mich näher, dem könnte ich alles sagen, vor der Dame habe ich zuviel Respekt; ich denke, wenn es auch Felice ist, so ist sie doch ein großes Fräulein, und Fräulein ist sie keineswegs nur nebenbei. Sie ist lustig, das kleine Mädchen war nicht traurig, aber doch schrecklich ernsthaft; sie sieht vollwangig aus (das ist vielleicht bloß die Wirkung der wahrscheinlichen Abendbeleuchtung) das kleine Mädchen war bleich. (B1 274)
>
> The new photograph makes me feel strange. I feel closer to the little girl, could say anything to her, but for the young lady I feel too much respect. I keep thinking: though it is Felice, it is also a grown-up young lady, and what's more, very much of a young lady. She is gay, not that the little girl was sad, just terribly serious; she has a full face (due perhaps to the effect of probable evening light), the little girl was pale. (EF 70)

Kafka's preference of the frail girl over the adult woman can be read as a sterotypically male rejection of female independence and

sexual maturity. Although Felice's expression in the adult portrait is not serious but 'gay', the image nevertheless induces a sense of distance and respect in Kafka, perhaps echoing his latent intimidation during their first encounter. Even though Felice's healthy appearance in the picture corresponds to Kafka's memory of her (B1 291/EF 81), he stubbornly questions the accuracy of this impression, attributing it to the lighting. The little girl, in contrast, is a less intimidating companion, not least because her pale, frail appearance mirrors Kafka's self-image and perceived physical inadequacies.[5]

Kafka thus finds himself torn between the little girl and her cheerful adult counterpart. His solution to this problem is highly revealing:

> Wenn ich zwischen beiden im Leben zu wählen hätte, so würde ich keineswegs ohne Überlegung auf das kleine Mädchen zulaufen, das will ich nicht sagen, aber ich würde doch, wenn auch sehr langsam, nur zum kleinen Mädchen hingehn, allerdings immer nach dem großen Fräulein mich umsehn und es nicht aus den Augen lassen. Das Beste wäre freilich, wenn das kleine Mädchen dann mich zu dem großen Fräulein hinführen und mich ihm anempfehlen würde. (B1 274–5)
>
> If I had to choose between them in real life, I wouldn't rush up to the little girl without hesitating—no, I wouldn't do that, but I would nevertheless advance, even though very slowly, toward the little girl, while all the time turning to glance at the young lady, never letting her out of my sight. Nicest of course would be if the little girl then took me up to the young lady, and commended me to her. (EF 70)

Kafka casts the child as a mediator between himself and the adult Felice, a solution which neatly encapsulates the core dynamic of their relationship. In order to create a sense of emotional closeness, Kafka must resort to projections and phantasmatic constructs to overcome the distance separating him from his correspondent. However, while such imaginary mediators at first seem to yield the desired result, they also prevent the acknowledgement of differences. Although images such as the childhood portrait provide Kafka with a screen for his projections, this screen also shields him from any uncomfortable

[5] As Elias Canetti argues, the insistence on his physical weakness plays a central role in Kafka's more general strategy of self-denigration in the correspondence (*Der andere Prozeß: Kafkas Briefe an Felice* (Munich: Hanser, 1969), 27–35).

realities. As a subsequent letter illustrates, Kafka is fully aware of this mechanism:

> Deine erste Photographie ist mir unendlich lieb, denn dieses kleine Mädchen existiert nicht mehr und die Photographie ist diesmal alles. Das andere Bild aber ist nur die Darstellung einer lieben Gegenwart und das Verlangen trägt den Blick über das beunruhigende Bildchen weg. (B1 282–3)
>
> That first photograph of yours is infinitely dear to me, for the little girl no longer exists, and so the photograph is all there is. But the other picture only portrays your dear presence, and my yearning carries my gaze beyond the disquieting little picture. (EF 75)

As Kafka openly admits, it is the self-contained character of the childhood portrait which attracts and harbours his desire. While this early photograph exists on its own terms, as an image without a referent, the adult portrait is 'disquieting' because it points beyond itself towards an outside reality.

Kafka's response anticipates a much later reflection on the dynamics of photographic representation. In his *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes intertwines his theoretical explorations of the medium with a personal narrative of loss and mourning. After the death of his mother, Barthes searches for a photograph to bring back her memory. All recent pictures fail in this respect, yet he eventually finds what he is looking for in a childhood photograph of his mother, 'a lost, remote photograph, one which does not look "like" her, the photograph of a child I never knew'.[6] For Barthes, as for Kafka, then, it is the lack of an external referent which provokes a moment of recognition. The referential absence which underpins the childhood photograph of Barthes's mother alludes to her actual, physical death, thus enabling the viewer to confront and come to terms with his loss.[7] Kafka's tears in response to Felice's childhood portrait touch on a similar realization; in both cases, the photograph's true 'message' is the

[6] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 2000), 103. On Barthes's engagement with the photograph of his mother, see Chantal Thomas, 'La Photo du jardin d'hiver', *Critique*, 38 (1982), 423–4.

[7] On the role of death as a central reference point in Barthes's discourse on photography, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, paperback edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 435–56, and Stefan Peters, 'Die Figur des Todes bei Siegfried Kracauer und Roland Barthes', *Fotogeschichte*, 78 (2000), 97–110.

absence of its sitter. As Susan Sontag puts it, 'all photographs are *memento mori*'.[8]

Kafka's letters and Barthes's *Camera Lucida* are both concerned with the same fundamental issue: the absence at the heart of photography, which casts its shadow even over the most immediate snapshots. In the case of Felice's childhood image, Kafka is drawn to this absence as an opportunity for projection and identification. In the course of the correspondence, however, the void underlying photography takes on a more unsettling character. As Kafka comes to realize, this absence also manifests itself in more recent pictures, where it challenges his response as a viewer.

PHOTOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES: MYSTERY, EXOTICISM, SUSPENSE

The underlying absence which so attracts Kafka to Felice's childhood photograph recurs in an intriguing yet troubling guise within her more recent pictures. Although these adult portraits do not depict Felice's unknown childhood self, they prove even more mysterious and elusive. They show Felice in alien surroundings accompanied by strangers, thus forcing Kafka into the position of the ignorant and puzzled outsider. Her photographs point beyond themselves towards a reality which, while captured in vivid detail, exists independently of the photograph and lies beyond the viewer's reach and control. As a response, Kafka resorts to a more imaginative strategy of interpretation; he inscribes these photographs into narratives of suspense and resolution, presence and absense, completeness and fragmentation, although this does not, as we shall see, reduce their inherent ambiguity.

Kafka's letters circle around the tension between what is visible and what is invisible in a given picture. His instinctive response to Felice's photographs is to ask endless questions; he shows himself fascinated by even the most trifling details, and his scrupulous accounts seem

[8] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), 15.

to vie with the photographic lens in their attention to minutiae. Yet while this strategy of textual duplication might suggest a gesture of authorial self-assertion, it often has the opposite effect. No matter how detailed they try to be, Kafka's accounts can never provide an exhaustive exploration of the image in question, which in turn shows only an arbitrary segment of reality. As a result, Kafka is faced with the limitations of both the medium and his own interpretative discourse. Indeed, it is precisely those elements which he singles out for a more detailed analysis which turn out to be inherently opaque; the textual exploration of a picture recurrently results in a pervading sense of ambiguity.

Kafka's approach bears an intringuing resemblance to Sigmund Freud's theory of fetishism, a psychological disposition which attempts to compensate for an underlying absence through its excessive fixation on details. In his 'Fetishism' essay (1927), Freud famously argues that the fetish is a substitute for the fantasized penis of the mother, whose absence the little boy interprets as the result of castration. To disavow this realization, the fetishist develops a fixation on the sight which immediately preceded his traumatic discovery, such as shoes, underwear, or fur. The fetish is thus a problematic compromise between recognition and disavowal; it marks the aversion of the gaze from the site of lack while at the same time preserving the memory of this traumatic realization. Fetishism is founded on a particular mode of looking whereby the fixation on one detail distracts the gaze from the underlying absence. This strategy, however, is highly precarious, as the element which is excluded from the field of vision threatens the self-sufficiency of the fetishized object cast into focus.

Photography has prime fetishistic capacities, not simply because of its materiality—photographs can be touched, handled, and carried around as substitutes for the absent referent—but, more importantly, because of its representational structure. As Christian Metz argues, photography is fetishistic in the way that it frames and freezes a segment of reality; it is 'a cut inside the referent, it cuts off a piece of it, a fragment, a part object'.[9] While a photograph can thus give the

[9] Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetishism', in Carolin Squiers (ed.), *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 155–64: 158.

illusion of presence, it simultaneously points beyond itself, drawing attention to what lurks outside its frame. Kafka's letters illustrate this dynamic but also exploit it for the sake of narrative tension. While he is struck by the vividness of Felice's pictures, he is simultaneously troubled by those features which evade his grasp. To counteract this sense of disempowerment, he 'zooms in' on particular details, casting them as fetishistic substitutes which only, however, draw attention to the photograph's constitutive feature: the absence of its referent, whose photographic presence highlights her distance in real life.

The aforementioned photograph of Felice as a 'young lady' illustrates this dilemma. As Kafka writes on 27 November 1912,

> Was war das übrigens für eine Photographie, deren Abschnitt Du mir schickst? Warum bekomme ich sie nicht ganz? Weil es ein schlechtes Bild ist? Du traust es mir also wirklich nicht zu, daß ich Dich auch in schlechten Bildern gut sehe? Nach dem Stückchen weißer Halskrause, die auf dem Bilde zu sehen ist und die allerdings auch von einer Bluse stammen kann, habe ich sogar den Verdacht, daß das Bild Dich als Pierrot dargestellt hat; wenn das wahr ist, dann wäre es recht böse von Dir, mir das Bild vorzuenthalten, wie es ja überhaupt eine Sünde ist, Photographien zu zerschneiden und gar wenn man sie jemandem schicken will, der nach Deinem Anblick so hungert wie ich. (B1 275)
>
> By the way, what was this photograph of which you send only part? Why don't I get all of it? Because it's a poor picture? So you really don't think I'm capable of seeing the best in you, even in a poor picture? Judging by the piece of white frill around your neck, which shows in the picture and could belong to a blouse, I almost suspect it is a photograph of you dressed as Pierrot; if so, it would be too bad of you to withhold the picture, and anyway it's wrong to cut photographs, the more so if they are to be sent to someone who yearns for the sight of you as much as I do. (EF 70)

The object of Kafka's interest oscillates between what the photograph shows and what it conceals, between its manifest content and that which lies beyond the photographic frame. Although Kafka immediately homes in on one element within the picture, namely Felice's white collar, this detail does not provide a self-contained object of scrutiny but points beyond itself, emphasizing both the photograph's physical incompleteness and its representational ambiguity. The fact that he is dealing with a fragment of a larger photograph brings out the limitations of the photographic gaze as such. In this respect, any

photograph gives rise to endless speculations about what lies beyond and beneath the captured segment of reality. In his letter, Kafka employs this structure to creative effect, investing the image with a theatrical, fantastical dimension and imagining that the cropped photograph depicts Felice in a Pierrot costume.

The incompleteness inherent to any image is a point of both fascination and anxiety for Kafka, who is particularly drawn to physically fragmented pictures: 'Was ist das für ein schönes leicht gearbeitetes Kleid, das Du auf dem Bilde trägst und wie verläuft es weiter? Wie stehst Du oder sitzt Du auf dem Bild? Dein rechter Arm ist weg. Das glänzende Ding, ist es das Medaillon?' (B2 63) ['What a beautiful, delicatedly worked dress you are wearing in the picture, and what is the rest of it like? Are you standing, or sitting? Your right arm is missing. That shiny thing, is it the locket?' (EF 172)]. In a barrage of questions, Kafka moves from the fragmented sight of Felice's dress, via her cut-off arm, to her shiny medallion. The photograph's incompleteness is thus compensated for by the medallion, a classic fetish object which captures the light and fixates the viewer's gaze, distracting his attention away from the rest of the image.

Yet although Kafka's scrutiny of individual details might provide a momentary sense of insight and control, this strategy ultimately only increases the sense of opacity and draws the viewer's attention to those elements which resist their integration into a homogenous interpretation. Recurrently, then, Kafka's letters do not invest Felice's pictures with a sense of unity; starting with an epiphanic moment of recognition, they subsequently dismantle this impression through an obsessive focus on particular details. In this respect, Kafka's interpretative strategy anticipates not only the Freudian theory of fetishism but also Barthes's concept of the photographic *punctum*. Barthes uses this term to describe a random and seemingly marginal detail which attracts the viewer's gaze, giving his engagement a focus which nonetheless undermines the supposed stability of photographic meaning. As Barthes writes, the *punctum* marks a 'wound' within the picture which disrupts its unity, drawing attention to its underlying absence.[10] However, while for Barthes the *punctum* is a single element which provokes the viewer's fascination, Kafka's attention is attracted

[10] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

and dispersed by a multitude of potentially significant features which prevent a unified interpretation.

Perhaps the most striking example of this dilemma is provided by Kafka's engagement with a family photograph which depicts Felice with her parents, sisters, and brother-in-law and which he receives around 6 December 1912. This image, which fuels his interest in family dynamics, allows him to indulge in his predilection for scrutiny with unprecedented resolve. As Felice does not provide any accompanying information, Kafka is restricted to the 'evidence' provided by the photograph, trying to relate it to what he already knows about her family. Kafka posits Felice as the photograph's centre, yet he counters this impression with the remark, 'Ich darf Dich nicht ordentlich ansehn, sonst bekomme ich den Blick nicht von Dir los' (B1 306) ['I mustn't look at you too much, or I won't be able to take my eyes off you' (EF 91–2)]. Indeed, in his subsequent exploration, Kafka focuses less on Felice than on her surroundings, and his account oscillates between proximity and distance, assertiveness and insecurity. While he initially claims that the photograph brings Felice much closer to him, he also describes it as a 'trap' aimed to mislead the unsuspecting viewer (B1 306/EF 91). Certainly Kafka's own interpretation is troubled by doubt and ambiguity:

> Das Ganze sieht übrigens in der Beleuchtung, Gruppierung und Laune der Abgebildeten ganz geheimnisvoll aus und der Schlüssel des Geheimnisses, der vorne auf dem Tisch neben der zu ihm gehörigen Schachtel liegt, macht die Sache um nichts klarer. Du lächelst wehmüthig oder es ist meine Laune, die Dir dieses Lächeln andichtet. (B1 306)

> The lighting, the position, and the mood of those in the picture make it all look most mysterious, and the key to the mystery is on the table in front, lying beside its box, but this does not make the whole thing any clearer. You have a wistful smile, or it may be my fancy that invents this smile for you. (EF 92)

Kafka describes the picture as 'mysterious', as a riddle to be resolved. This notion acts as a kind of leitmotif within the correspondence; in a previous letter, for instance, Kafka had argued that Felice's photographs needed to be 'deciphered' (B1 292/EF 82). Thus the viewing process is not aimed at an immediate sense of recognition; Kafka constructs Felice's photographs as an interpretative challenge, as a kind of hermeneutic puzzle whose individual features all point

towards an underlying meaning or solution.[11] It is no coincidence that the first detail which attracts Kafka's attention is a mysterious box on the table which he constructs as the photograph's implicit centre. Its emblematic significance is underlined by the accompanying key which Kafka evocatively describes as the 'key to the mystery'. Box and key thus encapsulate his detective-style approach to the picture whereby individual details render the photograph *à clef*, thus offering it up for the viewer's interpretation. As it turns out, however, the key is merely placed next to the box and cannot unlock the photograph's secrets.

In keeping with this symbolism, Kafka's subsequent account is characterized by a tension between doubt and assertiveness. Belying his initial claim that 'Glück und Dankbarkeit macht mich kühn und ich fürchte mich nicht' (B1 306) ['happiness and gratitude make me bold, and I'm not afraid' (EF 91)], his subsequent analysis is plagued by ambiguity:

> Du trägst eine sonderbar aufgeputzte Bluse. Auf dem linken Unterarm hast Du eine Schnur oder ein Armband. Abgesehen von meinem hier wirklich gar nicht maßgebenden Urteil bist Du auch für andere Beobachter nicht nur wegen Deiner Stellung im Mittelpunkt des Bildes, sondern auch weil Deine Mutter Dich unter dem Arm gefaßt hat oder weil es wenigstens diesen Anschein hat. Das gibt Dir eine besondere Bedeutung. Außerdem hast Du eine ganz andere Blickrichtung als die übrige Familie.… Das Urteil über sie [Felice's mother] ist deshalb ein wenig unsicher, weil das meiste und differenzierteste Licht auf ihr Gesicht fällt.… Dein Vater sieht sehr würdig aus, vor dem wäre ich schon unsicherer. (B1 306–7)

> You are wearing a strangely ornate blouse. There is some string or bracelet on your left wrist. Apart from my personal opinion, in this case irrelevant, you are the centre of this picture for other observers too; not only because of your position in the centre, but because your mother has taken your arm, or at least looks as though she has. That gives you some special significance. Moreover you are looking in quite another direction to the rest of the family. … My impression of her [Felice's mother] is a little uncertain because the brightest and most diffused light falls on her face.… Your father looks very dignified; with him I would feel rather less certain. (EF 92)

[11] As we shall see, this analytical structure is taken up in *Der Proceß*, where images and other sights are subjected to a similar 'criminological' analysis.

Practically every claim is undermined by doubts and questions, an approach which stresses the subjective, hypothetical character of the viewing process. At times this uncertainty has a comical effect, as for instance in Kafka's remark: 'Am nächsten steht mir von allen andern Deine Mutter (selbst auf die Gefahr hin, daß Deine Mutter gar nicht auf dem Bilde ist)' (B1 307) ['of the others, your mother is closest to me (were it not for the risk of your mother not being in this picture at all)' (EF 92)]. The passage's keyword is 'unsicher', 'uncertain', which appears in relation to both Felice's mother and father, suggesting that the task of photographic interpretation only anticipates other, even more perilous tasks—such as an actual encounter with Felice and her family.

Given his interpretative scruples, Kafka's concluding remark seems incongruously assertive:

> Liebste wie mächtig ist man gegenüber Bildern und wie ohnmächtig in Wirklichkeit! Ich kann mir leicht vorstellen, daß die ganze Familie beiseite tritt und sich entfernt, daß nur Du allein zurückbleibst und ich mich über den großen Tisch zu Dir hinüberlehne, um Deinen Blick zu suchen, zu erhalten und vor Glück zu vergehn. (B1 307)
>
> Dearest, how powerful one is, face to face with a picture, and how powerless in reality! I can easily picture your whole family stepping aside and removing themselves, leaving you on your own, while I lean across the big table searching for your eyes, finding them, and dying of joy. (EF 92)

Paradoxically, Kafka's power over the image stems precisely from its inherent ambiguity; by constructing the photograph as a riddle or mystery he also opens it up for an imaginary, narrative transformation. In the end he overcomes the unsettling presence of Felice's family members by imaginarily removing them from the photographic scene, thus restoring the intimacy between Felice and himself. As we shall see, the imaginary dissociation of Felice from the surrounding photographic context is a frequent strategy by which Kafka tries to counter the confusing heterogeneity of her photographs.

On the whole, then, Kafka's stance towards the family photograph is highly ambiguous. While the image provides him with vital insights into the concrete reality of Felice's existence, it offers only incomplete, even opaque evidence and remains open to speculation. Ultimately, photographs are a source both of pleasure and of emotional, as well as

hermeneutic, torment: 'Liebste, Bilder sind schön, Bilder sind nicht zu entbehren, aber eine Qual sind sie auch' (B1 307) ['Dearest, pictures are wonderful, pictures are indispensable, but they are torture as well' (EF 92)].

A flash photograph recorded at the tenth-anniversary celebration of Felice's company takes this mixture of pain and pleasure to a new, obsessive level:

> Nun ist also endlich das ganze liebe Mädchen da! Und durchaus nicht negerhaft, sondern so wie man sie im Kopf und Herzen hat. Und durchaus nicht traurig und schlechtaussehend, sondern lustiger fast als alle. Nur leider so festgehalten auf beiden Seiten, daß man Riesenkräfte haben müßte, um sie hervorzureißen. Und leider so nahe neben ihrem Herrn, daß man, wenn man sie küssen will, notwendig diesen Herrn Rosenbaum (es scheint übrigens ein anderer zu sein) mitküssen müßte. (B1 317)
>
> Now at last the whole of the dear girl has arrived! And not in the least like a negro, but just as she is in one's mind and heart. And not in the least sad or ill-looking—gayer, almost, than anyone else. But unfortunately held so tightly on either side that it would take immense strength to pry her loose. And unfortunately so close to her partner that should one want to kiss her, one would have to kiss Herr Rosenbaum (actually, it seems to be someone else) as well. (EF 99)

The initial moment of epiphanic recognition soon gives way to a pervading sense of doubt as the apparent wholeness of Felice's appearance is dissected into fetishistic details. As in the family portrait, Felice is surrounded by a group of strangers who are threatening to distract the viewer's attention away from her. While Kafka had eventually been able to remove Felice's extended family, he here lacks the 'immense strength' required to imaginarily disengage her from the picture. Indeed, it is probably not just the *physical* proximity of Felice's dance partner which prevents any real sense of intimacy, since unlike the domestic family photograph, this image is full of erotic tensions. Kafka's light-hearted remark that in kissing Felice he would also have to kiss her neighbour Herr Rosenbaum is only the first symptom of his growing suspicion. Indeed, in this confusing melee of bodies, even the fetishistic focus on inconspicuous details does not bring any relief:

> Was ist das für ein Medaillon was ist das für ein Ring, den Du trägst?… Die Frau neben Dir ist wohl die Frau eines Direktors, die Hand zwischen Euch

gehört wohl ihr? Wo ist aber Deine zweite Hand, und warum drängen Dich Deine beiden Nachbarn so. Oben umsäumt Deinen Rock eine Spitze, nicht wahr? (B1 318)

What is that locket you are wearing, what is the ring?… The woman next to you must be the wife of one of the directors, and the hand between you must be hers? But where is your other hand, and why do your neighbours press so close to you? The top of your skirt is edged with lace, isn't it? (EF 99)

As in the case of the box on the table, the locket around Felice's neck does not help to uncover the picture's mystery. In fact, locket and ring merely draw Kafka's attention to another detail, or rather its absence, which undermines the picture's air of respectability. Felice's second hand is conspicuously invisible while, conversely, an unaccounted-for hand is placed next to her. Although Kafka arrives at the 'harmless' conclusion of attributing this hand to the director's wife—and not, say, to the threatening Herr Rosenbaum—he cannot help commenting again on the excessive physical proximity between Felice and her neighbours.

Once again, then, the focus on part-objects provides at best a provisional sense of orientation; in the end, such details invariably bring out the picture's inherent ambiguities. Another split between manifest and latent meaning concerns Felice's appearance in the anniversary photograph. To start with, Kafka is struck by her glowing and 'gay' expression which he contrasts with his inner image of her as 'sad and ill-looking'. Alongside this contrast—by now almost a commonplace in his letters[12]—Kafka also introduces a more unusual kind of photographic double. His account opens with a mysterious reference to Felice's 'negerhaft' ['negro-like'] appearance, a comment obviously made in response to her own complaints about the picture. Indeed, this remark must have made a particular impression on Kafka, who even in his previous letter eagerly anticipates 'das kommende Negermädchen' (B1 317) ['the negro girl soon to come' (EF 99)]. Once he receives the actual image, however, Kafka dismisses this claim and reassures Felice that she looks 'as she is in one's mind and heart'. That said, the idea of Felice as a 'Negermädchen' invests his response with an interesting dynamic, setting up a contrast between

[12] See B1 291, 292; B2 63/EF 81, 82, 172.

familiarity and exotic, perhaps erotic, otherness. Boa remarks that desire in Kafka's texts often springs from difference and fades once the other is familiarized;[13] according to this logic, the notion of Felice as a 'negro girl' invests the photographic scenario with an erotic tension which, like the suspicious hand, undermines its facade of bourgeois respectability.

Indeed, if Felice is cast as a 'negro girl' then the tight grip with which she is held by her neighbour is suggestive of a colonial master–slave scenario. While alluding to the picture's erotic undertones, Kafka also maps this bourgeois group portrait onto the grid of another photographic iconography: that of racial otherness, which was constructed and disseminated through the displine of anthropology. Indeed, Kafka is so fascinated by this idea that he even hopes to find the sight of Felice as a 'negro girl' in another photograph: 'Deine Bemerkung über das Negergesicht bringt mich auf den Gedanken, daß noch eine zweite Photographie existiert. Ist es so, unvorsichtige Liebste?' (B1 318) ['Your remark about looking like a negro girl makes me think there must be another photograph. Am I right, dear careless one?' (EF 99)]. By carefully matching textual and visual evidence, Kafka tries to uncover possible slip-ups in Felice's letters which might hint at the existence of another, more exotic picture which matches the allusions in her letter.

The above letter is typical of Kafka's interpretative strategy, whereby one supposedly minor detail can suddenly change the meaning of an entire image. Features such as the locked box or the missing hand are exemplary of this approach; they provide Kafka's account with a focus; yet the suspense thus created also comes to unsettle both picture and viewer. The hypothesis of the 'second photograph' provides a remedy for this situation, as it acts as an imaginary repository for alternative meanings and interpretations. Yet this fantasized photograph also brings out another feature of Kafka's letters: his desire to narrativize and indeed fictionalize the pictures he receives, investing them with a literary dynamic. In the case of the family photograph, key and box transform the image into a detective story, whereas Felice's appearance as a 'negro girl' inscribes this group portrait into a narrative of colonial eroticism. In the end, however,

[13] Boa, *Kafka: Gender*, 63.

Kafka's strategy has a twofold effect; although Felice's photographs enable him to exercise his literary imagination by transforming these harmless snapshots into photographic narratives of mystery and suspense, he finds himself increasingly drawn into the dynamic of his own explorations, and although these earlier letters playfully draw out points of ambiguity, this strategy soon takes on its own, uncontrollable dynamic, creating a vertiginous spiral of scrutiny, uncertainty, and paranoia.

Indeed, in the following example, a photograph of Felice arouses Kafka's suspicion not despite but because of the absence of any male rivals:

> Es ist wohl das lebendigste Bild, das ich von Dir habe. Der Einjährig-Freiwillige soll gesegnet sein! Die Hand an der Hüfte, die Hand an der Schläfe, das ist Leben, und da es Leben ist, dem ich gehöre, ist es durch Anschauen gar nicht zu erschöpfen. Ist es Dein Zimmer? Ist es nicht das Deine? Für Beides spricht Manches. Das Tischchen dürfte an der Stelle stehn, an welcher auch das Deine steht, dann wäre gegenüber das Bett. Aber diese vielbehängten Wände beirren mich wieder, Du hast sie auch bei der Beschreibung Deines Zimmers nicht erwähnt. Wozu hättest Du Bierkrüge aufgehängt, an der übrigens riesig hohen Wand? Wozu stünde vorn ein Herrenstock, dessen Griff man sieht? Vielleicht ist es also nur das Studierzimmer Eures Gastes.… Auf allen Bildern an der Wand (bis auf jenes, das einen Mann im Barett darstellt) suche ich Dich und habe Dich vorläufig auf drei gefunden. (B1 333)
>
> It probably is the most alive picture I have of you. Bless the young Volunteer! One hand on your hip, the other on your temple, that is life! And since that is the life to which I belong, it can never be exhausted by scrutiny. Is that your room? Or isn't it? There is something to be said for both. The little table seems to be where yours is, then the bed would be opposite. But I am mystified by the densely covered walls; you never mentioned them when describing your room. And why should you have hung beer mugs on that immensely high wall? And why, in the foreground, should there by a gentleman's walking stick, the handle of which is visible? So perhaps it is your visitor's study, after all.… I look for you in all the pictures on the wall (except the one with the man in a beret), and so far I have found you in three. (EF 105)

Once again, the initial impression of closeness gives way to increasing uncertainty. To start with, Kafka praises the picture's vivid, life-like quality, claiming it cannot be 'exhausted' even by prolonged

interpretation. Undeterred by his own observation, he then goes on to explore the photograph in more detail, uncovering once more a subtext of erotic tension and potential rivalry. Kafka's attention is diverted away from Felice by the traces of a male presence. These clues, which he scrutinizes in a detective-style fashion, include accessories such as beer mugs and a 'gentleman's walking stick'; Kafka's paranoia is fuelled not only by manifest evidence but also by the elusive traces of a male rival who remains outside the frame.

Most unsettling, however, is the photograph's *mise en abyme* structure. Kafka is irritated by the large number of pictures displayed on the walls, a set-up which invests the photograph with a disconcerting self-reflexivity, suggesting 'that the observer too may be caught up in a mirror-world of representations'.[14] Kafka's attempts to identify Felice in these pictures produce only inconclusive results, provoking the revealing plea: 'Wenn es richtig ist, so bestätige es, wenn ich falsch sehe, so laß mir den Glauben' (B1 333–4) ['If I am right, confirm it; if my eyes deceive me, let me believe it' (EF 105)]. In contrast to earlier letters where Kafka had explicitly asked Felice to validate or correct his own conjectures, he here anxiously rejects any conflicting interpretations.

Like the beer mugs and walking stick, the photographs on the wall come to allude to a potential male rival; Kafka attempts to discover Felice in these pictures, but he cannot help noticing the image of a man in a beret. Although tucked away in parentheses, this discovery becomes the photograph's unsettling *punctum*, unleashing a veritable paranoia in Kafka, who still remembers it over a year later, in a letter written on 24 April 1914:

> Immer wieder mischt sich heute in die Briefe an Dich Dein Bekannter aus Breslau, dessen Namen ich mir nicht etwa aus Trotz aber doch aus irgendeiner Notwendigkeit nicht merken kann; nicht einmal sein Aussehn kann ich mir merken, trotzdem ich doch sein Bild groß genug in Deinem Zimmer habe hängen sehn. Ihn selbst dagegen kann ich nicht vergessen; es ist zum Teil Deine Schuld, Du hast mir zu wenig Deutliches und zu viel Andeutungsweises von ihm erzählt. (B3 43)
>
> Your friend from Breslau keeps interfering with my letters to you, the friend whose name I can never remember, not out of spite but nevertheless out of

[14] Boa, *Kafka: Gender*, 194.

some kind of necessity; I cannot even remember what he looks like, though I have seen a big enough picture of him hanging in your room. Him as a person, however, I can never forget; it's partly your fault, you have said too little about him specifically, and too much allusively. (EF 395)

Unlike the other suspicious details with which Kafka becomes obsessed in his photographic narratives, this photograph within a photograph has the capacity to transcend the boundaries of the image. Kafka follows up this clue when he visits Felice in Berlin, responding to its sight with a mixture of obsession and denial; although he cannot forget the picture of Felice's male acquaintance, he is unable to recall any specific details about it, a fact which, combined with Felice's vague allusions, only increases his paranoia. What is more, this unsettling detail not only transcends the borderline between photograph and reality, but also between autobiography and fiction. The above photograph, with its *mise en abyme* structure and traces of an invisible rival, made such an impression on Kafka that it inspires several episodes in *Der Proceß*, whose protagonist is drawn into a similar spiral of scrutiny, uncertainty, and paranoia.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF FETISHISM

Kafka's comments on Felice's photographs reflect the overall state of the relationship. As time goes on, Kafka's letters are increasingly characterized by tension and anxiety, the result of differing needs and expectations which are enforced by lack of personal contact. December 1912 marked the end of the early heyday, a decline triggered by what Kafka perceived to be Felice's indifference to his literary talent.[15] This crisis is reflected in his response to her photographs, where latent jealousy gradually gives way to open frustration. In this period, the exchanged photographs no longer provide a sense of closeness but illustrate the growing distance between the correspondents. As Kafka

[15] Kafka had sent Felice a copy of *Betrachtung* but when, after several reminders, she failed to comment on it, he had to confront the fact that she was not going read it, a realization which severely undermined his belief that Felice was above all interested in him as a writer. See Canetti, *Der andere Prozeß*, 20–6.

writes about the image of Felice surrounded by male accessories, 'Deine Haltung ist prachtvoll, ich rufe Dich bei Deinem Namen an und Du wendest Dich mir nicht zu, trotzdem ich es erwartet habe' (B1 333) ['You hold yourself magnificently; I call you by name, but you don't turn toward me, though I expected you to' (EF 105)]. While Kafka here humorously attributes Felice's resistance to her good posture, his response to a second failure of his imaginary powers is less positive: 'Dein Blick will mich nicht treffen, immer geht er über mich hinweg, ich drehe das Bild nach allen Seiten, immer aber findest Du eine Möglichkeit, wegzusehn und ruhig und wie mit durchdachter Absicht wegzusehn' (B1 361) ['Your eyes refuse to meet mine, they always ignore me; I turn the picture this way and that, you invariably manage to look the other way, calmly and as though deliberate to look the other way' (EF 125)]. Kafka's inability to meet Felice's gaze is reminiscent of *Der Verschollene*, where Karl Rossmann is equally unsuccessful in capturing his father's gaze. As in his novel, indeed, where Karl falls asleep on the picture, pressing his cheek against its cool surface, Kafka likewise resorts to direct physical contact: 'Allerdings habe ich die Möglichkeit, das ganze Gesicht an mich zu reißen, indem ich es küsse' (B1 361) ['On the other hand I have the opportunity of pulling the whole face toward me by kissing it' (EF 125)].

On the whole, then, Kafka's stance towards Felice's pictures undergoes a gradual change. Rather than dissecting them in fetishistic mini-narratives, he focuses on his own response and on the viewing strategies employed to bring about the desired effect. A little bag which Felice sends him alongside one of her photographs gains a particular significance as it enables Kafka to carry her picture around with him and look it at wherever he pleases:

> Dieses kleine Täschchen, das Du mir geschickt hast, ist ein Wundertäschchen. Ich werde ein anderer ruhigerer besserer Mensch dadurch. Diese Möglichkeit, wo immer ich bin, … das Täschchen hervorzuziehn (die Methode es ständig in der Hand zu halten, hat sich nicht bewährt) ist wieder ein neues Glück, das ich Dir verdanke. Wenn ich Dein Bildchen—es steht vor mir—anschaue, geht beim Anschauen immer wieder ein Staunen darüber mit, mit welcher Stärke wir zwei zusammengehören. (B1 363)

> That little bag you sent me is a magic bag. It is making a different, calmer, better man of me. The possibility of … pulling out the little bag wherever

I happen to be (the notion of carrying it constantly in my hand has not proved successful) is again a new delight, which I owe to you. Whenever I look at your picture—it is standing in front of me now—I marvel at the strength which binds us together. (EF 126)

Unlike with previous pictures, Kafka here experiences an unprecedented sense of closeness; this photograph creates an emotional bond with Felice undiminished by visible or invisible rivals. This remarkable change is, however, not primarily the result of the picture itself but of Kafka's viewing strategy. The accompanying 'magic bag' allows him to repeat the initial, happy moment of recognition without destroying this effect through excessive scrutiny.[16] This bag allows Kafka to shift his focus away from elements *within* the photograph to the picture as a whole, and as a result, Kafka's fetishistic focus on photographic details gives way to a different kind of fetishism; bag and photograph become involved in a kind of *fort-da* game, a therapeutic defence against the photograph's underlying absence.

Soon, however, Kafka's need for reassurance turns into a veritable compulsion:

Manchmal geht mir das Verlangen nach Dir an die Kehle. Das Täschchen wird aufgerissen und freundlich und lieb zeigst Du Dich gleich dem unersättlichen Blick. Unter dem Licht der Straßenlaternen, an den beleuchteten Auslagen, am Schreibtisch im Bureau, beim plötzlichen Innehalten auf den Korridoren, neben dem einnickenden Schreibmaschinisten, am Fenster des Wohnzimmers, während große Gesellschaft und Verwandtschaft hinter mir das Zimmer füllt. (B1 365)

There are times when my longing for you overwhelms me. The bag is ripped open, and in a friendly and charming manner you at once present yourself to my insatiable gaze. In the light of street lamps, outside illuminated shop windows, at my desk in my office, at a sudden standstill in the corridors,

[16] In an earlier letter, Kafka had already compared the moment of taking a photograph of Felice out of its envelope with her actual, physical arrival: 'Dem Briefumschlag sieht man es nicht an, reißt den Briefumschlag auf als wäre es nur ein Brief … aber da ist ein Bild darin gewesen und Du schlüpfst selbst heraus wie Du einmal in schönern Tagen vor mir aus dem Eisenbahnwaggon kommen wirst' (B1 292–3) ['One can't tell from the envelope, one rips it open as though it were just a letter … , but then one finds a picture inside and you yourself slip out of it, as one fine day I will see you getting out of a railway carriage' (EF 82)].

beside a drowsy typist, by the window in the living room, while a large gathering of friends and relatives fills the room behind me. (EF 127)

This is one of the rare moments in the correspondence where Kafka's response to Felice's photographs takes on a sexual undertone, uncovering the voyeuristic dimension of his photographic engagement. His desire for her is expressed in the rather violent act of ripping open the bag to reveal the contained photograph—an act of exposure which substitutes the image for the desired body. The uncovered image, however, makes a disappointing object for such passion; its sitter responds to Kafka's 'insatiable' gaze with 'friendly and charming' decorum, nipping his passion in the bud. In a relationship where contact was for the most part limited to letters and photographs, the coy studio portrait does little to make up for a lack of intimacy, frustrating the desire even of the most passionate viewer.

That said, even this harmless picture cannot fully be mastered by Kafka's hungry gaze:

Und daß dieses Bildchen so unerschöpflich ist, das ist freilich ebenso viel Freude wie Leid. Es vergeht nicht, es löst sich nicht auf wie Lebendiges, dafür aber bleibt es wieder für immer erhalten und ein dauernder Trost, es will michauch nicht durchdringen, aber es verläßt michauch nicht. (B1 365)

And because this little photograph is so inexhaustible, it actually produces as much pleasure as pain. It does not fade away, it does not disintegrate like a living thing; instead it will survive forever, a permanent comfort; it cannot altogether satisfy me, but it won't leave me, either. (EF 127)

As Kafka realizes, his imaginary intercourse with photographs is inevitably caught up between joy and frustration; their reassuring permanence and stability makes them superior to any human relationship, yet this comes at the price of a fundamental, unbridgeable distance between viewer and image.

This realization marks a turning point within the correspondence. In subsequent letters, Kafka never rekindles the earlier, ecstatic sense of recognition, stressing instead the inadequate and even deceptive character of the photographic medium. In a letter of 26 January 1913, for instance, he complains: 'Aber was helfen die Bilder! auf dem Bild siehst Du frisch aus, hast runde Wangen, klare Augen, bist so wie Deine Mutter und ich Dich haben wollen und in Wirklichkeit bist Du

noch spät abend wach im Bett und weinst' (B2 63) ['But what's the good of pictures? In this one you look flourishing, your cheeks are round, your eyes clear; you are as your mother and I would like you to be, and in reality you lie awake in bed till late at night, and cry' (EF 172)]. In March 1913, Kafka finally visits Felice in Berlin, their first meeting since their initial encounter. This experience puts an end to Kafka's photographic obsession:

> Ich habe Dich zu lange in Wirklichkeit gesehn … als daß mir Deine Photographien jetzt etwas nützen könnten. Ich will sie nicht ansehn. Auf den Photographien bist Du glatt und ins Allgemeine gerückt, ich aber habe Dir in das wirkliche, menschliche, notwendig fehlerhafte Gesicht gesehn und mich darin verloren. Wie könnte ich wieder herauskommen und mich in bloßen Photographien zurechtfinden! (B2 147)
>
> I have gazed at you too long in real life … for your photographs to be of any use to me now. I don't want to look at them. In the photographs, you are smooth, and nearer to the commonplace, whereas I have beheld the true, human, inevitably imperfect face, and lost myself in it. How can I find my way out of it again, and be content with mere photographs! (B2 147)

Having seen Felice face to face, Kafka now rejects her photographic substitutes; in comparison to her real, humanly flawed appearance, the photograph's smooth surface strikes him as anodyne and impersonal. While the meeting in Berlin does not bring about a radical change in their relationship, it marks the end point of its first phase when photographs acted as substitutes for personal contact. Although Kafka and Felice continue to exchange photographs during the remaining four and a half years of their relationship, these pictures rarely provoke the same emotional, analytical, and imaginative response as the early images.[17] Indeed, the one image which depicts Kafka and

[17] An exception is Kafka's comment in a letter of 9 August 1913: 'Und doch muß ich im Anblick des Bildes, das ich jetzt zuhause vorgefunden habe, eingestehn, daß ich mich Dir mit unendlicher Gewalt verbunden fühle und wenn nicht dieser durchlittene Vormittag mir in der Erinnerung die Fähigkeit gegeben hätte, das Obige … niederzuschreiben, ich lieber nur gedankt hätte, wie ich es im Anblick Deines Bildes ununterbrochen tue' (B2 257) ['And yet I must confess that when contemplating the picture I found on reaching home, I felt my ties with you to be immensely powerful, and if the memory of this morning's suffering hadn't given me the strength to record the above, … I would have preferred to say nothing but thank you, as I do continually when contemplating your picture' (EF 301)].

15. The official engagement photograph, July 1917.

Felice together, their official engagement photograph from 1917, is not mentioned anywhere in Kafka's writings.

DISTORTED DOUBLES: KAFKA'S SELF-PORTRAITS

In his study of the correspondence, Elias Canetti describes Kafka as an 'expert on power' in the way he plays on and manipulates the

relationship's psychological dynamics.[18] As the above examples have shown, photography plays a central role in this struggle for mastery and control; Kafka's response to Felice's photographs acts as an emotional barometer reflecting the overall state of their relationship. In this respect, these images form part of a self-perpetuating circuit; while they become the subject of Kafka's projections, they also themselves trigger feelings of exhilaration and suspicion, intimacy and alienation.

Given the huge significance with which Kafka invests Felice's pictures, it is only natural that he is equally sensitive where his own photographs are concerned, responding to Felice's comments with a mixture of self-deprecation, defiance, and paranoia. In this respect, the fact that Felice's side of the correspondence has not survived is particularly hampering, as Kafka's response is highly subjective, unbalanced, and rather monomaniac. For the reader, this one-sided correspondence takes on a frustratingly fragmented character which echoes Kafka's own struggles with Felice's cropped, incomplete pictures.

One theme which runs through Kafka's comments on his own photographs is his complaint about the distorting and disfiguring effect of the camera. This anxiety is symptomatic of Kafka's more general insecurity about his body and appearance; in the correspondence, these fears are enforced by a sense of exposure to what he regards as Felice's unsympathetic scrutiny not only of his pictures but also of his more general goals and intentions. Like Felice's own images, then, Kafka's portraits become symbolic of the more general tensions of the relationship, and the discrepancies between the lovers' expectations which are played out in the field of photography.

A striking example of this mechanism is the first adult portrait which Kafka sends to Felice, having first sent her two childhood pictures.[19] Since over three months had passed since their first

[18] Canetti, *Der andere Prozeß*, 86.

[19] Apart from the photograph accompanying his letter about himself as 'ape of my parents', Kafka also sends another childhood snapshot on which he comments in a half-humorous, half-serious manner: 'ich war vielleicht 5 Jahre alt, das böse Gesicht war damals Spaß, jetzt halte ich es für geheimen Ernst' (B1 253) ['I was perhaps 5 years old; at the time the angry expression was put on as a joke, now I suspect I secretly meant it' (EF 55)].

16. Kafka, *c.*1910.

and only encounter, this photograph was naturally invested with considerable significance:

> Ein verdrehtes Gesicht habe ich in Wirklichkeit nicht, den visionären Blick habe ich nur bei Blitzlicht, hohe Krägen trage ich längst nicht mehr. Dagegen ist der Anzug schon jener mehrerwähnte einzige (einzige ist natürlich eine Übertreibung, aber keine große) und ich trage ihn heute munter wie damals.… Er altert mit mir. (B1 293)
>
> I haven't actually got a twisted face; it's only the flash that gives me that visionary gaze, and I have long ago abandoned high collars. On the other hand, the suit is the once or twice mentioned one-and-only (one-and-only is of course an exaggeration, but not a great one), and I am wearing it today as cheerfully as ever.… It is aging with me. (EF 82)

Given his own, rather ambivalent response to Felice's portrait as a 'young lady', Kafka must have been highly aware of the potentially alienating effect of his portrait, and thus takes every precaution to emphasize its inadequacy. Only the suit establishes some kind of connection between image and reality; the collar, by contrast, is

hopelessly outdated, and the portrait as such a distortion. Kafka warns Felice not to trust his visionary gaze, which is merely the effect of the flash. As in the fiction, then, Kafka challenges the myth of photographic verisimilitude, singling out those elements which distance the image from reality. Yet while these remarks tie in with Kafka's literary presentation of photographs such as the one of Karl Rossmann's father, they are at odds with his investment in Felice's photographs, which he does endow with a significance both realist and symbolic.

At the end of the letter, Kafka further distances himself from his portrait by contrasting it with another, 'better', picture:

> Alles in allem bitte ich Dich nur, vor dem Bild nicht zu erschrecken. Es gibt nur ein gutes Bild von mir aus neuerer Zeit (gut ist nur das Bild, das einen so zeigt, wie man, wenn es schon nicht anders geht, aussehn will) aber das ist unter Rahmen mit andern Familienbildern. (B1 293)
>
> Above all, please don't be alarmed by this picture. Only one good picture of me has been taken recently (a photograph is good only if, failing all else, one looks as one would like to look), but this one is in a frame with other family photographs. (EF 82–3)

Kafka's remark in parentheses takes the critique of photographic realism even further; a good portrait, it suggests, would depict its sitter's inner, idealized self-image rather than his or her actual appearance. Predicably, then, Kafka's worries about Felice's response turn out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy; in her subsequent letters, he discerns a coolness which he promptly attributes to his photograph. Given the absence of Felice's response, the actual basis of these complaints is impossible to determine, although Kafka's letters do contain a familiar element of paranoia.

That said, in due course, Kafka's anxiety about what he perceives to be Felice's negative response gives rise to a statement of unexpected assertiveness:

> Was soll ich tun? So sehe ich nun einmal aus. Das Bild ist schlecht, aber ähnlich ist es, ich sehe in Wirklichkeit sogar ärger aus. Es ist 2 Jahre alt, aber mein jungenhaftes Aussehn hat sich kaum verändert … Und bedenke, das Bild ist schließlich noch erträglich, aber bis dann der Mensch selbst vortritt. (B1 302)
>
> What can I do? That's how I look. The picture is bad, but it is a good likeness; in reality I look even worse. It is 2 years old, but my boyish appearance

has hardly changed … And consider, the picture after all is still bearable, but what will happen when the man himself appears? (EF 88–9)

Although Kafka continues to stress the photograph's flaws, he nonetheless defends it as an adequate likeness. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that his real appearance is even worse than in this picture, while simultaneously stressing that it has hardly changed in the past two years. These contradictory statements illustrate Kafka's anxieties about the potentially alienating effect of his image. Related to this, however, is a more general fear of rejection, the sense that his image is exposed to Felice's unsympathetic gaze, which might mirror his own scrutiny of her photographs.

These anxieties turn out to be more deeply rooted than even Kafka had thought. In a letter written just two days later, he describes a dream which encapsulates his ambivalent feelings: his fear of Felice's scrutiny as well as his own concomitant desire for visual mastery. Kafka is aware of the dream's revelatory character, warning Felice that it contains 'schreckliche Wahrheiten aufdringlich und überdeutlich … , so wie sie in dem mattern Tagesleben niemals zum Durchbruch kommen können' (B1 308) ['frightening truths … , more obtrusive and vivid than could ever come to the surface in drab everyday life' (EF 93)]. In the dream, Kafka is on holiday with his mother when the peace is disrupted by the visit of a Berlin 'Blindeninstitut'. As it turns out, Felice is blind and part of the group about to visit a village. Upon learning about her arrival, Kafka embarks on a chaotic search; rushing to meet the group, he is suddenly struck by a reassuring realization: 'Auf dem Weg aber fiel mir ein, daß Du ja blind seist, daß daher mein Aussehn und äußerliches Benehmen den Eindruck, den ich auf Dich machen werde, glücklicherweise nicht beeinflussen könne' (B1 310–11) ['On my way I remembered that you were blind, in which case my appearance and outward demeanour luckily could not influence the impression I made on you' (EF 94)]. This insight, which marks the dream's climax and conclusion, reveals Felice's blindness to be a wish-fulfilment. Because of her disability, she will be unable to judge Kafka's appearance, a scenario which neatly assuages his anxieties about her examining his photograph. The dream redresses this imbalance by re-establishing Kafka as the all-seeing observer whose control is not threatened by

Felice's own scrutiny. Although Kafka wakes up before he actually meets Felice, the realization that she cannot see or judge him produces a mental image which anticipates their encounter: 'Ich stellte mich also bereit, sah Dich im Geiste im Gedränge der Mädchen schon herankommen, die Augenlider gesenkt, steif und still' (B1 311) ['I placed myself in readiness, imagined you among the crowd of girls coming toward me, eyelids lowered, stiff and silent' (EF 95)]. Felice's appearance, with her downcast eyes, is emblematic of Kafka's wishful fantasy of her as devoid of any visual agency. What is more, her static posture has a distinctly photographic character and is reminiscent of her pale childhood image for which Kafka felt a particular affection.

In real life, Kafka takes a while to recover from the incident with his photograph. Although he repeatedly promises to send a copy of the aforementioned 'good' photograph, he postpones this undertaking time and again, referring to the difficulties involved in having the picture copied. At the same time, he refuses to send any other photographs 'weil ich Angst bekommen habe, daß ich auf allen, ohne Schuld und ohne Richtigkeit, ein wenig merkwürdig ausschaue' (B1 342) ['because I am afraid that through no fault of my own, and quite unjustly, I look rather peculiar in all of them' (EF 111)]. Eventually, however, Kafka keeps his promise and sends Felice not one but three copies of his most recent picture:

> Auf die Gefahr hin, Dir den Sonntag zu verderben, schicke ich Dir meine neueste Photographie undzwar gleich in 3 Exemplaren, da ich gefunden zu haben glaube, daß sie in größerer Anzahl an Schrecken verliert. Ich weiß mir keine Hilfe, dieses Blitzlicht gibt mir immer ein irrsinniges Aussehn, das Gesicht wird verdreht, die Augen schielen und starren. (B2 17–18)
>
> At the risk of ruining your Sunday, I am sending you my most recent photograph, and 3 copies at that, since I think I have discovered that in larger quantities it loses some of its horror. I don't know what to do, the flash always gives me a mad look—the face twisted, the eyes crossed and staring. (EF 140)

To prevent another negative response, Kafka develops the rather strange idea of sending three copies of the same picture to dissipate its effect. Indeed, just as the photograph is replicated, so is Kafka's critique of the photographic medium, which repeats elements of his previous letters. Once again, he emphasizes the distorting effect of the flash

which uncannily transforms his gaze until it resembles that of a madman. By humorously exaggerating the picture's negative qualities, Kafka obviously hopes to provoke a more positive response; indeed, his account has a slightly gothic undertone, evoking doppelgänger narratives such as the Bassermann film *Der Andere* (see Chapter 2). As Kafka's letter suggests, photographic portraits can take on the role of an uncanny alter ego, distorting the appearance of the sitter and gaining a life of their own.

Although this latest image is presumably his long-announced 'good' portrait, Kafka is quick to contradict his own judgement by promising Felice yet another, 'better' image:

> Habe keine Angst Liebste, so sehe ich nicht aus, dieses Bild gilt nicht, das sollst Du nicht bei Dir tragen, ich werde Dir bald ein besseres schicken. In Wirklichkeit bin ich zumindest noch einmal so schön, wie auf diesem Bild. Genügt Dir das nicht Liebste, dann ist es allerdings schlimm. Was soll ich dann machen? Übrigens hast Du ja ein ganz wahrheitsgemäßes Bild von mir; so wie ich in dem kleinen Buch [*Betrachtung*] aussehe, so sehe ich auch wirklich aus, so sah ich wenigstens vor kurzem aus. (B2 18)

> Don't worry, dearest, I don't look like that, this picture doesn't count, it isn't one you should carry around with you, I'll send you a better one soon. In reality I am at least twice as beautiful as in this picture. If that's not enough for you, dearest, then things are indeed serious. In that case, what am I to do? However, you do have a fairly true picture of me; the way I look in the little book [*Meditation*] is how I really look, at least that's how I looked a short while ago. (EF 140)

Effectively, then, the 'good' photograph turns out to be an illusory concept whose arrival must be endlessly postponed. As a substitute, however, Kafka proposes an altogether different medium. His casual remark that his 'little book' *Betrachtung* contains a more truthful portrait indicates a shift from photography to writing—and to a text, moreover, whose short, highly visual sketches make it reminiscent of a photo album. However, Kafka's remark is not just a playful comparison but also a less than subtle hint; having received his book nearly a month earlier, Felice had so far failed to make any comment. Indeed, this is not the first time that Kafka draws a connection between *Betrachtung* and his photographs; in an earlier letter, he complains: 'Dir gefällt mein Buch ebensowenig wie Dir damals mein

Bild gefallen hat' (B1 372) ['You don't like my book any more than you liked my photograph' (EF 132)].

Kafka's comments on his own photographs thus reflect an underlying, more serious agenda: what is at stake here is his very identity as a writer, and Kafka's letters convey his growing frustration at trying to communicate his vocation to Felice. Compared to writing, then, photographs can only offer a distorting, inadequate portrait of the author, limited as they are to surfaces and external appearances. Ultimately, then, Kafka's ideal of a photograph which depicts its sitter 'as one would like to look' remains an impossible aspiration.

EXCHANGE, REPRODUCTION, CIRCULATION

In the early parts of the correspondence, Kafka treats Felice's pictures as cherished possessions, investing them with an almost magical capacity to create a sense of closeness between sitter and viewer. As time goes by, however, the fetishistic investment in individual images is undercut by a second tendency; Kafka becomes increasingly interested in processes of copying, traffic, and exchange, a fixation which also extends to the role of photography in the correspondence.

The smooth and prompt exchange of letters is of great importance to Kafka, whose letters demonstrate his expert knowledge of the postal system of his time, of collection times, tariffs, and types of express delivery.[20] Photography soon becomes part of this obsession; not only does Kafka recurrently draw attention to what he perceives as an almost magical synchronity in the exchange of photographs between him and Felice,[21] but his appetite for new pictures gathers speed as the correspondence develops:

Außerdem aber hat mich Dein Einfall, Liebste, mit solcher Gier gepackt, daß ich Dir den Vorschlag mache, solche Bildchen jeden Monat auszutauschen.

[20] See the chapter on Kafka in Bernhard Siegert, *Relais: Geschicke der Literatur als Epoche der Post, 1751–1913* (Berlin: Brinkmann and Bose, 1993), and Julian Preece, 'The Letters and Diaries', in Julian Preece (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 111–30: 113.

[21] See B1 267, 283/EF 65, 75.

Du veränderst Dich doch, die Jahreszeit geht weiter, Du trägst andere Kleider — nein Liebste ich verlange zu viel, ich verirre mich. Ich soll zufrieden sein, daß ich dieses Bildchen besitze, für das ich Dir in jedem Brief von neuem danken sollte. (B1 365)

I was seized moreover with such greed by your idea, dearest, that I propose a monthly exchange of such little pictures. Your appearance must surely alter, the seasons advance, you wear different clothes — no, dearest, I am asking too much, I'm going too far. I must be content to possess this picture for which I should thank you again in every letter. (EF 127)

Kafka claims that in order to keep up to date with Felice's life, he requires a new photograph every month. His justification for this request, however, points towards a more specific motivation. The physical changes undergone by Felice are reflected in another temporal order: the change of the fashion seasons which projects the rhythm of natural time into the realm of commodity culture. Although atemporal by nature, photography plays a vital role in this process, as fashion shots become time markers in the modern mass media. Although Kafka justifies his request with his desire for personal closeness, his wish for an updated picture every month aligns Felice's portraits with the images of commodity culture.

Kafka's fascination with this overlap between the private and the public is fuelled by another set of photographs of Felice which do indeed straddle the public–private boundary. Given his general, not least professional, interest in modern technology, Kafka is naturally curious about Felice's employer, a leading manufacturer of office machinery. Carl Lindström's flagship product was the so-called Parlograph, a forerunner of the Dictaphone. Although Kafka expresses his reservations about using such a device in his own office, arguing that it reduces the human operator to a 'Fabriksrbeiter der mit seinem Gehirn eine schnurrende Maschine bedienen muß' (B2 31) ['factory worker whose brain has to serve a whirring machine' (EF 149)], he nevertheless displays a lively interest in the technical aspects of the Parlograph and repeatedly urges Felice to send him some company prospectuses for further information.[22] In the end, however, Kafka's attention is captured not by these official publications

[22] See B1 263, 268/EF 62, 65.

but by a set of photographs of Felice which he receives a few weeks later:

> Ach Liebste wie ist das mit den Bildern doch ein sehnsüchtiges Vergnügen. Alle stellen die Liebste dar, keines gleicht dem andern, alle fassen einen mit Gewalt. Auf diesen Bildern gleichst Du wieder sehr dem kleinen Mädchen auf dem ersten Bild, das Du mir schicktest. So still sitzt Du da, die linke Hand, ganz unbeschäftigt, darf doch nicht erfaßt werden, etwas sehr Nachdenkliches wird diktiert. Eine raffinierte Aufnahme für den Fall, als man es darauf angelegt haben sollte, den Mund zu küssen. Bist Du hier in Deinem Bureau photographiert? Was für ein Unterschied ist zwischen den verschiedenen Mundstücken der Apparate? (B2 37–8)

> Oh, dearest, what nostalgic pleasure these pictures give! They all represent my dearest one; each is different from the others, they all take hold of one by force. In these pictures you again look very much like the little girl in the first picture you sent me. You sit there so quietly, your left hand completely idle, yet it cannot be seized, something requiring thought is being dictated. An ingenious picture in the event of one having planned to kiss the mouth. Was it taken in your office? What is the difference between the various mouthpieces of the machines? (EF 154)

To oblige Kafka's insatiable hunger for new images, Felice sends not just one but several images at once. While Kafka stresses their resemblance to Felice's very first picture, her childhood portrait, these images lead him into unknown terrain, as they depict Felice in her professional capacity. Kafka's personal aversion to the Parlograph is here transformed into an almost erotic fascination triggered by the images which show Felice dictating into this apparatus. Although Kafka's gaze is not distracted by the presence of potential rivals, the Parlograph acts as an ambivalent presence in these images, creating a mixture of distance and proximity.

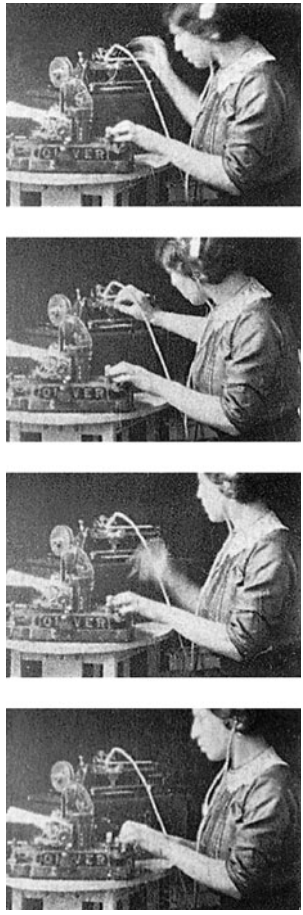
Kafka is immediately drawn to Felice's hand; yet he represses the desire to touch it with reference to the apparatus which exercises its own, physical and mental, control over the operator. Likewise, his desire to kiss Felice's lips is deflected by the Parlograph's different mouthpieces. The machine appears as a non-human rival which both enhances and undermines the viewer's desire for physical closeness. While it acts as a mechanical extension of Felice's

body, it also distracts Kafka's attention away from her, acting as an alluring spectacle in its own right. In this respect, these photographs allude to a more general tendency within modern culture, namely the substitution of the human body by various mechanical 'prostheses'. At the same time, the photographs also employ a strategy whose popularity remains unbroken in present-day advertising: the eroticized juxtaposition of female body and commodity. Kafka's fascinated response illustrates the reifying consequences of this set-up; while body and apparatus mutually enhance each other's attraction, the display of the machine and its individual components in turn entails the fragmentation of the female body into an assortment of functional parts—a process neatly encapsulated in the term 'mouthpieces'.

The juxtaposition between erotic and commodity fetishism in these pictures highlights a more general feature of Kafka's letters, which equally display a desire to fragment and dissect Felice's appearance rather than engage with her whole person. In their dual capacity as personal portraits and commercial displays, the Parlograph photographs cross a boundary between private and public to which Kafka had already alluded in his letter about the fashion seasons. Having been drawn into the photographs' intricate dynamic, he promptly alludes to their potential commercial usage: 'Soll das Bild vielleicht zu Reklamezwecken verwendet werden? Vielleicht zu Ansichtskarten? Das doch nicht?' (B2 38) ['Perhaps the picture is meant to be used for advertising purposes? Perhaps for picture postcards? But surely not?' (EF 154)].

Kafka responds to this prospect with a mixture of fascination and dread; although the public dissemination of Felice's photographs would undermine his own, privileged access, this prospect ties in with his fantasies of photographic replication, traffic, and exchange. Indeed, Kafka's hunch about the photographs' potential purpose might well have been inspired by the company prospectuses which he requested from Felice a few weeks previously and which contained a photograph of a secretary typing a dictation from the Parlograph.[23] In Kafka's mind, then, the viewing of Felice's photographs becomes

[23] For a reproduction of this and other illustrations, see Wolf Kittler, 'Schreibmaschinen, Sprechmaschinen: Effekte technischer Medien im Werk Franz Kafkas',



17. Felice Bauer at the Parlograph (photographic flick-book).

invaded by public images, just as he himself momentarily adopts the detached gaze of the customer when assessing both sitter and apparatus.

As it turns out, Kafka's private intuition about the photographs was well founded. Felice Bauer's bequest, which has only recently been

in Wolf Kittler and Gerhard Neumann (eds.), *Franz Kafka: Schriftverkehr* (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 1990), 75–163: 120–1.

acquired by Fischer Verlag, contains a flick-book, or *Daumenkino*, which shows a typist writing a dictation from the Parlograph.[24] The woman depicted in these photographs is none other than Felice herself, who in 1909 was initially hired by Lindström as a typist and must have been amongst the first to use this new invention. The fact that Kafka never mentions this flick-book might suggest that Felice never showed it to him—a decision hardly surprising given his ambiguous response to her photographs and their potential purpose. Kafka's anxieties about the public distribution of her photographs implies that he was—and remained—blissfully unaware of Lindström's actual advertising ploy.

ILLICIT EXCHANGE

In the course of the correspondence, the accumulation of Felice's photographs becomes a central goal for Kafka. This collector's habit, however, is by no means limited to the relationship with Felice but forms part of a wider pattern which recurs with remarkable regularity throughout his adult life. Whenever he became emotionally close to a woman, Kafka was always keen to acquire and exchange photographs, a goal which he pursued with great persistence. In his personal writings, photography is thus a theme which connects his various major and minor liaisons, acting as a catalyst both emotional and erotic. In particular, photography plays a central part in a secret correspondence which Kafka pursued during his relationship with Felice Bauer.

Even before he met Felice, Kafka had made strategic use of photography as a tool of seduction. Only a few weeks before their first encounter, he had undertaken a trip to Weimar with Max Brod, during which he entered into a tentative and ultimately unsuccessful romance with Margarethe 'Grete' Kirchner, the daughter of the custodian of the Goethehaus. The acquaintance with Margarethe and her

[24] As Reiner Stach remarks, this *Daumenkino* had a twofold purpose: 'Potential customers were not just familiarized with the use of the apparatus in the most immediate manner, but they were also shown that the company's strategy was in every respect state of the art' (*Die Jahre der Entscheidung*, 291–2).

parents allowed Brod and Kafka access to house and garden outside the official opening hours.[25] The friends record their impressions not just in their respective diaries but also on camera; indeed, photography soon becomes more than a tourist occupation. As Brod notes in his diary:

Goethehaus.… Garten photographiert—Ich beschäftige den Vater mit photographischen Sachkenntnissen, während Kafka die Tochter zu einem Rendezvous überredet. Ich führe den Vater hinter die hohe Hecke. Er hat als Stativ eine leere hohe Kiste. Ich erkläre ihm das Mysterium der übereckstellung beim Pavillon. (F 229)

Goethehaus.… Took pictures of the garden—I occupied the father with expertise in photography while Kafka persuaded the daughter to a rendezvous. I led the father behind a high hedge. He used a tall empty box as a stand. I explain to him the secret of the diagnonal perspective at the pavilion.

The pretext of taking a photograph enables Kafka to get close to Margarethe. As he notes: 'Es wird photographiert. Wir zwei auf der Bank' (TB 1029) ['They take the photographs. The two of us on the bench' (ED 470)]. Photography, at first merely a topic of conversation, subsequently becomes part of an intricate strategy of distraction and seduction:

Goethehaus. Mansarden. Beim Hausmeister die Photographien angesehn. Herumstehende Kinder. Photographiegespräche. Fortwährendes Aufpassen auf eine Gelegenheit mit ihr zu sprechen.… Max im Bad, ich hole die Photographien, treffe sie vorher, komme mit ihr vors Tor. Der Vater zeigt mir die Bilder, ich bringe Photographieständer, endlich muß ich doch gehn. Sie lächelt mir sinnlos nutzlos hinter dem Rücken des Vaters zu. Traurig. Einfall, die Photographien vergrößern zu lassen. In die Drogerie. Wieder zurück ins Goethehaus wegen des Negativs.… Vielfaches Treffen der Grete. Beim Erdbeeressen; vor Werthers Garten, wo ein Koncert ist. Ihre Beweglichkeit des Körpers im losen Kleid. (TB 1028)

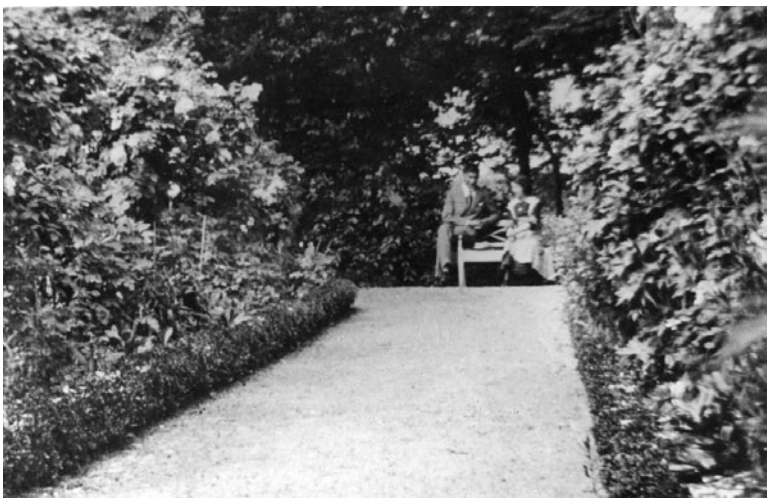
Goethehaus. Garrets. Looked at the photographs in the custodian's quarters. Children standing around. Talked about photography. Continually on the alert for a chance to speak to her.… Max went swimming, I went for the photographs, ran into her just before, walked up to the gate with her.

[25] Max Brod, *Über Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1966), 109.

Her father showed me the pictures, but finally I had to go. She smiled at me meaninglessly, purposelessly, behind her father's back. Sad. Thought of having the photographs enlarged. To the chemist. Back to the Goethehaus again for the negative.… Often ran into Grete. When eating strawberries; in front of Werther's Garden, where there was a concert. The suppleness of her body in its loose dress. (ED 470)

Indeed, photography dominates Kafka's account not only on a thematic but also on a stylistic level; Margarethe is captured in momentary snapshots which reflect Kafka's own restlessness and exitement. This barely suppressed tension is projected onto the girl: 'Es soll im Garten photographiert werden. Sie ist nicht zu sehn, ich darf sie dann holen. Sie ist immer ganz zittrig von Bewegung, bewegt sich aber erst, wenn man zu ihr spricht' (TB 1029) ['Photographs are to be taken in the garden. She is nowhere to be seen so I go to fetch her. She is always jittery with movement, but stirs only if you speak to her' (ED 470)].

In the end, however, neither this burgeoning romance nor Kafka's photographic attempts are crowned with success. In his diary he writes, 'Zweimaliges Photographieren im Park. Eines auf einer Brücke, das nicht gelingen will' (TB 1026) ['Twice took picture in the park; one on a bridge, it won't come out' (ED 469)]. Indeed, the one blurry



18. Kafka and Margarethe Kirchner, Weimar 1912.

snapshot of Kafka and Margarethe, presumably taken by Brod or by her father, does not testify to great photographic skills. As a last resort, Kafka even shows these failed images to Margarethe's father in the futile hope that more pictures might be taken: 'Photographien geholt. Hingebracht. Nutzlos herumgestanden, nur 3 Photographien von den 6 abgegeben. Und gerade die schlechtern in der Hoffnung, daß der Hausmeister um sich zu rechtfertigen, von neuem photographieren wird. Keine Spur' (TB 1032) ['Went for the photographs. Took them there. Waited around to no avail, delivered only three of the six photographs. And just the worst ones, in the hope that the custodian, to vindicate himself, would again take photographs. Not a chance' (ED 472)].

In the end, however, it is not the father's intervention but Margarethe's own lack of interest which ends this little liaison. Back in Prague, Kafka briefly enters into a correspondence with her in which photography makes one last appearance. As he reports to Brod,

> Ich habe einen kleinen Brief von ihr bekommen mit eigenhändigen Grüßen der Mutter und 3 beigelegten Photographien. Auf allen dreien ist sie in verschiedenen Stellungen zu sehn, in einer mit den frühern Photographien unvergleichbaren Deutlichkeit und schön ist sie! (B1 164)
>
> I have received a short letter from her, with regards from her mother in her own hand and 3 enclosed photographs. In all three she can be seen in different poses, ever so much more clearly than in the earlier photographs, and how beautiful she is! (EL 83)

Initially a mere seductive ploy, photography has by the end become Kafka's chief interest in this liaison. With an expert eye, he discusses the pictures' sharpness and the sitter's different poses; Margarethe's beauty, in contrast, only strikes him as an afterthought. That said, Kafka's suddenly awakened interest in photography soon bears more lasting fruit; only a few weeks later, the Weimar photographs spark a conversation between Kafka and Felice Bauer on their first encounter.

The photographic testimonies of this romance thus pave the way into another, creating a bridge between this early fling and a serious relationship. Indeed, photography remains a common theme in subsequent correspondences, for instance with Milena Jesenská and Minze Eisner. However, while photography in these cases acts as a diachronic link between Kafka's different relationships and

encounters, in one case, this connection is a synchronic one, lending the exchange of photographs an illicit, transgressive character.

Kafka's intimate letters to Felice's friend Grete Bloch have provoked much speculation about the nature of their relationship. Grete Bloch entered Kafka's life in autumn 1913, during a crisis in his relationship with Felice. Although she was initially called in as a mediator she subsequently became instrumental in the break-up of the engagement in July 1914.

A reader comparing Kafka's letters to Grete Bloch and to Felice Bauer would not necessarily be able to guess which of the two addressees was a mere friend and which one his fiancée. As Elias Canetti notes, Kafka's letters to Grete Bloch reproduce a discursive pattern in which he was already well versed from his correspondence with Felice,[26] and sure enough, Kafka's letters soon turn to the topic of photography. While Felice sent her first picture only reluctantly and after several weeks of persuasion, Grete is only too obliging, sending her picture without even being prompted. On 3 May 1914 Kafka responds to this unexpected gift in terms which strikingly resemble his letters to Felice:

Das Liebste und Schönste unter dem Lieben und Schönen, das Sie geschickt haben, ist Ihr Bild. Ich merkte, ich hatte Ihr Gesicht ganz vergessen; seit jener Zeit hat es sich in meiner Erinnerung ganz aufgelöst und was sich allmählich im Laufe der Zeit zu einem neuen Menschenbild zusammensetzte, war ein Mensch, an dem mir so viel lag, daß ich glaubte, an seinem Gesicht könne mir gar nichts liegen. Und nun vor dem Bild ist das natürlich gar nicht wahr. Ich wäre so froh, wenn ich ein Bildchen von Ihnen bekäme; bekäme ich nur eins, so würde ich das wählen wo Sie mit den 2 Mädchen beisammen sitzen. Nicht etwa zum Dank dafür, das wäre komisch, sondern aus eigenem Antrieb lege ich die schiefgedrehte Fratze bei. (B3 52)

The nicest and best thing among the nice and good things you sent is the picture of you. I realized that I had quite forgotten your face; it had wholly disintegrated in my memory since those bygone days, and the image assembled by degrees in the course of time was of a person who meant so much to me that I had imagined I could forget about the face altogether. And now, of course, confronted with the picture, this isn't true at all. I should be so pleased if I were to get a snapshot of you; if it were to be only one, I should

[26] Canetti, *Der andere Prozeß*, 56.

choose the one of you sitting with the 2 girls. I enclose my twisted mug not as an expressions of thanks, which would be absurd, but from an unrelated impulse. (EF 401)

As in the case of Felice, Kafka assesses Grete's photograph with reference to their first encounter, the memory of which is refreshed and modified by her picture. What is more, this first image immediately awakens Kafka's collector instinct, and his request for a particular image implies that Grete Bloch has already promised him further pictures. In exchange, Kafka promptly sends a portrait of himself, an image which he describes in familiar terms as a 'twisted mug'. Both the picture itself and Kafka's textual commentary are replications drawn from the correspondence with Felice (B1 293/EF 82), this time, however, lacking the self-consciousness and anxiety of these earlier letters.

Indeed, things are a lot less complicated in this second exchange. Only two days later, Kafka receives not just one but several more pictures from Grete:

Liebes Fräulein Grete, nun habe ich die Bilder, sie liegen vor mir, das am Denkmal ist das schönste (so matt stützen Sie sich auf Ihre Nachbarin?), der 'einsame Weg' ist noch charakteristisch, die andern sind nur Hilfsmittel, keine Hilfe, aber alle sind mir viel wert, glauben Sie. In was für einem schönen Park sind Sie? In einer Villa? Lustig doch im ganzen. Sind es Freundinnen? (B3 52–3)

Dear Fräulein Grete, I now have the pictures, they are lying in front of me, the one with the monument is the best (you lean so wearily on your neighbour?), the 'lonely road' is characteristic, the others are merely aids, no help at all, but I can assure you they are all very dear to me. Which lovely park are you in? At a villa? Rather gay on the whole. Are these girls friends of yours? (EF 401)

As with the photographs he received from Felice, Kafka compares Grete's different pictures and responds to them with a series of questions. That said, in its relative brevity, Kafka's response differs considerably from his painful scrutiny of Felice's pictures. Prudently Grete Bloch only sends him photographs which depict her with female friends rather than unknown men; as a result, Kafka's response contains none of the paranoia or insecurity which characterize his letters to Felice.

On the whole, then, the correspondence with Grete Bloch represents a less intense and less troubled replication of Kafka's letters to

Felice. The exchange of photographs in particular is a less emotionally charged affair, as Grete responds instantly to Kafka's requests and is in turn not taken aback by his photograph. Nonetheless, this secret exchange forms an act of betrayal which leaves its traces in Kafka's personal writings; his diaries contain an encoded yet highly revealing reflection of this illicit photographic exchange and the associated feelings of guilt and even self-disgust.

PORNOGRAPHY: BEYOND THE BOURGEOIS PORTRAIT

On 12 June 1914, Kafka recounts in his diary the visit of Anton Max Pachinger, a collector from Linz, whom he had met in Prague in November 1911. At the time, Kafka had extensively recorded this encounter; yet almost three years later he returns to this event, subjecting it to a second exposure. An external trigger for the revisiting of this encounter might have been a postcard which Kafka received from the artist Alfred Kubin, who in 1911 had accompanied Pachinger on his visit. This alone, however, does not fully explain Kafka's second account three years later. The trigger for this recollection lies much deeper and relates to Kafka personal circumstances at the time.

Only twelve days previously, on 1 June 1914, Kafka and Felice had celebrated their engagement at a so-called 'Empfangstag' in Berlin. A few days later, he writes about this experience: 'Hätte man mich mit wirklichen Ketten in einen Winkel gesetzt und Gendarmen vor mich gestellt und mich auf diese Weise zuschauen lassen, es wäre nicht ärger gewesen' (TB 528–9) ['Had they sat me down in a corner bound in real chains, placed policemen in front of me, and let me look on simply like that, it could not have been worse' (ED 275)]. Kafka here casts himself as a captive, a helpless prisoner forced to undergo this bourgeois ritual, but this sense of frustration is coupled with a very different sentiment; his self-image is also that of a criminal bound and arrested for an unspecified crime. Kafka's subsequent, seemingly unmotivated recollection of the Pachinger episode is closely related to the trauma of the engagement and his concomitant feelings of guilt which are prompted, at least in part, by the secret correspondence

with Grete Bloch. Indeed, what links the letters to Grete Bloch and Pachinger's visit is the role of photography: in both cases photographs become the subject and evident of an illicit erotic exchange.

Photography already plays a prominent role in Kafka's first diary account of Pachinger's visit in 1911. Begun on 26 November 1911 and completed three days later, this account stretches over five printed pages. In it Kafka pointedly sums up Pachinger's personality: 'sein Leben besteht aus Sammeln und Koitieren' (TB 272) ['His life consists of collecting and coitus' (ED 127)]. Both of these interests are brought together in photography:

> Die Erzählungen über seine [Pachinger's] Potenz machen einem Gedanken darüber, wie er wohl sein großes Glied langsam in die Frauen stopft. Sein Kunststück in frühern Zeiten war, Frauen so zu ermüden, daß sie nicht mehr konnten. Dann waren sie ohne Seele, Tiere. Ja diese Ergebenheit kann ich mir vorstellen. Er liebt Rubensweiber wie er sagt, meint aber solche mit großen oben gebauchten unten flachen, sackartig hängenden Brüsten. Er erklärt diese Vorliebe damit, daß seine erste Liebe eine solche Frau, eine Freundin seiner Mutter und Mutter eines Schulkollegen … war, die ihn mit 15 Jahren verführte.… Er zeigt Photographien seiner Lieblinge. Sein gegenwärtiger ist eine ältere Frau, die auf einem Sessel mit gespreizten Beinen, gehobenen Armen, von Fett faltigem Gesicht sitzt und so ihre Fleischmassen zeigt. Auf einem Bilde, das sie im Bett darstellt, sind die Brüste, so wie sie ausgebreitet und geschwollen förmlich geronnen aussehn, und der zum Nabel gehobene Bauch gleichwertige Berge. Ein anderer Liebling ist jung, sein Bild ist nur ein Bild der aus der aufgeknöpften Blouse gezogenen langen Brüste und eines abseits schauenden in einem schönen Mund zugespitzten Gesichtes. (TB 275–6)

> The stories about his [Pachinger's] potency lead one to imagine how he slowly stuffs his large member into the women. Previously, his trick had been to tire women out until they could take no more. Then they became soulless, animals. Yes, I can imagine that kind of capitulation. He loves Rubenesque women, as he puts it, although he actually means those with large breasts that hang like sacks, bulbous at the top and flat at the bottom. He explains this preference with the fact that his first lover was just such a woman, a friend of his mother's and the mother of a school friend … , who seduced him when he was 15.… He shows photographs of his favourites. His current one is an older woman sitting on an armchair, legs parted, arms lifted, face wrinkled with fat, thus displaying her masses of flesh. On one picture depicting her in bed, her breasts—spread out and swollen, looking as if they

were curdled—and the belly rising up to the navel form equal mountains. Another favourite is young, her image is only an image of the long breasts which have been pulled out of her unbuttoned blouse, and of a turned-away face with a beautiful pointed mouth.

This passage is one of the most sexually explicit in Kafka's writings and was in fact only published in 1990.[27] It conveys Pachinger's sexual escapades with a latent sense of fascination and indeed identification. What makes Pachinger's stories of his conquests particularly tantalizing, however, is the fact that they are accompanied by photographic evidence. Kafka's descriptions of these erotic photographs display a mixture of fascination and disgust, in particular in the case of the older woman whose corpulent body is invested with a monstrous, grotesque character.[28] As the same time, his account combines the detached clinical gaze of a forensic pathologist with an artistic sensitivity to shapes and proportions; the second picture, with its elongated shapes of breasts and lips, contrasts with the rounded, voluptuous proportions of the first.

The objectifying character of Pachinger's photographs is underlined by the mode of their display. Their circulation among a group of male viewers, some of them complete strangers to the owner, dissociates them from the original intimate context and exposes them to a wider audience, thereby transforming eroticism into pornography. Kafka's account is remarkable not only for its explicit content but also in the way that the 'cold', detached tone of his report mirrors the gaze of the camera which reduces the depicted women to sexual objects, commodities ready for (erotic) consumption.

Kafka returns to this episode three years later from a very different perspective. By 1914, his earlier eroticized fascination has given way

[27] In Brod's edition of the diaries, and hence in the English translation which is based on Brod's text, this particular part of the account is missing altogether. Indeed, even in the section leading up to it, Pachinger's name is transformed into the cipher 'N.'. To add to the confusion, in the later entry of 12 June 1914, where Kafka returns to the encounter, his name appears under the initial 'P.'. This combination of censorship and inconsistency underlines the explosive nature of Kafka's account, at least in the eyes of his friend and editor. Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher 1910–1923*, ed. by Max Brod (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1952), 175–7, 401–2.

[28] This mixture of fascination and repulsion also underlies the portrayal of older, sexually forthright female characters in Kafka's fiction, for instance Brunelda in *Der Verschollene* and Helene, the mistress of state attorney Hasterer, in *Der Proceß*.

to distance and barely concealed disgust. To begin with, Kafka focuses not on Pachinger himself but on the stories of his companions, the painter Alfred Kubin, the writer Karl Wolfskehl, and the illustrator Melchior Lechter. Recounting the group's sexual escapades and other 'adventures', he paints a vivid tableau of decadence pervaded by an atmosphere of moral and physical corruption. Kubin's fear of having contracted a sexually transmitted disease from a prostitute is echoed in Wolfskehl's dysentery which he contracted on a journey to India where he ate 'jedes Obst, das er auf der Straße im Staub liegen sieht' (TB 535) ['every piece of fruit he finds lying in the dust of the street' (ED 289)]. These tales of indiscriminate consumption find their climax in Pachinger's barbaric practices as a collector:[29]

Pachinger hat einer Leiche einen silbernen Keuschheitsgürtel abgesägt, hat die Arbeiter, welche sie ausgegraben haben, irgendwo in Rumänien, beiseitegeschoben, hat sie mit der Bemerkung beruhigt, daß er hier eine wertlose Kleinigkeit sehe, die er sich als Andenken mitnehmen wolle, hat den Gürtel aufgesägt und vom Gerippe heruntergerissen. (TB 535)

Pachinger sawed a silver chastity belt off a corpse; pushed aside the workers who had dug it up somewhere in Romania, reassured them by saying that he saw in the belt a worthless trifle which he wanted to take as a souvenir, sawed it open and ripped it off the skeleton. (ED 289)

Kafka concludes his account by returning to Pachinger's aforementioned erotic photographs, the only aspect which links this account to his previous diary entry:

Liebe zu dicken Weibern. Jede Frau, die er hatte, wird photographiert. Stoß von Photographien, den er jedem Besucher zeigt. Sitzt in der einen Sophaecke, der Besucher, von ihm weit entfernt, in der andern. Pachinger sieht kaum hin und weiß doch immer, welche Photographie an der Reihe ist und gibt danach seine Erklärungen: Das war eine alte Witwe, das waren die zwei ungarischen Dienstmädchen u.s.w. (TB 535–6)

[29] Walter Benjamin refers to Pachinger in his *Passagen-Werk* (*Arcades Project*), commenting that his collection 'im Verfemten, Verkommenen sich der Sammlung Figdor in Wien zu Seite stellen ließe. Er weiß kaum mehr, wie die Dinge im Leben stehen, erklärt seinen Besuchern neben den altertümlichsten Geräten Taschentücher, Handspiegel etc.' (BGS V 275) ['equals the Figdor collection in Vienna in terms of its ruthlessness and depravity. He can hardly remember how these things relate to life, explaining to his visitors handkerchiefs and pocket mirrors alongside the most ancient devices' (BA 145)].

Loves fat women. Every woman he has had is photographed. The pile of photographs that he shows every visitor. Sits at one end of the sofa, his visitor, at a considerable distance from him, at the other. Pachinger hardly looks across and yet always knows which picture is on top and supplies the necessary explanations: This was an old widow; these were the two Hungarian maids; etc. (ED 289)

While in the earlier version each photograph was described in close voyeuristic detail, this second version is informed by a pronounced sense of distance. Kafka does not go into any graphic details but merely refers to the pile of photographs passed around by Pachinger, who himself comes across as bored rather than boastful. Most revealingly, however, Kafka's erotic identification with Pachinger's potency has been entirely erased from this account; indeed, he does not once use the first person but displaces the viewing experience onto an anonymous 'visitor' who is described as sitting 'at a considerable distance' from the collector.

Compared to the anecdotes about sex, crime, and disease, Kafka's return to these photographs seems rather like an anti-climax. Yet given the preceding tales about decadence and corruption, these erotic pictures appear in a different light. Kafka's account brings out an inherent connection between Pachinger's chief interests, 'collecting and coitus', suggesting that his sexual conquests are merely a variant of his sacrilegious practices as a collector. As Kafka's narrative implies, the collecting of photographs is only a step away from the acquisition of more gruesome trophies. Although diametrically opposed, erotic photographs and chastity belt testify to the same dehumanizing stance; in modern commodity culture, bodies, images, and objects are all indiscriminately appropriated. In this climate, photography is no longer a sign of personal closeness or even erotic frisson. Rather, the process of mechanical recording becomes the purpose, rather than the pretext, of seduction for the photographer, whose every conquest reinforces his disengagement: 'Every woman he has had is photographed.'

In the light of Kafka's recent engagement, his revisiting of this episode of sexual transgression could be read as a rebellion against the looming straitjacket of marital sexuality. Indeed, Pachinger's erotic photographs are diametrically opposed to the bourgeois propriety which characterizes Felice Bauer's portraits. The radically changed

tone of this second version, however, suggests a different agenda. The pronounced distance which informs this new account is in fact more revealing than Kafka's earlier, all too eager fascination. Indeed, his detachment marks a defence mechanism against the underlying personal significance of this incident.

After all, only a few weeks earlier Kafka had himself indulged in the illicit collection of Grete Bloch's photographs, and although the images exchanged in this correspondence are a world away from Pachinger's pornographic snapshots, they nevertheless point to an unsettling parallel between Kafka's and Pachinger's liaisons. Not only does Kafka's secret exchange of photographs directly echo his relationship with Felice, but this practice evokes his encounter with another Grete—Margarethe Kirchner in Weimar, where photographs were likewise used as a tool of seduction. For Kafka as for Pachinger, then, photography acts as a kind of erotic souvenir, yet in contrast to Pachinger, Kafka circulates his photographs not among men but among women; the photographs from the Weimar trip are used to attract Felice, and Kafka uses copies of the same self-portrait to woo both Felice and Grete Bloch. As we shall see, photographs are also associated with eroticism and seduction in *Der Proceß*—indeed, this is only one of the many aspects of the novel which is prefigured in the correspondence.

6

Der Proceß: The Criminological Gaze

The history of photography is closely intertwined with the emergence of criminology. As early as 1841, daguerreotypes were used to record the likenesses of criminals, and as the century progressed, the medium became instrumental in the establishment of criminology as a scientific discipline and social practice.[1] In the early twentieth century, a new method of scene-of-the-crime photography was developed, based on photographic techniques employed in military surveying and map-making. Such recordings of criminal scenes and victims had their counterpart in a detailed photographic classification system of suspects and perpetrators. Developed in 1883 by the Paris police inspector Alphonse Bertillon, the system of *bertillonage* photographically 'dissected' the human body into its individual parts for comparison and analysis. It was in widespread use in Europe and America until the First World War and exemplified the turn-of-the-century obsession with measurements, records, and statistics. Bertillon's system directly prefigured the use of photography in passports and identity cards.

These and other criminological applications of photography formed part of a much wider development: the emergence of an increasingly refined network of control and surveillance which, while embodied by institutions such as the prison, hospital, and mental asylum,

[1] For a summary of the histories of criminology and photography, see Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001), 101–7. As their study demonstrates, the use of photography for disciplinary purposes is not limited to criminology but also plays a central role in disciplines such as anthropology, ethnology, medicine, and psychiatry.

soon permeated society at large. As Walter Benjamin points out: 'Die Photographie ermöglicht zum ersten Mal, für die Dauer und eindeutig Spuren von einem Menschen festzuhalten.... Seither ist kein Ende der Bemühungen abzusehen, ihn dingfest im Reden und Tun zu machen' (BGS I 550) ['Photography made it possible for the first time to preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of a human being.... Since that time, there has been no end to the efforts to capture a man in his speech and actions' (BSW IV 27)]. In the wake of this heightened visual paranoia, reality becomes transformed into one extended 'scene of the crime', and the criminological gaze permeates even artistic uses of photography, such as in Eugène Atget's photographs of Paris: 'Nicht umsonst hat man Aufnahmen von Atget mit denen eines Tatorts verglichen. Aber ist nicht jeder Fleck unserer Städte ein Tatort? nicht jeder ihrer Passanten ein Täter?' (BGS II 385) ['It is no accident that Atget's photographs have been likened to those of a crime scene. But isn't every square inch of our cities a crime scene? Every passer-by a culprit?' (BSW II 527)]. Criminological modes of perception and interpretation thus became an essential characteristic of modernity, and while the traces of this development can be discerned across turn-of-the-century art and literature,[2] *Der Proceß* (*The Trial*, 1914–15) provides a particularly striking illustration of this development.

Kafka was familiar with the use of photography as juridical and criminological evidence both personally and on a professional level. His law professor Hans Gross was a fervent advocate of the photographic categorization of criminals, and in his later position at the Workers' Accident Insurance Company Kafka dealt with photographic material in the assessment and prevention of work-related accidents.[3] Around 1912, he began to take a more personal, literary interest in this configuration. As I argued in the previous chapter,

[2] For a general outline of this relationship, see Peter J. Hutchings, *The Criminal Spectre in Law, Literature and Aesthetics: Incriminating Subjects* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[3] In their campaigns for improved working conditions, accident insurance companies in Germany and Austria made strategic use of the new visual media. Illustrated brochures, posters, and even educational films were used to raise awareness of unsafe working conditions. See Klaus Hermsdorf, 'Franz Kafka und die Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt', in Hans-Gerd Koch and Klaus Wagenbach (eds.), *Kafkas Fabriken*, Marbacher Magazin, 100 (Marbach: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2002),

one of the reasons why photographs held such a persistent fascination for Kafka was their need to be decoded and interpreted. In his letters to Felice Bauer, he constructs her photographs as 'riddles' or 'enigmas' in need of resolution, subjecting them to a detailed pseudo-criminological analysis. Through protracted scrutiny, he attempts to decode Felice's images, but this strategy often has the opposite effect, as it merely increases the pictures' inherent opacity. Rather than serving as a tool of detection, the photograph becomes itself a mystery in need of resolution. In his engagement with Felice's photographs, Kafka thus inscribes his private explorations into a criminological as well as literary tradition; notions such as 'mystery' and 'enigma' are, of course, staple features of a genre closely associated with the discipline of criminology: the detective story.[4] As we shall see, Kafka was familiar with this genre and its emphasis on visual observation, analysis, and deduction, mobilizing these strategies in his novel.

While *Der Proceß* is a text full of images, the most famous examples—Titorelli's portraits and landscapes—are man-made rather than mechanically produced. In *Der Verschollene* and *Die Verwandlung*, photographs feature at prominent points in the narrative, condensing its central themes and trajectories; *Der Proceß*, in contrast, appears to be primarily informed by painting and the associated power dynamics of manipulation, deception, and intimidation. And yet Kafka's second novel is deeply and subtly influenced by photography; as I shall demonstrate, photography appears in *Der Proceß*, as in *Der Verschollene*, both as an explicit motif and through implicit, intertextual, connections which underpin key episodes. In *Der Proceß*, Kafka draws on his personal experiences with photographic interpretation and his professional encounters with the medium, creating a hero

41–78: 62. Kafka's superior Robert Marschner wrote an extensive report on the role of film in accident prevention (AM 705–12).

[4] Ritchie Robertson has argued that *Der Proceß* resembles the metaphysical crime novel epitomized by Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* whose emphasis is on the moral implications of the crime rather than its actual solution (*Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 90–3). While this comparison sheds light on many of the novel's themes, in particular its discourse on questions of guilt and justice, I would contend that its mechanisms of visual perception and interpretation bear more resemblance to the classic detective story.

who, although himself the accused, attempts to adopt the gaze of the detective in his struggle with a faceless disciplinary apparatus. The remnants of the photographic exchange with Felice Bauer in the novel illustrate Kafka's attempts to come to terms with the relationship and even to mobilize it creatively, but also the obsessive hold which these photographs and their abortive interpretation still have on his imagination.

While the photographic paradigm shapes Josef K.'s criminological outlook on the world, his attempts at detection, scrutiny, and analysis, the medium also underpins his various erotic encounters, contributing to what Deleuze and Guattari have described as the proliferation of desire in the novel but also to the fetishistic frustration of this desire. Yet photography as a medium does not exist in isolation from other visual genres. As I shall argue, the paintings featured in the novel are intrinsically related to the photographic medium; despite their traditional, even archaic character, their production, display, and even consumption bear all the hallmarks of a culture of technical reproduction.

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

A diary entry of 5 January 1912 illustrates Kafka's familiarity with the classic detective story and its modes of visual scrutiny and analysis. Observing his friend, the actor Jitzchak Löwy, Kafka models himself on the most famous representative of this genre:

> Löwy mit seinen starken Kopfschmerzen, die wahrscheinlich ein schweres Kopfleiden anzeigen, lehnte sich unten auf der Gasse, wo er auf mich wartete, die Rechte verzweifelt an der Stirn, an eine Hausmauer. Ich zeigte ihn Weltsch, der sich vom Kanapee aus zum Fenster hinüberneigte. Ich glaubte zum erstenmal in meinem Leben in dieser leichten Weise aus dem Fenster einen mich nahe betreffenden Vorgang unten auf der Gasse beobachtet zu haben. An und für sich ist mir solches Beobachten aus Sherlock Holmes bekannt. (TB 348–9)

> Löwy, with his severe headache that probably indicates a serious ailment, was leaning against a wall down in the street where he was waiting for me, his right hand pressed in despair against his forehead. I pointed him out

to Weltsch who, from his sofa, leaned out of the window. I thought it was the first time in my life that I had so easily observed from the window an incident down in the street that concerned me so closely. In itself, this kind of observation is familiar to me from Sherlock Holmes. (ED 166–7)

The identification with Conan Doyle's master sleuth gives Kafka's secret surveillance a criminological spin. Indeed, Kafka is so fascinated with this new, 'light' mode of observation that he has no time to sympathize with his friend's suffering; deducing Löwy's 'severe headache' from his posture, Kafka employs Holmes's method of extrapolating hidden facts from external clues. Even in this moment of secret surveillance, however, Kafka's visual mastery is subtly challenged; the observed friend is a member of an Eastern European Yiddish theatre group whose gesturally expressive performances Kafka attended regularly at the time.[5] The latent theatricality of the scene thus undermines his self-appointed role as a detective, blurring the line between 'real' evidence and its staged simulation. In this respect, the passage prefigures the pitfalls of criminological scrutiny in Kafka's correspondence and in particular in *Der Proceß*: in the novel, the scrutinized images and scenes often take on a disconcertingly theatrical dimension which thwarts their conclusive analysis.

These and other uncertainties haunt Kafka's protagonist. *Der Proceß* mirrors the classic detective story in its emphasis on visual observation and deduction, parading the signifying systems of clothing, physiognomy, language, and gesture; as it turns out, however, these meticulously described appearances preclude any conclusive analysis on the part of protagonist or reader.[6] The medium of photography, itself the epitome of a perception limited to surfaces, exemplifies this dilemma. In the opening chapter, photographs feature with an inconspicuous regularity, accompanying Josef K.'s struggle for perceptual mastery. On two occasions, K. is confronted with photographs on display in the boarding house, first in the living room of his landlady Frau Grubach and then in the room of Fräulein Bürstner, the site of his

[5] On Kafka's relationship to Löwy and the Yiddish theatre, see Reiner Stach, *Kafka: Die Jahre der Entscheidung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002), 46–65, and Peter-André Alt, *Franz Kafka: Der ewige Sohn* (Munich: Beck, 2005), 227–36.

[6] Ritchie Robertson, 'Reading the Clues: Kafka, *Der Proceß*', in *The German Novel in the Twentieth Century: Beyond Realism*, ed. David Midgley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 59–79: 73–7.

interrogation by the Inspector. The content of these photographs is not actually revealed in this chapter, and they thus appear as little more than realist background props, stock features of bourgeois domesticity. In fact, however, these images harbour a deeper significance; as the narrative unfolds, they take on a self-reflexive function, highlighting the pitfalls of visual observation in Kafka's novel.

When K. first emerges from his room on the morning of his arrest, he notes

[daß] es auf den ersten Blick fast genau so aus[sah], wie am Abend vorher. Es war das Wohnzimmer der Frau Grubach, vielleicht war in diesem mit Möbeln Decken Porzellan und Photographien überfüllten Zimmer heute ein wenig mehr Raum als sonst, man erkannte das nicht gleich, umsoweniger als die Hauptveränderung in der Anwesenheit eines Mannes bestand, der beim offenen Fenster mit einem Buch saß, von dem er jetzt aufblickte. (GP 8–9)

[that] things looked at first glance almost exactly as they had on the previous evening. It was Frau Grubach's living-room; perhaps there was a little more space than usual in this room packed with furniture, rugs, china and photographs, but that was not immediately apparent, especially as the most striking change was the presence of a man who was sitting by the open window with a book, from which he now looked up. (ET 2)

The over-decorated bourgeois interior has, as Benjamin has argued, a deeply paradoxical effect; although it shelters the individual from the outside world and its invasive networks of surveillance and control, it also compensates for the increasing sense of anonymity and invisibility characteristic in the modern age by preserving the traces of its inhabitants:

Unverdrossen nimmt es [the bourgeoisie] den Abdruck von einer Fülle von Gegenständen; für Pantoffeln und Taschenuhren, für Thermometer und Eierbecher, für Bestecke und Regenschirme bemüht es sich um Futterale und Etuis. Es bevorzugt Sammet- und Plüschbezüge, die den Abdruck jeder Berührung aufbewahren. (BGS I 548)

The bourgeoisie unabashedly takes the shape of a host of objects. For slippers and pocket watches, thermometers and egg cups, cutlery and umbrellas, it tries to get covers and cases. It prefers velvet and plush covers, which preserve the imprint of every touch. (BSW IV 26)

In this respect, Benjamin argues, the bourgeois interior provides the ideal environment for the detective story—an idea which is echoed

(and yet turned on its head) in Kafka's novel. The abundance of physical objects in Frau Grubach's living room offers itself up for K.'s scrutiny, yet this environment ultimately defies his criminological gaze. K. is faced with his landlady's crowded living room as a perceptual challenge: have parts of its content been removed to create more space, or is this just an impression produced by the stranger at the window? His only conclusion is that everything looks *almost* like the night before, but he finds it impossible to determine whether this impression is the result of any genuine change in the room's set-up or merely an optical illusion. This brief moment of perceptual disorientation is paradigmatic of the novel as a whole. K.'s trial does not manifest itself in any radical change to his normal existence; rather, his environment becomes unsettling as a result of his own heightened—and yet inconclusive—sensitivity. In this respect, the photographs in Frau Grubach's room are more than a perfunctory gesture towards the conventions of realism; they allude to an ideal of perceptual objectivity which remains inaccessible to the protagonist.

Frau Grubach's room is not the only place in the boarding house to contain photographs. The images on display in Fräulein Bürstner's bedroom play a prominent role during K.'s interview with the Inspector, during his subsequent conversation with Fräulein Bürstner, and once again during K.'s first hearing. Belying their marginal position as mere decorative props, they maintain a remarkable hold on the protagonist's attention, and his recurrent reference to them is symptomatic of his more general proneness to become obsessed with details.

While the pictures' content is not actually described within the first chapter, they exert a persistent and rather uncanny effect on the entire scene. When K. first enters the room, they are among the first things he notices: 'In einer Ecke des Zimmers standen drei junge Leute und sahen die Photographien des Fräulein Bürstner an, die in einer an der Wand aufgehängten Matte steckten' (GP 20) ['In the corner of the room stood three young persons looking at Fräulein Bürstner's photographs stuck on a mat which hung on the wall' (ET 8)]. This association between the photographs and their bystanders is maintained throughout the episode; during his defensive speech, K. feels compelled to address '[die] drei bei den Photographien' (GP 21) ['the three standing by the photographs'

(ET 9)], and even once the Inspector has alerted him to the fact that these supposed strangers are in fact his colleagues from the bank, he finds it hard to match this realization with his previous impression of '[d]iese so uncharakteristischen blutarmen jungen Leute, die er immer noch nur als Gruppe bei den Photographien in der Erinnerung hatte' (GP 27) ['[t]hese utterly insipid and anaemic young men, whom he had noted mentally as merely a group by the photographs' (ET 12)]. It seems, then, that the bank clerks' appearance as an non-distinct group is somehow determined by their proximity to the photographs; indeed, one is tempted to replace the formulation 'by the photographs' with 'in the photographs', as the employees' pale, 'anaemic' appearance suggests that they have somehow escaped the monochrome images with which they are so persistently associated.

Indeed, even once K. has recognized the three as his colleagues, their appearance still maintains a photographic character; this is evidenced not only by their collective paleness but in particular through Kaminer's 'unausstehlichen durch eine chronische Muskelzerrung bewirkten Lächeln' (GP 27) ['insufferable smile caused by chronic muscular spasm' (ET 12)]. As Deleuze and Guattari remark, the photographs in *Der Proceß* 'have the power to metamorphose those who look at them'.[7] Kaminer's frozen smile, despite its medical explanation, illustrates how in Kafka's texts photographs come to invade the reality which surrounds them.

Perhaps the most memorable example of this mechanism is the 'Prügler' episode where K., returning to the lumber room on the following day, finds guards and Whipper frozen in exactly the same positions as when he last opened the door. As Adorno comments,

> Was auf der Spitze des Augenblicks balanciert wie ein Pferd auf den Hinterbeinen, wird geknipst, als solle die Pose für immer währen. Das grausigste Exempel enthält wohl der Prozeß: Josef K. öffnet die Rumpelkammer … , um die Szene getreu, auch mit der Anrufung seiner selbst, wiederholt zu findet.[8]

[7] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, fore. Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 61.

[8] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, paperback edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), x. 254–87: 264.

Anything that balances on the pinnacle of the moment like a horse on its hind legs is captured, as though the pose ought to be preserved forever. The most gruesome example of this is probably to be found in the *Trial*: Josef K. opens the lumber-room … to find the scene faithfully repeated, including the appeal to himself.[9]

The text contains an encoded reference to its narrative strategy: fleeing from his second encounter with the three in the lumber room, Josef K. comes across two workers, 'die ruhig an der Kopiermaschine arbeiteten und erstaunt in ihrer Arbeit innehielten' (GP 117) ['working quietly at the copying machine and now stopped in astonishment' (ET 71)]. While these two workers already feature in K.'s first visit to the lumber room, it is only once after his confrontation with its exact replication that the copying machine makes an appearance. As in the case of the bank employees' frozen appearance, then, references to techniques of mechanical reproduction expose the text's underlying narrative logic.

Fräulein Bürstner's photographs point not only to the uncannily arrested appearance of Kafka's colleagues but also beyond the text; the scenes set in her room are inspired by the aforementioned photograph of Felice Bauer surrounded by male accessories—a walking stick and beer mugs—posing in front of a wall covered with photographs. As I argued in the previous chapter, this image has a profoundly unsettling effect on Kafka because its *mise en abyme* structure defies conclusive analysis.[10] In *Der Proceß*, the photographs depicted in Felice's image are transposed into Fräulein Bürstner's room, while the male accessories surrounding Felice have metamorphosed into actual male intruders. What is more, Kafka's detective-style scrutiny of Felice's picture is adopted by Josef K., whose attention is likewise drawn to various objects in Fräulein Bürstner's room without being able to ascertain their significance.[11]

[9] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka', in *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Webar and Samuel Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 243–71: 253.

[10] Cf. Hartmut Binder, *Kafka in neuer Sicht: Mimik, Gestik und Personengefüge als Darstellungsformen des Autobiographischen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976), 160; Reiner Stach, *Kafka erotischer Mythos: Eine ästhetische Konstruktion des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1987), 90–1; and Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 193–5.

[11] The candles and box of matches on Fräulein Bürstner's bedside table are rearranged by the Inspector and thereby invested with an additional significance

Yet Felice's photograph provides the model not only for the room but also for its inhabitant. In his letter, Kafka describes Felice's gracious but immobile posture with one hand on her hip and the other one at her temple (B1 333/EF 105). Fräulein Bürstner adopts the same pose during K.'s (second) visit that evening; she walks up to the photographs, 'die flachen Hände tief an die Hüften gelegt' (GP 41) ['with hands pressed flat and low on her hips' (ET 19)] and then reclines on her chaise longue where she 'das Gesicht auf eine Hand stützte … während die andere Hand langsam die Hüfte strich' (GP 43) ['her face propped on one hand … while with the other hand she slowly stroked her hip' (ET 21)]. In his letters, Kafka had taken Felice's upright posture as a symbol of her recalcitrance; in the novel, he turns her fictional counterpart through ninety degrees, thus transforming her into an eroticized object of the male gaze.[12] Despite this move, however, Fräulein Bürstner maintains some of Felice's defiance. Like Felice in this and other photographs, she refuses to meet K.'s gaze (GP 47/ET 23), and the violent embrace with which K. breaks her resistance mirrors Kafka's strategy of kissing Felice's recalcitrant photograph.

Der Proceß thus takes up a central theme of Kafka's correspondence, namely the capacity of photography to attract, enhance, and mediate desire. Fräulein Bürstner's photographs arouse a curious attachment in the men in their vicinity; what is more, they even preserve the evidence of their fetishistic transgressions. Although K.'s colleagues are only described as standing next to the photographs, it later turns out that they have been meddling with them. A criminological tool, photographs are here themselves subject to illicit handling, acting as both scene and target of the crime.

During his evening visit, K. attempts to exculpate himself from the morning's intrusion, yet this behaviour only attracts Fräulein Bürstner's suspicion. Noticing the disarray of her photographs, she immediately accuses him of having meddled with them, and K.'s defensive explanation 'daß nicht ich es war, der sich an Ihren Photographien vergangen hat' (GP 41) ['that it was not I who interfered

which transforms them into objects in a criminal investigation. Boa, *Kafka: Gender*, 194.

[12] Ibid., 197.

with your photographs' (ET 20)] supports rather than diminishes the possibility of his own guilt. The verb *vergehen* has distinctly sexual undertones, suggesting that more is at stake than just the (dis)order of Fräulein Bürstner's photographs.[13] K.'s impulsive accusation underlines his own unconscious complicity in their deeds; as Elizabeth Boa remarks, the bank clerks act as both 'rivals and a horrible externalization of K.'s secret lust'.[14]

To dissipate any potential charge levelled against him, K. singles out one of his colleagues as the most likely culprit. When Fräulein Bürstner notices the disarray of her photographs, K. 'verfluchte im stillen den Beamten Kaminer, der seine öde sinnlose Lebhaftigkeit niemals zähmen konnte' (GP 41) ['silently cursed the clerk Kaminer, who was never able to curb his dreary and idiotic verve' (ET 20)]. By casting the blame on Kaminer, who stands out from the group through his eerie smile, K. follows in the footsteps of a criminological approach developed in the nineteenth century. The Italian anthropologist Cesare Lombroso and the British eugenicist Francis Galton used photography to establish a physiognomical taxonomy of criminality; superimposing individual photographs, they created composite images of the 'prototypical criminal'. While Galton used photographic mug shots, Lombroso superimposed photographs of the skulls of convicted criminals; both, however, focused on atavistic structures or physical irregularities to prove their theories about the link between criminality and degeneracy.[15] Kafka was familiar with Lombroso's theories through his law professor Hans Gross, one of Lombroso's

[13] Boa points out the parallel between this phrase and one of Kafka's letters to Felice in which he describes how he looks at her photograph 'um … vor Glück zu vergehn' (B1 307) ['dying of joy' (EF 92)]. The erotic joy of looking is thus transformed into a guilty, 'criminal' interference (*Kafka: Gender*, 195).

[14] Ibid., 194. Indeed, as the novel progresses, K. feels the need to further exaggerate the extent of his colleagues' transgression. At the first hearing, he even constructs their handling of the pictures as the main, devious purpose of their presence at the interrogation, claiming that the Inspector 'hat sogar noch ein übriges getan und in das Zimmer jener Dame drei niedrige Angestellte meiner Bank gebracht, die sich damit beschäftigten, Photographien, Eigentum der Dame, zu betasten und in Unordnung zu bringen' (GP 66) ['had in fact done something else and introduced into that lady's room three minor employees of my bank who spent their time handling and disarranging photographs, the property of the lady' (ET 34)].

[15] See Hamilton and Hargreaves, *The Beautiful*, 94–8, 101.

main advocates in the German-speaking world.[16] His physiognomic approach is reflected in *Der Proceß* where it is, however, also exposed in its absurdity.

When he blames Kaminer for the 'crime' of having interfered with Fräulein Bürstner's photographs, K. employs a strategy of physiognomic interpretation aimed at the uncovering of anomalies and irregularities. Because of his facial paralysis, Kaminer is marked out as different from his colleagues; indeed, because of their photographic stasis his features do not even need to be captured in a mug shot to be subjected to physiognomic analysis. Yet while K. readily employs this criminological model to cast the blame for the incident onto his colleague, he later finds himself subjected to a similar kind of scrutiny. In his conversation with tradesman Block, he learns that not only the Court representatives but also the other accused are well versed in physiognomic interpretation. As Block explains,

> Ein solcher Aberglaube ist es z. B. daß viele aus dem Gesicht des Angeklagten, insbesondere aus der Zeichnung der Lippen den Ausgang des Processes erkennen wollen. Diese Leute also haben behauptet, Sie würden nach Ihren Lippen zu schließen, gewiß und bald verurteilt werden. (GP 236–7)
>
> One of the superstitions, for instance, is that, according to many people, the outcome of a case can be seen in the accused man's face and particularly in the line of his lips. And these people said that, judging by your lips, you are sure to be convicted, and soon. (ET 136)

K.'s face thus becomes readable to others, revealing some meaning unknown even to himself; when he scrutinizes his face in a mirror he cannot discern any of the features which others extrapolate from his appearance (GP 237/ET 136). Block himself dismisses this belief as superstition; yet his rational stance is undermined by K.'s own lawyer, Huld, who, in a reversal of Lombroso's and Galton's theories, tells K. about the 'merkwürdige gewissermaßen naturwissenschaftliche Erscheinung' (GP 250) ['remarkable, you might even call it scientific, phenomenon' (ET 143)] that accused men are recognizable to the insider because of their outstanding beauty. Importantly, however,

[16] Mark Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg 'Fin-de-Siècle'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, repr. 2002), 147.

Huld blames this transformation not on any inherent guilt but on the trial itself, implying that these physiognomic characteristics are projected by the very system which draws on them for the purpose of investigation.

THE PROLIFERATION OF DESIRE

In the novel's opening chapter, photography exemplifies the protagonist's futile attempts at visual mastery. Yet the role of the medium is not limited to scrutiny and detection. Photographs also play a central role in another narrative strand, namely in K.'s erotic encounters. While the opening chapter draws on the medium's capacity to arrest, record, and preserve evidence, photographs can also have the opposite effect: they can initiate a process of dissemination and exchange, in particular in the context of sexuality and desire. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, in *Der Proceß*

> we see a proliferating power of the photo, of the portrait, of the image.… In short, the portrait or the photo that marked a sort of artificial territoriality of desire now becomes a centre for the perturbation of situations or characters, a connector that precipitates the movement of deterritorialization. An expression freed from its constricting form and bringing about a similar liberation of contents.[17]

In this respect, the novel echoes another aspect of Kafka's personal writings, namely his fascination with the accumulation of photographs in a secretive and, as in the case of Pachinger's collection, transgressive manner. This eroticized blurring of the private–public divide is a prominent theme in *Der Proceß*. Here, images of different kinds are handled, displayed, and exchanged; yet this often results in the frustration, rather than the fulfilment, of desire.

Following his encounter with Fräulein Bürstner, whose pictures were the subject of fetishistic handling and male rivalry, photographs also underpin K.'s relationships with other women. In his conversation with Huld's nurse Leni, K. initially denies having a mistress,

[17] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 61.

but subsequently shows Leni a photograph of Elsa, a waitress and prostitute:

> Es war eine Momentphotographie, Elsa war nach einem Wirbeltanz aufgenommen, wie sie ihn in dem Weinlokal gern tanzte, ihr Rock flog noch im Faltenwurf der Drehung um sie her, die Hände hatte sie auf die Hüften gelegt und sah mit straffem Hals lachend zur Seite; wem ihr Lachen galt, konnte man aus dem Bild nicht erkennen. (GP 144)
>
> It was a snapshot of Elsa taken as she was spinning at the end of a dance she liked to perform at the wine tavern, her skirt still billowing up in folds flung out by the pirouette, her hands on her hips and head rigidly held aloft as she looked sideways, laughing. From the picture it was impossible to tell whom she was laughing at. (ET 86)

The revelation that K. is carrying a photograph of his beloved has obvious parallels with Kafka's own fetishistic attachment to Felice's photographs. Yet K.'s stance towards this picture is diametrically opposed to Kafka's anxious affection. He fends off Leni's enquiries, declaring that 'ich habe noch nicht einmal das Bild so genau angesehn, wie Sie' (GP 144–5) ['I've not even looked at the picture as closely as you have' (ET 86)]. This indifference reverses the author's photographic obsession and curiously jars with K.'s own overall outlook, his habit of subjecting encountered sights to close, detailed scrutiny.

While the protagonist's response is thus constructed in marked opposition to the author's own experience, the photograph in question is more manifestly linked to the correspondence. Elsa's snapshot is evidently inspired by the same photograph of Felice which had already provided the model for K.'s encounter with Fräulein Bürstner. Both Elsa and Fräulein Bürstner mirror Felice's pose of standing with her hand on her hip. In the case of Elsa, this posture is dynamized in a manner prefigured by Kafka's letter: 'Wie biegsam Du dastehst! Hätte ich Dich doch tanzen gesehn!' (B1 334) ['How supple you look! If only I had seen you dance!' (EF 105)]. The snapshot which in the letters had aroused Kafka's jealousy now recurs within a narrative of promiscuity and betrayal. As in *Der Verschollene*, then, the same photographic set-up is replicated across the narrative, interlinking different episodes. Yet while Fräulein Bürstner is stretched out on the chaise longue as the fetishized object of the male gaze, Elsa displays more agency and recalcitrance; her face is averted and her smile directed at an invisible

dance partner or observer. In this respect, her snapshot also reflects another one of Felice's pictures: the group photograph taken at the anniversary ball which arouses Kafka's jealousy.[18]

The renewed reference to Felice's photographs is not the only aspect which connects Elsa's image to the encounter with Fräulein Bürstner. As in the first chapter, photography triggers an erotically charged conversation:

'Sie ist stark geschnürt', sagte Leni und zeigte auf die Stelle, wo dies ihrer Meinung nach zu sehen war. 'Sie gefällt mir nicht, sie ist unbeholfen und roh. Vielleicht ist sie aber Ihnen gegenüber sanft und freundlich, darauf könnte man nach dem Bilde schließen. So große starke Mädchen wissen oft nichts anderes als sanft und freundlich zu sein. Würde sie sich aber für Sie opfern können?' 'Nein', sagte K., 'sie ist weder sanft und freundlich noch würde sie sich für mich opfern können. Auch habe ich bisher weder das eine noch das andere von ihr verlangt.' (GP 144)

'She is tightly laced', said Leni, and she pointed to the place where she thought this could be seen. 'I don't like her. She is clumsy and coarse. But perhaps she's gentle and kind with you. Big strong girls like that often can't be anything but gentle and kind. But could she sacrifice herself for you?' 'No', said K., 'she is neither gentle and kind nor could she sacrifice herself for me. But so far I've not asked her for one or the other.' (ET 86)

Leni subjects the image to a close analysis, trying to deduce Elsa's character from her appearance. Her probing questions about her rival create a sense of intimacy between herself and K.; indeed, as the scene evolves, photographic interpretation becomes the pretext for seduction. As in the scene with Fräulein Bürstner, then, photography acts as the catalyst for erotic encounters, a pattern prefigured in Kafka's personal writings; not only do the Weimar photographs of Margarethe Kirchner provide a pretext for conversation between Kafka and Felice, but the secret exchange of photographs with Grete Bloch leads into

[18] In his personal writings, Kafka recurrently expresses his fascination with dancing as an erotic spectacle, a fact which conversely explains his jealousy when Felice is involved in such activities. The Russian dancer Eugenie Eduardowa is the subject of some erotic fantasies in the early diaries (TB 10–11/ED 9–10), and in a letter to Felice, he recalls with excitement 'the dancing and singing of one negro girl' in a variety performance he visited with some friends, including Brod and his wife, while simultaneously emphasizing that he would never allow his own wife to visit such a show (B2 231/EF 285).

more dangerous territory and ultimately to the traumatic break-up in Berlin. The rewritten Pachinger episode in the diaries, in contrast, sheds a more critical light on the use of photographs as erotic trophies. Indeed, the photographic proliferation of desire in *Der Proceß* is similarly associated with the reification of intimacy. As the conversation about Elsa's photograph leads into a sexual encounter, Leni exclaims 'Sie haben mich eingetauscht' (GP 146) ['You've exchanged her for me' (ET 87)];[19] in the age of commodity culture, the traffic of images mirrors the substitution of one body for another.

As it turns out, the proliferation of images and desire is a feature which also characterizes the Court. On his second visit to the court-rooms, the wife of the Law-Court Attendant allows K. to have a closer look at some law books on the Judge's table:

> Es waren alte abgegriffene Bücher, ein Einbanddeckel war in der Mitte fast zerbrochen, die Stücke hiengen nur durch Fasern zusammen. 'Wie schmutzig hier alles ist', sagte K. kopfschüttelnd und die Frau wischte mit ihrer Schürze, ehe K. nach den Büchern greifen konnte wenigstens oberflächlich den Staub weg. K. schlug das oberste Buch auf, es erschien ein unanständiges Bild. Ein Mann und eine Frau saßen nackt auf einem Kanapee, die gemeine Absicht des Zeichners war deutlich zu erkennen, aber seine Ungeschicklichkeit war so groß gewesen, daß schließlich doch nur ein Mann und eine Frau zu sehen waren, die allzu körperlich aus dem Bilde hervorragten, übermäßig aufrecht dasaßen und infolge falscher Perspektive nur mühsam sich einander zuwendeten. K. blätterte nicht weiter sondern schlug nur noch das Titelblatt des zweiten Buches auf, es war ein Roman mit dem Titel: 'Die Plagen, welche Grete von ihrem Manne Hans zu erleiden hatte.' 'Das sind die Gesetzbücher, die hier studiert werden', sagte K. 'Von solchen Menschen soll ich gerichtet werden.' (GP 76–7)

> They were old, well-worn books; one cover had almost disintegrated in the middle, the sections hung together only by threads. 'How dirty everything is here', said K., shaking his head, and before he could reach for the books the woman wiped the dust off with her apron, superficially at least. K. opened the top book, revealing an indecent picture. A man and a woman were sitting

[19] On closer inspection, Leni's remarks is, as Boa has pointed out, rather counter-intuitive as it suggests that Leni is replaced by, rather than replacing, another woman (*Kafka: Gender*, 213). Her slip-up thus already anticipates her own fate in this endless chain of sexual encounters.

naked on a sofa; the artist's vulgar intention was clear enough, but his lack of skill was so great that in fact all that could be seen was a man and a woman whose bodies protruded out of the picture all too physically, sitting rigidly upright and, because of false perspective, finding the greatest difficulty in turning towards each other. K. looked no further but merely opened the second book at the title page. It was a novel called *The Torments Grete Had to Suffer from Her Husband Hans*. 'So these are the law books studied here', K. said. 'It's by people like this I'm supposed to be judged.' (ET 41)

These 'law books' straddle the boundary between the public and the private. Their official character is undermined by their seedy content designed for the viewer's private pleasure. The same hybridity also characterizes their representational status; although they contain drawings rather than photographs, such pornographic publications, being mass-produced, belong to the same genre as the magazine image proudly displayed in Gregor Samsa's bedroom.

Even though K. vocally expresses his disgust at the Court's dubious morality, the books in fact highlight the parallels between his own promiscuous behaviour and that of the Court representatives. The books' erotic content anticipates K.'s sexual liaisons during his trial, while also referring back to his attempted 'conquest' of Fräulein Bürstner seductively stretched out on her chaise longue.[20] Indeed, the law books' grubbiness, which alludes to their use as a masturbatory aid, echoes the illicit handling of Fräulein Bürstner's photographs by the male intruders. It is no coincidence that the wife of the Law-Court Attendant wipes the books before passing them to K., thus erasing any traces—fingerprints or otherwise—which such interferences might have left.[21]

Like Fräulein Bürstner's tainted photographs, the pornographic books juxtapose seediness and bourgeois respectability. The title of the second book situates its sadomasochistic scenario within a marital

[20] As he waits for Fräulein Bürstner to come home, K. also sits on the 'Kanapee' ['sofa'] in his room (GP 38/ET 18).

[21] In his 'Kafka' essay, Adorno comments on this notion of the trace, arguing that Kafka's narratives employ a perspective which accounts for reality as criminological evidence: 'Kafka nimmt die Schmutzspuren unter die Lupe, welche von den Fingern der Macht in der Prachtausgabe des Lebensbuchs zurückbleiben' ('Aufzeichnungen', 268) ['Kafka scrutinizes the smudges left behind in the deluxe edition of the book of life by the fingers of power' ('Notes', 256)].

context, while simultaneously evoking an incestuous version of the Grimms' fairy tale. Indeed, this title could act as a caption for the first book's illustration, an image characterized by conflicting representational codes. This crude pornographic scenario is undermined by the drawing's clumsy perspective but also, slightly paradoxically, by the sitters' all too physical appearance. Its erotic effect is thus undermined by an excessive, rather clinical, degree of realism, but also by its concessions to a more respectable pictorial genre; the couple's lack of bodily contact and their stiff, upright poses on the sofa—the centrepiece of the petit-bourgeois interior—are more reminiscent of a posed studio photograph than of seedy pornography.[22]

PAINTING: MANIPULATION AND REPLICATION

While photography plays an important role in Josef K.'s relationships with women, his encounters with the Court and its male representatives is mediated through painted portraits. Among the images featured in Kafka's works, Titorelli's paintings have received most critical attention. Here, I shall not repeat the many existing interpretations, which mostly focus on the paintings' symbolism and their significance for questions of justice, judgement, and punishment.[23]

[22] Some critics have even suggested that the seediness of the picture's content is a mere figment of K.'s imagination; as Speirs and Sandberg remark, his judgement of the picture as indecent 'reveals more about him than it does about the picture, which could equally well be described as "sad" since it shows two people in an intimate situation but incapable of communication' (*Franz Kafka*, 76). The false perspective which K. discerns in the picture could thus also apply to his own distorting gaze, his compulsion to project sexual undertones even into seemingly harmless scenes. Ronald Gray makes a similar point when he notes that 'the faults in the picture seem to be a matter of drawing technique rather than moral guilt or perversity', concluding that the picture's indecency is, like the bank clerks' interference with Fräulein Bürstner's photographs, a mere projection of K.'s own obsession with sexual obscenity (*Franz Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 109).

[23] Malcolm Pasley, for instance, identifies Michelangelo's Moses statue as a possible model. As he argues, Kafka might have become aware of this sculpture through Freud's essay 'Der Moses des Michelangelo' (1914), in which Freud stresses that Michelangelo's Moses looked as if he was about to get up ('Two Literary Sources of Kafka's *Der Prozeß*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 3 (1967), 142–7). See also Ralf R. Nicolai, *Kafkas 'Process': Motive und Gestalten* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1986), 182.

What is missing from these interpretations, however, is an engagement with the inherent anachronism of these images: with their role as traditional artworks commissioned, produced, and viewed in an age of mechanical reproduction. That said, as I shall argue, the paintings of *Der Proceß* are not simply cast in opposition to the photographic images that populate the novel; rather, they emerge as part of a dialectical configuration which critically illuminates the precarious dynamics between traditional and technical media in modern culture.

Josef K. enjoys in his bank the reputation of an art expert. He used to be a member 'des Vereins zur Erhaltung der städtischen Kunstdenkmäler' (GP 272) ['of the Society for the Conservation of Municipal Monuments' (ET 155)], although in reality he only joined the society for business reasons. This indicates a cunning, instrumentalizing attitude towards art and its cultural connotations. As it turns out, however, the images which K. encounters in the course of the novel reveal his deeply traditional investment in art as the site of authenticity, truth, and authority. When K. first enters the study of his lawyer Huld, his attention is immediately captured by a portrait:

> Besonders fiel ihm ein großes Bild auf, das rechts von der Tür hieng, er beugte sich vor, um es besser zu sehn. Es stellte einen Mann im Richtertalar dar; er saß auf einem hohen Tronsessel, dessen Vergoldung vielfach aus dem Bilde hervorstach. Das Ungewöhnliche war, daß dieser Richter nicht in Ruhe und Würde dort saß, sondern den linken Arm fest an Rücken- und Seitenlehne drückte, den rechten Arm aber völlig frei hatte und nur mit der Hand die Seitenlehne umfaßte, als wolle er im nächsten Augenblick mit einer heftigen und vielleicht empörten Wendung aufspringen um etwas Entscheidendes zu sagen oder gar das Urteil zu verkünden. Der Angeklagte war wohl zu Füßen der Treppe zu denken, deren oberste mit einem gelben Teppich bedeckte Stufen noch auf dem Bilde zu sehen waren. 'Vielleicht ist das mein Richter', sagte K. und zeigte mit einem Finger auf das Bild. (GP 141–2)

> He was especially struck by a large picture which hung to the right of the door. He leaned forward to see it better. It showed a man in the robes of a judge. He was sitting on a high throne-like chair whose gilding stood out prominently in the picture. The unusual thing about it was that this judge was not sitting in tranquil dignity but was pressing his left arm against the back and side of the chair and had his right arm completely free and just held the other arm of the chair with this hand as if his intention was to spring up in the next moment with a violent and perhaps outraged gesture to utter

something decisive or even to pronounce judgement. The defendant had to be imagined at the foot of the steps, whose upper ones, covered in yellow carpet, were visible in the picture. 'Perhaps that is my judge', said K., and he pointed his finger at the picture. (ET 84–5)

The painting's set-up and perspective situate the observer immediately beneath the judge's throne, in a position of supplication. The viewer is automatically cast in the role of the accused awaiting the damning verdict, an effect reinforced by the gilded throne of the stern judge, which lends this judicial scenario an archaic, biblical character. K. complies with the pictorial hierarchy both physically and mentally; not only does he emphasize his inferior position by bowing down to look at the image, but he instinctively takes the sitter to be his very own judge, thus identifying with the role imposed onto him as observer.

In terms of both content and perspective, the portrait is exemplary of the 'auratic' artwork theorized by Benjamin, which is viewed in a state of contemplative immersion rather than critical detachment. K.'s response is that of the traditional observer taken in by the encountered artwork, its air of presence, authority, and authenticity; yet his response also highlights the precarious power dynamics of this process which subjects the viewer—both physically and psychologically—to the aura of the picture.

K.'s contemplation is undermined by Leni, who turns out to be a more critical spectator, resilient against the picture's air of authority. Drawing on her personal—potentially intimate—acquaintance with the sitter, Leni exposes the painting's pompous set-up as a mere sham dictated by its sitter's vanity. As she points out, the depicted judge was in reality sitting on a kitchen chair covered by a horse blanket, and was, moreover, a tiny man whose figure had been elongated to make him appear taller (GP 142/ET 85).

Leni's demystifying interpretation exposes a mechanism of staging and manipulation at work in the portrait—an approach which also underlies, concealed by a facade of realism, the equally theatrical genre of the photographic studio portrait. The judge's portrait acts as a hyperbolic counterpart to the more subtly intimidating photographic displays of authority which structure Kafka's texts.[24]

[24] As Boa points out, this portrait might be yet another example of a scene motivated by the aforementioned photograph of Felice Bauer; amongst the pictures

Together with the photographs of Karl Rossmann's father and that of the anonymous young soldier in *Der Verschollene*, as well as the portrait of a confident Gregor Samsa in uniform, the judge's portrait partakes in an iconography of masculinity through which power is constructed, displayed, and disseminated in the visual sphere.

Compared to these photographs, where the desired effect is created through pose, attire, and backdrop, the judge's portrait is based on a more radical strategy of deception. That said, both pictorial genres are subjected to a process of deconstruction whereby their air of authority is dismantled. In *Der Verschollene* and *Die Verwandlung*, this effect is achieved primarily through a discrepancy between image and reality which emerges in the course of the narrative. In *Der Proceß*, in contrast, this process of deconstruction is more explicit and takes place on several levels. Not only does Leni expose the picture as a sham, but its aura of authority is further diminished during K.'s visit to Titorelli's studio. This visit to the site of artistic production has a disillusioning effect not because it confronts K. with the discrepancy between viewer and image but rather because it highlights the de-individualizing conventions which inform all of Titorelli's portraits.

In the painter's studio, K. comes across another, virtually identical portrait, this time drawn in pastels to cater for the taste of a female viewer (GP 197/ET 115) and thereby combining the purposes of intimidation and seduction. Apart from such differences in technique, however, the set-up of the throne and the rising judge is exactly replicated in this second portrait.[25] Like the photographs in *Die Verwandlung* and *Der Verschollene*, moreover, Titorelli's portraits derive their impact from a highly codified version of masculine authority. While working on *Der Proceß*, Kafka also wrote the 'Oklahoma'

on the wall behind Felice, Kafka identifies an image depicting a man wearing a beret, a cap worn by judges (*Kafka: Gender*, 195).

[25] While the previous image was informed by a sense of imposing immediacy, this pastel portrait gains a more auratic, elusive character through the reddish halo surrounding the head of the judge, and in particular through the mysterious figure hovering behind the throne, whose appearance shifts from a goddess of justice to one of victory and finally to a goddess of the hunt. More openly than the previous image, then, the apparent immediacy of the scene is suffused with an anti-realist, allegorical dimension.

chapter of *Der Verschollene*, in which—as we have seen—the image of the empty President's box exposes the theatricality at the heart of any display of power. The gilded throne in Titorelli's portraits resembles the golden balustrade of the theatre box; in both cases, ornate backdrops have superseded the male figures whom they purport to frame and enhance.

Although not in themselves photographs, Titorelli's paintings thus emulate both the clichéd pose of the bourgeois photographic portrait and its serial replication, exposing the de-individualizing tendencies at work in modern society. However, if this process erodes the verisimilitude of portraiture then this is even more apparent in another pictorial genre which seems relatively immune to social norms and conventions. The most formulaic images in Titorelli's studio are not his portraits but his landscapes:

'Eine Heidelandschaft', sagte der Maler und reichte K. das Bild. Es stellte zwei schwache Bäume dar, die weit von einander entfernt im dunklen Gras standen. Im Hintergrund war ein vielfarbiger Sonnenuntergang. 'Schön', sagte K., 'ich kaufe es.' K. hatte unbedacht sich so kurz geäußert, er war daher froh, als der Maler statt dies übel zu nehmen, ein zweites Bild vom Boden aufhob. 'Hier ist ein Gegenstück zu diesem Bild', sagte der Maler. Es mochte als Gegenstück beabsichtigt sein, es war aber nicht der geringste Unterschied gegenüber dem ersten Bild zu merken, hier waren die Bäume, hier das Gras und dort der Sonnenuntergang.… 'Das Motiv scheint Ihnen zu gefallen', sagte der Maler und holte ein drittes Bild herauf, 'es trifft sich gut, daß ich noch ein ähnliches Bild hier habe.' Es war aber nicht ähnlich, es war vielmehr die völlig gleiche alte Heidelandschaft. (GP 220–1)

'*A Moorland Scene*', said the painter, and handed K. a picture. It showed two spindly trees standing some distance apart in dark grass. In the background there was a multicoloured sunset. 'Nice', K. said. 'I'll buy it.' K. had spoken curtly without thinking, so he was relieved when the painter, instead of being offended, picked up another picture from the floor. 'Here's a companion piece to that picture', said the painter. It might have been meant as a companion piece, but there was not the slightest perceptible difference between this and the first picture. Here were the trees, here the grass, and there the sunset.… 'The subject seems to appeal to you', said the painter and produced a third picture, 'so it's a good thing I have another picture like those here.' But it was not just like them, it was the absolutely identical same old moorland scene. (ET 128)

In this barren landscape, with its frail trees lit up by a setting sun, nature is presented as a *nature morte*. While the portraits retained at least a semblance of individuality, the landscapes openly expose their quasi-photographic seriality. In the age of the technical media, traditional art emulates the effect of mechanical reproduction, even if the artist himself does not seem to realize the extent to which his paintings are determined by this principle. Although K. by contrast does recognize this effect, his purchase of not one but several of Titorelli's landscapes suggests that he too is gradually being drawn into this world of replication.

Kafka's *Proceß* presents us with an exploration of the artwork in the age of mechanical reproduction which exposes notions such as singularity, aura, and authenticity as deceptive and obsolete. This process does not, however, posit an absolute contrast between photographic and man-made images; on the contrary, it highlights the fact that the mechanisms of replication and manipulation apply across the boundaries of genres and representational techniques. In the course of the novel, K.'s initial supplication to the power dynamic of the judge's portrait, which reflects his investment in the court's authority, gives way to a cynical disillusionment which is, however, equally counterproductive. When he encounters his last painting, the altarpiece in the cathedral, K.'s initial interest in the only partially visible image quickly wanes; the anticipatory significance of Christ's burial is dissipated with reference to its 'gewöhnlicher Auffassung' ['conventional technique'] and the image dismissed as 'ein neueres Bild' (GP 281) ['a modern painting' (ET 160)] potentially tainted with the same flaws as Titorelli's paintings.

'DAS HAUS': THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

Josef K.'s trial is, as we have seen, underpinned by technical and man-made images which reveal the psycho-social power dynamics inherent in the act of viewing. While photographs contribute to the proliferation of desire in the novel, painted portraits construct, but also deconstruct, the court's masculine authority. Both strands, however, are brought together in the fragmentary chapter 'Das Haus'

('The House'), where photography is once again associated with heterosexual desire and rivalry, but also with a display of masculinity which reveals the homoerotic underpinnings of (male) authority.

Exhausted at the end of the working day, K. often stays behind in his office to take a brief nap. The dreams he has during this half-sleep take place in the law court where, according to Titorelli, his arrest was initially authorized. On his imaginary walks through its corridors, K. encounters a series of spectacles, the first of which is a group of Frau Grubach's tenants resembling the choir in a Greek tragedy:

> Immer traten dann als geschlossene Gruppe die Mieter der Frau Grubach auf, sie standen beisammen Kopf an Kopf mit offenen Mäulern wie ein anklagender Chor. Es waren viele Unbekannte unter ihnen, denn K. kümmerte sich schon seit langem um die Angelegenheiten der Pension nicht im Geringsten. Infolge der vielen Unbekannten machte es ihm aber Unbehagen sich näher mit der Gruppe abzugeben, was er aber manchmal tun mußte, wenn er dort Fräulein Bürstner suchte. Er überflog z. B. die Gruppe und plötzlich glänzten ihm zwei gänzlich fremde Augen entgegen und hielten ihn auf. (GP 349)

> Invariably at this point Frau Grubach's tenants appeared as a coherent group, they stood close together with open mouths like an accusing choir. There were many strangers among them, since for a long time K. had not been paying the slightest bit of attention to the goings-on in the boarding-house. Because of the many strangers, however, he felt uneasy about engaging more closely with the group, although this was what he sometimes had to do when he was looking among them for Fräulein Bürstner. He would for instance skim over the group and suddenly two entirely unknown eyes gleamed towards him and held him up.

The group of the open-mouthed tenants resembles a photograph in their statically silent appearance. This sight recurs in K.'s daydreams with an obsessive persistence; yet he merely skims over the scene distractedly, reluctant to engage with its familiar and unfamiliar faces. When his gaze is arrested it is not by a specific person but by a pair of eyes which cannot be attributed to a particular individual; rather than enabling a moment of personal contact, this eye contact only highlights K.'s paranoid sense of exposure. What is more, his fixation on these eyes initially prevents K. from discerning Fräulein Bürstner, his actual target, amongst the group: 'Er fand dann Fräulein Bürstner nicht, aber als er dann, um jeden Irrtum zu vermeiden nochmals suchte, fand er sie gerade in der Mitte der Gruppe, die Arme um

zwei Herren gelegt, die ihr zur Seite standen' (GP 349) ['He then failed to find Fräulein Bürstner, but when he then looked again to prevent any error, he found her right in the middle of the group, with her arms out around two gentlemen who stood on either side']. K.'s sudden discovery illustrates a principle familiar from Kafka's letters, where the fetishistic focus on a particular detail likewise prevents an understanding of the 'bigger picture'. In fact, K.'s dream vision of Fräulein Bürstner is based on a previously viewed photograph. Her discovery amongst the group

> machte unendlich wenig Eindruck auf ihn, besonders deshalb da dieser Anblick nichts neues war, sondern nur die unauslöschliche Erinnerung an eine Photographie vom Badestrand, die er einmal in Fräulein Bürstners Zimmer gesehen hatte. Immerhin trieb dieser Anblick K. von der Gruppe weg und wenn er auch noch öfters hierher zurückkehrte so durcheilte er nun mit langen Schritten das Gerichtsgebäude kreuz und quer. (GP 349)
>
> made infinitely little impression on him, especially since this sight was nothing new but merely the indelible memory of a photograph taken on the beach which he had once seen in Fräulein Bürstner's room. Even so, this sight drove K. away from the group and although he would frequently return to it, he now hurried through the corridors of the court building with long strides.

Despite repeated references to Fräulein Bürstner's photographs in the first chapters of the narrative, their content remains a conspicuous blind spot for most of the novel. This gap is retrospectively filled when one of these pictures comes back to haunt K., who finds himself torn between evasion and obsessive scrutiny. Although K. stresses his indifference, this claim is belied by the 'indelible memory' left by the image which depicts the Fräulein framed by two male strangers. This photograph has a particular resonance within the narrative and beyond; not only is Fräulein Bürstner's room inspired by an image of Felice Bauer, but the snapshot displayed within this interior is likely to be modelled on another one of her photographs.

In August 1913, Felice spent her summer holidays on the island of Sylt together with her cousin Erna Danziger. Kafka, in contrast, was tied to his office and, in his letters, urged Felice to send some holiday snapshots: 'Du, in Seebädern wird soviel photographiert, ich möchte Dich z.B. im Strandkorb sitzen sehn oder in den Dünen, könnte ich

nicht ein Bild bekommen?' (B2 253) ['Listen, photography is very much the fashion at seaside resorts; I should like to see you sitting in a beach chair, for instance, or in the sand; couldn't I be sent a photograph?' (EF 298)]. In two subsequent letters, Kafka impatiently reminds Felice of his request (B2 264, 267/EF 306, 308); yet his further correspondence contains no other reference to such pictures. Having encountered Kafka's previous fits of jealousy, Felice may well have chosen to ignore his persistent requests. If she did give in to his demands, however, Kafka's unresponsiveness is rather conspicuous, given his habit of commenting extensively on each of her pictures. The question of whether Kafka did in fact receive any holiday photographs will have to remain open; what we do know is that Felice's boarding house was located near the 'modern' mixed beach rather than the more traditional all-female one.[26] The image of Fräulein Bürstner on the beach could thus be based on an actual holiday snapshot, reinforcing Kafka's more general paranoia about Felice's independent lifestyle and possible suitors. Just as likely, however, is the possibility that the image which so haunts K. never existed and that it was a mere figment of Kafka's jealous imagination. Indeed, the snapshot described in the novel is reminiscent of another picture which Kafka did receive: the group photograph of Felice at the anniversary ball, held tightly by a potential rival.

The image of Fräulein Bürstner is not the only disconcerting sight with which K. is confronted during his daydream. On his imaginary walk through the law courts, he also comes across another spectacle which imposes itself onto him with tantalizing vividness. Like the sight of Fräulein Bürstner, this scene is derived from a photographic source, although this is not made explicit to the reader:

Er kannte sich immer sehr gut in allen Räumen aus, verlorene Gänge, die er nie gesehen haben konnte, erschienen ihm vertraut, als wären sie seine Wohnung seit jeher, Einzelheiten drückten sich ihm mit schmerzlichster Deutlichkeit immer wieder ins Gehirn, ein Ausländer z. B. spazierte in einem Vorsaal, er war gekleidet ähnlich einem Stierfechter, die Taille war eingeschnitten wie mit Messern, sein ganz kurzes ihn steif umgebendes Röckchen bestand aus gelblichen grobfädigen Spitzen und dieser Mann ließ sich, ohne sein Spazierengehn einen Augenblick einzustellen, unaufhörlich

[26] Stach, *Die Jahre der Entscheidung*, 355.

von K. bestaunen.… Er [K.] kannte alle Zeichnungen der Spitzen, alle fehlerhaften Fransen, alle Schwingungen des Röckchens und hatte sich doch nicht sattgesehn.… 'Was für Maskeraden bietet das Ausland!' dachte er und riß die Augen noch stärker auf. Und im Gefolge dieses Mannes blieb er bis er sich auf dem Kanapee herumwarf und das Gesicht ins Leder drückte. (GP 349–50)

He always knew his way round all the rooms very well; lost corridors, which he could never have seen before, seemed familiar to him as if they had always been his home. Details impressed themselves repeatedly onto his brain with the most painful sharpness, a foreigner for instance was parading up and down in an antechamber, he was dressed like a bullfighter, his waist was cut in as if with knives, his very short jacket which surrounded him stiffly consisted of yellowish coarse lace, and this man let himself be incessantly admired by K. without stopping his walk even for a moment.… He [K.] knew all the details of the lace, all the missing tassels, all the movements of the jacket, and yet he could not see enough.… 'What masquerades foreigners offer!' he thought and opened his eyes still further. And he remained in this man's thrall until he threw himself onto his front and pressed his face into the leather of the sofa.

The strangely familiar corridors of the law court harbour an exotic spectacle. It remains unclear whether the man parading up and down one of the antechambers is a court official, another defendant, a witness, or simply an observer. He is described in only the vaguest terms as an 'foreigner', and while his attire resembles that of a bullfighter, K. interprets his appearance as a theatrical 'masquerade', thus questioning its authenticity. This stranger is reminiscent of other exotic figures whom K. encounters during his trial—the guard with his travelling suit, the Whipper with his tanned sailor's face, and the Italian business partner with his perfumed moustache—all of whom exert a strange fascination over K. In this sequence of ostentatiously paraded male bodies, however, the bullfighter provides the most alluringly unsettling spectacle. His profession, origin, and even gender escape clear classification, a fact which only heightens K.'s immense fascination. Indeed, this exotic spectacle reveals a fundamental power dynamic which informs K.'s dealings with the Court and his more general stance as an observer.

K. subjects the matador's appearance to close scrutiny; yet his fetishistic fixation on details of the costume does not lead to increased

clarity but only highlights the ambivalence of the matador figure, who oscillates between Mediterranean machismo and camp effeminacy. While the matador's self-display thus ties in with other erotic spectacles in the novel, this scene also evokes K.'s encounters with Titorelli's paintings. Looking at the judge's portrait in Huld's study, K. has to lean forward to see it more clearly, a submissive posture echoed in his eagerness to take in this exotic spectacle: 'Gebückt umschlich ihn K. und staunte ihn mit angestrengt aufgerissenen Augen an' (GP 350) ['In a hunched posture K. encircled him and looked at him with eyes which he anxiously kept wide open'].

K.'s transfixed encounter with the bullfighter has a photographic subtext. In a letter to Felice of 1 November 1912, Kafka describes a recurrent dream which has haunted him during his afternoon naps: 'eine Woche lang habe ich in diesem Schlaf nur Montegriner gesehn mit einer äußerst widerlichen, Kopfschmerzen verursachenden Deutlichkeit jedes Details ihrer komplicierten Kleidung' (B1 204) ['for a whole week I saw nothing but Montenegrins in my sleep, in extremely disagreeable clarity, which gave me headaches, I saw every detail of their complicated dress' (EF 22)]. Kafka wrote this during the time of the Balkan War, and his dream is, as Stach points out, likely to be derived from a newspaper image of a Montenegro soldier.[27] Kafka's novel replaces the soldier with a bullfighter,[28] yet both episodes occur during a (day)dream and are linked by their excessively detailed character; while Kafka describes this experience as revolting and pain-inducing, K. likewise watches the bullfighter 'incessantly', feeling himself invaded by the details of his appearance.

In its photographic sharpness, this dream vision marks the epitome of K.'s detective-style scrutiny. It is only in this dream episode that the full, compulsive extent of his visual scrutiny becomes apparent: 'er hatte sich schon längst sattgesehn oder noch richtiger er hatte es niemals ansehen wollen aber es ließ ihn nicht' (GP 350) ['he had already seen enough a long time ago, or even more to the point he had never wanted to look in the first place but it wouldn't let him

[27] Stach, *Die Jahre der Entscheidung*, 254.

[28] Indeed, Kafka's strategy of textual transposition is encapsulated in his description of the matador's waist as 'eingeschnitten', 'cut in'—a formulation which playfully alludes to his cut-out, *ausgeschnitten*, origin.

go']. Although the referential indeterminacy of this 'it' leaves it open whether K.'s voyeuristic obsession is motivated by an inner urge or an external force, this daydream exposes an insidious mechanism at work within *Der Proceß*: K.'s scrutiny of Court representatives, rather than gaining him any insights into his own case, draws him ever more closely into the Court's subjugating power.

Despite its apparent inaccessibility, then, the Court's authority is not based on invisibility but on strikingly alluring images and displays; photographs, paintings, and unmediated scenes all attract K.'s attention, subjecting him to sights at once intimidating and alluring. His detective-style scrutiny of the Court and its representatives is thus heightened and indeed anticipated by the Court's spectacular, exhibitionist dimensions. They simultaneously fuel and thwart K.'s attempts to make sense of his situation, drawing his attention to details which merely obscure the 'bigger picture'. This inescapable link between vision and disempowerment reflects Kafka's own frustration at the sight of Felice's photographs. For his protagonist, scrutiny and analysis do not lead to clarity and emancipation; rather, his captivation by the sights of the Court becomes synonymous with his psychological and, eventually, physical entrapment.

'REPRESENTATION AND EXECUTION'

Like much of the novel, the concluding chapter 'Ende' has a photographic subtext. In this case, however, the underlying images are not derived from Kafka's private correspondence but have a different and, within the context of Kafka's literary writings, exceptional source. The novel's final episode draws on a text which Kafka wrote in his professional capacity, during his employment by the Workers' Accident Insurance Company. This article takes on a singular role within Kafka's writings, as it is his only piece which not only comments on photography but which also contains photographic illustrations.

In 1914, Kafka wrote an article for the company's annual report in which he drew attention to the unsafe working conditions in quarries. This report is accompanied by fifteen photographs; in his text, Kafka refers to these images in a manner which, given the

19. Quarry; illustration in Kafka's essay 'Die Unfallverhütung in den Steinbruchbetrieben', 1914.

official context, is rather unorthodox. Not only does he comment on each picture in great detail, but the style of his descriptions also transgresses the stylistic conventions of an insurance report. Rather than maintaining an analytical, objective distance, his piece consists of a series of dramatic and highly evocative mini-narratives. One of these comments reads:

Der Anblick dieses Bruches ist erschreckend. Alles ist von Abraum, Abfall und Schutt überfüllt. Der Felsen ist zerklüftet in einer Art, daß man die ursprüngliche Säulen- und Bankenbildung der Steinmassen mehr ahnt als sieht. Oberhalb des Zeichens a) steht ein vor der 40 m hohen Felswand kaum erkennbarer Arbeiter. Das Gerölle oberhalb seines Standpunktes, das auf etwa 1000 m^3 abgeschätzt werden kann, ist beim Tauwetter im März 1914 abgestürzt. Glücklicherweise befand sich zur Zeit des Absturzes die Arbeiterschaft bei der Jause, sonst wäre sie in ihrer Gesamtheit begraben worden. (A 405)

The sight of this quarry is shocking. Everything is overflowing with rubble, rubbish and debris. The rock is fissured in such a way that the original

pillar and bank formations of the stone have to be guessed rather than seen. Above the mark a) stands a worker who can hardly be discerned in front of the 40-metre-high rock face. The rubble above his position, which amounts to an estimated 1000 m^3, collapsed during a thaw in March 1914. Fortunately the workers were on their break at the time of the collapse, otherwise they would all have been buried.

In another case, Kafka even invests the described photograph with both sound and movement:

Die Lebensgefährlichkeit der Arbeit in diesem Bruche muß jeder Laie erkennen. Ununterbrochen rollen Steinstücke herunter, ununterbrochen hört man das Echo von dem Aneinanderschlagen der Steine. Nach dem Arbeiter in der Mitte des Bildes kann man die Höhe der Felswand auf etwa 20 m abschätzen. (A 404)

Every layman must recognize the lethal danger posed by work in this quarry. Lumps of rock are ceaselessly rolling down, and ceaselessly one can hear the echo of the stones colliding. Given the worker in the centre of the image, the height of the rock face can be estimated at about 20 metres.

These descriptions reflect the author's strong emotional and imaginative engagement with the images, which he describes as sites of lethal danger. Kafka's commentary invests the inserted photographs with a sense of looming threat; text and images are juxtaposed to create an atmosphere of menace and suspense. For this purpose, the depicted scenes are inserted into a narrative of 'before' and 'after'. In the case of the first picture, this tension is further heightened by the viewer's knowledge that the image was taken prior to the subsequent collapse; by commenting on its anticipatory nature, Kafka's report turns the described photograph into the harbinger of a catastrophe which has already happened.[29] Indeed, Kafka spells out this twofold temporal structure in his concluding recommendations. In a section headed 'Photographisches Festhalten der Situation nach Unfällen' ['Photographic Recording of the Situation after Accidents'], he recommends photography as a means of reconstructing the situation which preceded the actual accident: 'Die photographischen

[29] This is a dynamic which Roland Barthes discerns in photography more generally; commenting on the photograph of a young prisoner awaiting his execution, he writes: 'I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake' (*Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 2000), 96).

Aufnahmen sollen … nach geschehenem Unfall die charakteristische Situation festhalten, welche zum Unfall geführt hat' (A 413) ['After an accident, the photographic recordings should try to capture the typical situation which led to the accident']. Photography is here elevated from a mere record of the status quo to the more constructive position of an analytical tool which can be used to reconstruct the events preceding a given catastrophe.

Kafka wrote this report in 1914, the year when he was working on *Der Proceß*. His evocative account of the quarry photographs has its literary counterpart in the novel's concluding chapter, which is set in a similar location. That said, this final chapter reveals a very different atmosphere and tone. Here, the quarry is the site not of lethal accidents but of a carefully and rationally prepared execution. What is more, in *Der Proceß* the deserted quarry is described as a tranquil, almost peaceful place: 'Überall lag der Mondschein mit seiner Natürlichkeit und Ruhe, die keinem andern Licht gegeben ist' (GP 310) ['The moonlight covered everything with the natural serenity possessed by no other light' (ET 177)]. This 'dreary and deserted' (GP 310/ET 177) site is far removed from the Court's enticing spectacles, but it is also diametrically opposed to the debris and chaos which characterized the photographs in Kafka's report. The only detail reminiscent of this chaos is one single 'losgebrochener Stein' ['detached boulder'] located 'nahe der Bruchwand' (GP 311) ['near the rock face' (ET 177)] — that part of the quarry which according to Kafka's report harbours lethal danger for the workers. In the novel, this place has similar associations, but again the effect here is deliberate rather than accidental, as the stone provides the site of K.'s execution.

As in *Der Verschollene*, then, photographs provide the subtext for an unsettling, even lethal conclusion. While the quarry location forges a link between Kafka's insurance report and his novel, however, the tone of the two accounts is very different. In his official report, Kafka abandons his professional detachment, using dramatic captions which highlight the danger lurking behind the photographic scenes. In *Der Proceß*, on the other hand, the empathy of Kafka's professional report gives way to a narrative which emulates the gaze of the camera in its coldly detailed detachment. This photographic subtext comes out in one particular scene. Once the two men have undressed K. for his execution, they lean his body against the stone and rest his head on

top of it. K. does not resist their attempts but even tries to assist them, yet 'trotz alles Entgegenkommens, das ihnen K. bewies, blieb seine Haltung eine sehr gezwungene und unglaubwürdige' (GP 311) ['in spite of … K.'s willing cooperation, his posture remained very forced and unconvincing' (ET 177)]. K. is not merely positioned for his execution, but his body is carefully arranged as if he were posing for a photograph. Despite his cooperation, however, K. cannot give this final, horrific snapshot a natural appearance: the contrived character of his pose exposes its underlying coercion.

K.'s dying pose echoes other, equally contrived, tableaux in the novel; while the judges in Titorelli's paintings are all depicted in the same aggressive posture, the pornographic law books depict a man and woman who face each other in an awkward, contorted manner. At the end of the novel, K.'s body is thus inserted into a lurid gallery of power, pornography, and execution which anticipates Walter Benjamin's dictum that photography marks a site of 'representation und execution'. In *Der Proceß*, the imposition of such a photographic perspective quite literally coincides with the extermination of the individual. As K. looks up in the moment before his death, his gaze is captured by the house nearby: 'Wie ein Licht aufzuckt, so fuhren die Fensterflügel eines Fensters dort auseinander' (GP 312) ['The casement window flew open like a light flashing on' (ET 312)], revealing the frail and almost hallucinatory figure of a potential rescuer. In contrast to the light emanating from the Law in the Priest's parable, which is described as a continuous radiating glow, this light, taken by K. as a last, elusive sign of hope, resembles a photographic flash, capturing the protagonist's death in a coldly revealing narrative snapshot.

7

Optics of Power: 'Blumfeld', 'Ein Hungerkünstler', and *Das Schloß*

Over the course of his literary career, Kafka's fascination with photography gives way to an increasing awareness of the ambiguities of the medium. In his correspondence with Felice Bauer, as in *Der Proceß*, Kafka explores how photographs attract and yet defy the viewer's desire for interpretation. That said, at this stage both Kafka and his characters still hold on to the belief that photographs, despite their inherent opacity, possess a discernible meaning. In Kafka's later writings, in contrast, this confidence is progressively undermined; here, a deeper scepticism emerges, concerning both photography's 'truth-character' and its potential to enable a better understanding of reality. Indeed, this scepticism is accompanied by a more general mistrust in the reliability of visual perception as a tool of intellectual judgement and (self-)knowledge.

While photography thus remains a recurrent theme in Kafka's later fictional and personal writings, it takes on a more precarious status in these texts. Works such as 'Ein Hungerkünstler' ('A Hunger Artist', 1922) and *Das Schloß* (*The Castle*, 1922) are linked through a shared sense that photographs provides no reliable or immediate access to reality and that they can on the contrary be subject to misinterpretation and manipulation. This deeply rooted scepticism about photographic representation can be traced back to the fragment 'Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle' ('Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor', 1915), in which Kafka explores the deceptive role of photography in political propaganda. The 'Blumfeld' fragment incorporates Kafka's experience of news coverage in the First World War, while 'Ein Hungerkünstler' illustrates the destructive impact of the culture

industry on traditional, pre-technological forms of entertainment. In *Das Schloß*, finally, photography becomes emblematic of the individual's futile struggle for social acceptance and self-fulfilment. All three texts thus testify to a fundamental disillusionment with photography as a tool of visual mastery and self-understanding; as a result, the medium becomes exemplary of the subject's disempowerment in modern society.

SNAPSHOTS OF HISTORY: 'BLUMFELD EIN ÄLTERER JUNGGESELLE'

The First World War has been described as the first 'modern' war not only because of its unprecedented reliance on technological warfare, but also because it was the first international conflict to be fully documented in the technical media. The telegraph, telephone, radio, and film were all employed for purposes of military strategy as well as political propaganda. Of these media technologies, however, photography played the most central and versatile role; aerial photography enabled the surveillance of enemy territory, while pictures of the trenches inscribed the image of the war into the collective imagination. Images of the war were disseminated in newsreels, newspapers, and magazines, on postcards and private snapshots, providing soldiers and civilians with a steady stream of sights and impressions.[1]

As a non-combatant,[2] Kafka experienced the war only indirectly, through reports of his conscripted brothers-in-law and, above all, through media coverage. Given his lifelong fascination with the mass media, it is rather surprising that the extensive coverage of the war seems to have left hardly any traces in his writings. In fact, during the early months of the war, Kafka harked back to a photograph of a *previous* conflict, the Balkan War of 1912–13, as his inspiration for

[1] On the role of photography in the First World War, see Bernd Hüppauf, 'Kriegsfotografie', in Wolfgang Michalka (ed.), *Der Erste Weltkrieg: Wirkung, Wahrnehmung, Analyse* (Munich: Piper, 1994), 875–909.

[2] In 1914, Kafka was declared unfit to serve. For his experience of the war and its impact on Kafka's surroundings, see Reiner Stach, *Kafka: Die Jahre der Entscheidung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002), 530–5, 564–75, 594–605.

the bullfighter passage in *Der Proceß*. Images of the current world war, however, which was raging across Europe and would have severe implications for Kafka's family and friends, do not seem to have entered his literary universe.

The outbreak of the First World War in the summer of 1914 coincided with a time of personal crisis for Kafka, who had just broken off his engagement with Felice Bauer. After the break-up, Kafka went on holiday to Denmark with the writer Ernst Weiss. During the weeks of July 1914, Kafka's diaries and letters do not make a single reference to the mounting political tension, containing instead descriptions of other holidaymakers. The obvious conclusion, drawn by many commentators, is that Kafka was too wrapped up in his personal grievances to have much interest in world politics.[3] Often cited in this respect is the famously laconic diary entry of 2 August 1914 in which Kafka finally breaks his silence about the war only to confirm his apparent indifference: 'Deutschland hat Rußland den Krieg erklärt.—Nachmittag Schwimmschule' (TB 543) ['Germany has declared war on Russia.—Went swimming in the afternoon' (ED 301)].

That said, a subsequent diary entry describing a military parade in Prague, which was written only four days later, tells a different story: 'Patriotischer Umzug. Rede des Bürgermeisters.... Ich stehe dabei mit meinem bösen Blick. Diese Umzüge sind eine der widerlichsten Begleiterscheinungen des Krieges.... Natürlich reißen sie manchen mit. Organisiert war es gut' (TB 546–7) ['Patriotic parade. Speech by the mayor.... I stand there with my malignant gaze. These parades are one of the most disgusting accompaniments of the war.... Naturally they carry many others along with them. It was well organized' (ED 302)]. Unlike many of his contemporaries, and many writers in particular, Kafka remains deliberately detached from this display of patriotism; in his account, he maintains the 'malignant gaze' of the critical outsider, watching this pompous parade from the margins, as a passive observer.[4]

[3] For a recent example of this argument, see Stach, *Die Jahre der Entscheidung*, 519.

[4] As Stach points out, a comparison with the manuscript reveals that Kafka's detachment is less an immediate response than the result of subsequent reflection. Originally, his comment read, 'Organisiert war es *auch* gut' (TBA 322; my emphasis)

The above passage could be seen as a rare exception, an isolated reference to the First World War in Kafka's predominantly apolitical and ahistorical writings. This notion, however, is challenged by a prose text which demonstrates Kafka's acute awareness of the war; the fragment 'Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle' provides a subtle analysis of the diplomatic manoeuvres leading up to the conflict and of the underlying political and psychological dynamics. More importantly, these questions are explored through the photographic lens, illustrating Kafka's active engagement with the mass media and their role in this conflict. Indeed, the 'Blumfeld' fragment's analytical dimension is underlined by the time of its creation. The text is inspired by a photograph which Kafka had seen half a year earlier, in July 1914, and yet it is only written well into the war, in spring 1915 (NIA 76). As a result, the 'Blumfeld' story explores the events leading up to it with hindsight, with the knowledge of what is to come.[5]

As several commentators have pointed out, the 'Blumfeld' fragment is something of a narrative experiment.[6] It is structured around the repetition of the same narrative configuration—over its course, the protagonist encounters a series of doubles or pairs which attach themselves to him, forming a triangular structure with Blumfeld at its apex. The first of these pairs are two bouncing celluloid balls which Blumfeld finds in his flat and which follow him around, mimicking his every step. They form a peculiar mechanical extension to his body; indeed, Blumfeld worries that the balls might be understood as 'etwas zu ihm Gehöriges …, das bei Beurteilung seiner Person irgendwie mit herangezogen werden mußte' (N1 247) ['something belonging to him, something which … , in passing judgement on his person, had somehow to be taken into consideration' (ES 194)]. This triangular structure then repeats itself in his encounters with the housekeeper

['It was *also* well organized'], and only the retrospectively deleted 'auch' shifts the emphasis from the appreciation of the whole event to a more subversive analysis of its skilful organization *(Die Jahre der Entscheidung*, 532).

[5] For a more detailed exploration of Kafka's story in relation to the war, see my 'Snapshots of History: Franz Kafka's "Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle" and the First World War', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 39 (2006), 24–43.

[6] Lienhard Bergel, 'Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor', in Angel Flores (ed.), *The Kafka Problem* (New York: Octagon Books, 1963), 172–8: 172, and Andrew J. Webber, *The 'Doppelgänger': Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 327.

and her son, with two little girls and, finally, with the two 'assistants' in Blumfeld's office.

Another episode, however, which transposes this triangular structure into a rather different context can be found towards the beginning of the story. To distract himself from the bouncing balls, Blumfeld tries to read the newly arrived issue of a French magazine to which he has subscribed. Although he initially must force himself to pay attention, his gaze is soon drawn to a large photograph. This picture

> stellt die Begegnung zwischen dem Kaiser von Russland und dem Präs[identen] von Frankreich dar. Sie findet auf einem Schiff statt. Ringsherum bis in die Ferne sind noch viele andere Schiffe, der Rauch ihrer Schornsteine verflüchtigt sich im hellen Himmel. Beide, der Kaiser und der Präs[ident] sind eben in langen Schritten einander entgegengeeilt und fassen einander gerade bei der Hand. Hinter dem Kaiser wie hinter dem Pr[äsidenten] stehn je zwei Herren. Gegenüber den freudigen Gesichtern des Ka[isers] und des P[räsidenten] sind die Gesichter der Begleiter sehr ernst, die Blicke jeder Begleitgruppe vereinigen sich auf ihrem Herrscher. Tiefer unten, der Vorgang spielt sich offenbar auf dem höchsten Deck des Schiffes ab, stehen vom Bildrand abgeschnitten lange Reihen salutierender Matrosen. (N1A 206)

shows a meeting between the Czar of Russia and the President of France. This takes place on a ship. All about as far as can be seen are many other ships, the smoke from their funnels vanishing in the bright sky. Both Czar and President have just rushed toward each other with long strides and at this moment are clasping one another by the hand. Behind the Czar as well as behind the President stand two men. By comparison with the gay faces of the Czar and the President, the faces of their attendants are very solemn, the eyes of each group focused on their master. Lower down—the scene evidently takes place on the top deck—stand long lines of saluting sailors cut off by the margin. (ES 187)

This passage stands out from the rest of the story, and indeed from Kafka's work more generally, for its unusual degree of historical specificity. The reference to two contemporary political leaders is singular in Kafka's writings, which do not commonly contain references to historical figures. In fact, Kafka subsequently deleted this passage altogether (N1A 205–7), perhaps feeling that it was too easily recognizable for his contemporaries. The fate of the passage within the history of Kafka editions underlines its rather exceptional character. While it is relegated to the variants in the recent Critical Edition, it

is included in the original edition by Max Brod, who deemed the passage important enough to include it—albeit in brackets—within the main text.[7] This editorial ambivalence reflects the passage's precarious status within the narrative. As a long excursus, it interrupts the main storyline, opening up this domestic scene towards a wider political context. At the same time, Blumfeld's encounter with the magazine image is by no means a random insertion; on the contrary, it forms a carefully constructed *mise en abyme* for the text as a whole, as it condenses its underlying issues and concerns. Its inclusion—as well as its subsequent deletion—sheds a revealing light on the story itself and on its author's response to contemporary political events.

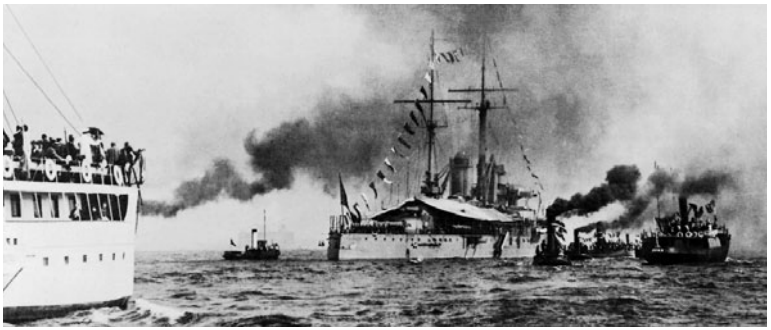
Blumfeld's magazine image refers to a crucial moment in European history. However, the encounter it depicts did not take place during the war itself but in the weeks leading up to it. In July 1914, the French President Raymond Poincaré paid a state visit to Czar Nicholas II in St Petersburg (20–23 July). Within the countdown to the war, this meeting played a decisive role; after the assassination of the Austrian crown prince and his wife in Sarajevo, the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, effectively a declaration of war, had been written and signed by Kaiser Franz Josef by 21 July. However, it was not until 23 July 1914 that the ultimatum was delivered; Austria and its German ally did not want to leave anything to chance, and they agreed that it would be imprudent to hand over the ultimatum while two of their chief enemies, France and Russia, were in the same place and hence in a position to formulate a common response. Thus the ultimatum was delivered in Belgrade at 6 p.m. on 23 July, timed to coincide exactly with Poincaré's departure from St Petersburg.[8] Given this background, photographs of the state visit provide a snapshot of Europe on the brink of war, in the process of frantic diplomatic and military preparations.

[7] Franz Kafka, *Beschreibung eines Kampfes: Novellen, Skizzen, Aphorismem aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Max Brod (Prague: Mercy, 1936), 147–8.

[8] As early as 11 July 1914, the handing over of the ultimatum was linked to Poincaré's departure from Russia. Once the exact hour of his departure became known, the time of its submission was moved by another hour. See Imanuel Geiss (ed.), *Julikrise und Kriegsausbruch 1914: Eine Dokumentensammlung* (Hanover: Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1963), i. 273.

The magazine image in Kafka's story is obviously modelled on this encounter; during the state visit, Czar and President inspected the fleet of Russian warships in Kronstadt. But where would Kafka have come across the image he describes in his text? The German and Austrian press commented on this visit only in passing; the French press, in contrast, provided more extensive coverage, and accordingly it is in a French publication that Kafka's protagonist discovers the image. Interestingly, however, none of the photographs published in French illustrated magazines matches Kafka's description entirely. While many reflect parts of the description, none correspond to the overall arrangement. Yet a closer look at the passage reveals that this is hardly surprising. Kafka describes what is in effect an impossible photographic scenario, a combination of long-shot and close-up. On the one hand, Blumfeld's magazine photo has panoramic elements, depicting the ship at the centre and other vessels surrounding it, whose steam rises up to the sky. On the other hand, the picture is a detailed enough close-up to capture the facial expressions of the two leaders and their attendants. This impression is further enforced by the lines of soldiers which are cut off at the margins, a detail which jars with its panoramic elements. In effect, then, a photograph like the one described by Kafka could not actually have existed.

The solution to this photographic conundrum is that Kafka simply merged two separate images both of which were reproduced on the



20. State visit of French President Raymond Poincaré to St Petersburg; *Le Monde illustré*, 1 August 1914, 68.

21. Poincaré and Nicholas II inspecting the fleet of Russian warships; *Le Monde illustré*, 1 August 1914, 68.

same page in the French magazine *Le Monde illustré* on 1 August 1914. In his text, Kafka performs a narrative photomontage lending his story a wider political dimension. Indeed, the reference to this state visit radically challenges the notion of Kafka's political indifference and self-absorption in July 1914. Yet while this episode marks one of the most immediate references to political events in Kafka's writings, the historical photographs are also subtly and strategically adapted to tie in with the surrounding narrative. Thus the historical context does not merely invade the literary sphere, but is adapted to contribute to the narrative dynamic.

Kafka's description of the picture establishes a contrast between the public figures in the foreground and the rows of anonymous soldiers behind them, a set-up extended to the fleet of ships in the background. The overall effect is that of a concentric, hierarchical arrangement which shows the two political leaders backed up by a powerful military apparatus. To emphasize this point, the soldiers in Kafka's version, unlike in the original photograph, are not actually on the same level as the statesmen. Instead, they are said to be positioned 'lower down' on the decks, reflecting their place at the bottom of the military hierarchy. The wording of Kafka's description picks up

on this aspect. The lines of sailors which frame the encounter are 'cut off', not only 'by the margin' but also from political decision-making.

The most important change, however, which Kafka made to the original pictures concerns the centre of the scene. In the historical footage, President and Czar are seen passing along the lined-up sailors side by side, whereas in Kafka's version they meet each other face on. Yet although the focus of the scene seems to be on the two leaders, its most revealing participants are the two pairs of attendants standing behind each head of state. In the original photograph, the two leaders are followed by a single pair of uniform-clad men, but in Kafka's symmetrical arrangement, there are two pairs of attendants, each pair facing the other. It is this detail which establishes the connection to the rest of the story with its various triangular configurations.

The doubles which Blumfeld encounters in the course of the text have an unnerving and unsettling effect, undermining his sense of individuality and self-control. The pairs of attendants in the photograph play a more ambivalent role. Although they are not immediately recognizable, their names are given in the caption (N1A 206/ES 187–8), thus lifting them above the level of anonymity. In this respect, they stand in between the heads of state in the foreground and the sailors in the background, bridging the gap between the leaders and the anonymous masses. In this capacity, however, they also undermine the picture's structural basis—the contrast between individuality and uniformity. The attendants have the uncanny effect of duplicating their superiors, thus undercutting the model of charismatic leadership through a de-individualizing process of doubling and replication. What is more, their serious expressions contrast with the smiling faces of Czar and President, thus belying the cheerful facade of the encounter.

On one level, then, the picture is a *mise en abyme* of the entire story, a reflection of its overall structure.[9] However, if we as readers merely focus on the *parallels* between the image and the wider narrative, then we are just as misled by the photograph as

[9] Dieter Hasselblatt, *Zauber und Logik: Eine Kafka-Studie* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1964), 104.

Blumfeld himself, whose response to the picture is very revealing indeed:

> Bl[umfeld] betrachtet allmählich das Bild mit mehr Teilnahme, hält es dann ein wenig entfernt und sieht es so mit blinzelnden Augen an. Er hat immer viel Sinn für solche grossartige Szenen gehabt. Dass die Hauptpersonen so unbefangen, herzlich und leichtsinnig einander die Hände drücken, findet er sehr wahrheitsgetreu. Und ebenso richtig ist es, dass die Begleiter—übrigens natürlich hohe Herren, deren Namen unten verzeichnet sind—in ihrer Haltung den Ernst des historischen Augenblickes wahren. (N1A 206)

> Gradually Blumfeld contemplates the picture with more interest, then holds it a little further away and looks at it with blinking eyes. He has always had a sense for such imposing scenes. The way the chief personages clasp each other's hand so naturally, so cordially and lightheartedly, this he finds most lifelike. And it's just as appropriate that the attendants—high-ranking gentlemen, of course, with their names printed beneath—express in their bearing the solemnity of the historical moment. (ES 187–8)

Blumfeld's viewing experience amounts to a sociological case study into the mechanisms of identification, deception, and projection at work in political propaganda. As he scrutinizes the picture, his initial distraction by the balls gives way to a closer emotional engagement.[10] This is partially the result of the picture's sense of immediacy: Czar and President 'have *just* rushed toward each other with long strides and and *at this moment* are clasping one another by the hand' (my emphasis). Blumfeld is obviously under the spell of the photograph, whose snapshot-style character serves to conceal the carefully choreographed nature of the encounter. His instinctive impression that the photograph is 'most lifelike' is comically absurd in its presumptuousness and highlights the discrepancy between the grandeur of the state visit and Blumfeld's own marginalized bachelor existence.

Yet Blumfeld's self-appointed 'sense for such imposing scenes' is more than a sign of self-delusion but refers instead to a mechanism at work in the mass media more generally. In 1927, Siegfried Kracauer

[10] Blumfeld's strategy of first looking at the picture closely, then holding it at a distance mirrors the picture's representational strategy, the simulation of proximity which is, however, undercut by the irreducible distance between the viewer and the depicted scene.

points out that in modern culture film stars and other celebrities become recognizable merely through their repeated representation across different technical media. As he wryly comments about the magazine photograph of a film diva, 'Jeder erkennt sie entzückt, denn jeder hat das Original schon auf der Leinwand gesehen' ['Everyone recognizes her with delight, since everyone has already seen the original on the screen'].[11] Blumfeld's picture exposes a similar effect in the field of politics: the media perpetuate not only a notion of celebrity but also an iconography of power, whereby any 'historical moment' becomes recognizable only as part of a pre-existing archive of similar scenes. In the light of subsequent political developments, Blumfeld's impression of the 'solemnity of the historical moment' is of course a highly accurate description. In his mouth, however, this becomes an empty phrase, a naïve observation which testifies to the anti-rational effect of news coverage rather than to the observer's actual political understanding.

Ultimately, indeed, the photograph's core attraction for Blumfeld lies less in its representational content than in its underlying psychological dynamic. A sentence added at the end of the passage reads: 'Bl[umfeld] lebt sich sehr in das Bild ein. Die letzte Stufe einer Treppe, die hinter den Franzosen zu sehen ist, bringt ihn auf den Gedanken, dass auch er über diese Treppe her' (N1A 206–7) ['Blumfeld really projects himself into the picture. The last step of the stairs visible behind the French delegation leads him to think that over these stairs he too …']. Here, the sentence breaks off unfinished. However, the direction of Blumfeld's thoughts is clear. For him, the magazine photo acts as a screen onto which he can project his own, disavowed fantasies of fame, power, and recognition. Earlier in the story, Blumfeld bemoans the fact that he lives his life 'practically in secret', expressing his desire for a 'Zuschauer' (N1 229) ['observer' (ES 183)] who would validate his solitary existence. The picture, with its contrast between the political protagonists and their impassive spectators, echoes Blumfeld's own dreams of public recognition. On

[11] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Photographie', in *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 21–39: 21; 'Photography', in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans., ed., and intro. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 47–63: 47.

first reading, its triangular structure, which parallels that of the text as a whole, seems to confirm Blumfeld's dreams; according to this logic, his position at the apex of the various triangles would in fact be equivalent to that of the leaders with their respective attendants. In reality, however, this parallel only underlines the vast discrepancy between image and reality. If anything, Blumfeld's place is not at the centre stage of power but at the margins, alongside the nameless onlookers who provide its backdrop, deceived by the superficial pomp of the state visit and unaware of its political implications.[12]

The 'Blumfeld' story thus sheds a very different light on Kafka's supposed political indifference towards the war. In July 1914, the photographs of Poincaré's state visit must have made a strong impression on Kafka for him to remember them in a story written over half a year later. His motivation for this unusually specific account, however, is not solely political. The photograph of the state visit serves as a covert reference to a more personal memory, the split-up with Felice and the ensuing weeks of private despair.[13] Rather than detaching him from wider political developments, however, Kafka's inner crisis sharpens his gaze for such outside impressions.

Although the photography episode in 'Blumfeld' thus counters the myth of Kafka's political indifference, it also illustrates his growing scepticism towards photography and its political exploitation. Rather than bringing the world within the viewer's grasp to make it accessible and comprehensible, photographs such as the one viewed by Blumfeld only reinforce the discrepancy between those at the centre stage of power and those looking on at the margins. Kafka's own scepticism

[12] In this respect, the various pairs of doubles which attach themselves to Blumfeld and threaten his self-contained identity are symbolic not only of his own de-individualized existence but also of his perceptual disposition which projects this uniformity onto the surrounding reality. This applies not only to Blumfeld but also to Josef K., who is initially unable to recognize his three colleagues as distinct individuals, and to K. in *Das Schloß*, who refuses to address his two assistants by their separate names. In their inability to perceive difference, Kafka's protagonists display a perceptual disposition which mirrors the de-individualizing effect of the technical media and of modern existence more generally.

[13] Two years later, Kafka chose to read the 'Blumfeld' story to Felice during their meeting in Bodenbach in July 1916. Whether he included the subsequently deleted photography passage in this reading cannot be established, but for both Kafka and Felice, the passage would have served as a reminder of a time of political as well as personal crisis.

towards such images is expressed in the ironic tone which informs the passage.

Reading the 'Oklahoma' episode of *Der Verschollene* as a fictional adaptation of military recruitment and mobilization, Thomas Anz has commented that this text portrays the war as a pompously staged performance using a sophisticated media and propaganda machinery.[14] Although less ostentatiously theatrical, the magazine image in 'Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle' follows a similar dynamic. With the hindsight of spring 1915, it provides a haunting illustration of the way in which theatrical pomp turns into lethal reality. In this respect, the photography episode acts as a literary equivalent to Kafka's diary account of the patriotic demonstrations in Prague; in both cases, his 'malignant gaze' exposes the inauthenticity of such carefully staged displays, yet while one such scenario takes place in Kafka's home town and initially manages to sway even this critical observer, the other one depicts Austria's two chief enemies in a display of military prowess which anticipates the imminent world war and evokes the spectre of Austria's defeat.

At the time when Kafka was writing the 'Blumfeld' story, the harmless pomp of military parades had given way to the reality of war. However, the political acuity of Kafka's story does not lie primarily in its realistic depiction of a political encounter dating back to a time of long-gone enthusiasm. Rather, it is centred on the psychologically subtle depiction of misrecognition, naïvety, and deception, of the protagonist's stubbornly apolitical gaze which falls under the spell of this well-staged spectacle, failing to recognize its ominous significance.

In this respect, however, Kafka's ironic portrayal of Blumfeld's naïvety also contains a self-reflexive and self-critical dimension. In July 1914, as Poincaré and Nicholas II were meeting in St Petersburg, Kafka wrote to his parents from Denmark, informing them of his plan to give up his job at the insurance company and make a new start as a freelance writer in Germany (B3 102). It took nothing less than a world war to thwart Kafka's dreams of a new beginning.

[14] Thomas Anz, 'Kafka, der Krieg und das größte Theater der Welt', in Uwe Schneider and Andreas Schumann (eds.), *Krieg der Geister: Erster Weltkrieg und literarische Moderne* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2000), 247–62: 260.

Half a year later and still in Prague, he remembers the magazine photograph from a dual perspective—as an emblem of mounting military tension but also as a reflection of his own ignorance in the face of these developments. It would be an overstatement of Kafka's political acuity to assume that he realized at the time the full ramifications of the French state visit. Half a year later and with a world war raging across Europe, he would have come to recognize the iconic significance of the remembered scenes. From the perspective of spring 1915, Blumfeld's naïve engagement with the magazine image offers a vignette of Kafka's hope for a new beginning—a hope crushed in the wake of the war's turbulence and destruction.

'EIN HUNGERKÜNSTLER': THE REPRODUCIBLE BODY

Blumfeld's investment in the magazine photograph stems from his desire for an audience which might acknowledge and validate his existence. A very similar need motivates the protagonist of 'Ein Hungerkünstler', yet as for Blumfeld this proves to be a problematic and ultimately unreachable goal; once again, photography thwarts, rather than supports, the protagonist's wish for recognition.

The story opens with the observation that '[i]n den letzten Jahrzehnten ist das Interesse an Hungerkünstlern sehr zurückgegangen' (D 333) ['[d]uring these last decades the interest in professional hunger artists has markedly diminished' (ES 268)]. Framed by this gloomy perspective, the narrative then returns to an account of the hunger artist's early heyday only to trace his subsequent descent into obscurity and oblivion. As the story unfolds, however, the distinction between the early period of fame and the subsequent decline is progressively undermined. Even at the height of his popularity, the hunger artist feels misunderstood, suffering from the need to sacrifice the purity of his artistic aspiration in order to convey it in a form comprehensible to his audience. The pressure from his impresario to limit his fasting to a predetermined timeframe of forty days is only one example of this coercion to present his art in ways conducive to

audience expectations; as we shall see, photography plays a crucial yet destructive role in this undertaking.

As Gerhard Neumann argues, Kafka situates his artist figures in a liminal space between deceit and authenticity.[15] Yet while Titorelli in *Der Proceß* has built his career on manipulative portraits of court officials, the hunger artist is engaged in a permanent struggle to defend himself against accusations that his fasting must be a sham. Not only does he strive to demonstrate his endurance in the face of lenient guards who mean to do him a favour, but he also rebels against well-meaning visitors who try to sympathize with his apparent plight:

Und wenn sich einmal ein Gutmütiger fand, der ihn bedauerte und ihm erklären wollte, daß seine Traurigkeit wahrscheinlich von dem Hungern käme, konnte es, besonders bei vorgeschrittener Hungerzeit, geschehn, daß der Hungerkünstler mit einem Wutausbruch antwortete und zum Schrecken aller wie ein Tier an dem Gitter zu rütteln begann. (D 341)

And if some good-natured person, feeling sorry for him, tried to console him by pointing out that his melancholy was probably caused by fasting, it could happen, especially when he had been fasting for some time, that he reacted with an outburst of fury and to the general alarm began to shake the bars of his cage like a wild animal. (ES 272)

In reality, of course, the hunger artist's melancholy stems from the prospect of having to end his fasting, rather than from the fasting itself. In any case, his occasional rebellions against this imposed regime are quickly thwarted by the impresario, who strategically employs photography as a 'Strafmittel' ['means of punishment'] to break the resistance of his protégé:

Er entschuldigte den Hungerkünstler vor versammeltem Publikum, gab zu, daß nur die durch das Hungern hervorgerufene, für satte Menschen nicht ohne weiteres begreifliche Reizbarkeit das Benehmen des Hungerkünstlers verzeihlich machen könne; kam dann im Zusammenhang damit auch auf die ebenso zu erklärende Behauptung des Hungerkünstlers zu sprechen, er könnte noch viel länger hungern, als er hungere; lobte das hohe Streben,

[15] Gerhard Neumann, 'Hungerkünstler und Menschenfresser: Zum Verhältnis von Kunst und kulturellem Ritual im Werk Franz Kafkas', in Wolf Kittler and Gerhard Neumann (eds.), *Franz Kafka: Schriftverkehr* (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 1990), 399–432: 408.

den guten Willen, die große Selbstverleugnung, die gewiß auch in dieser Behauptung enthalten seien; suchte dann aber die Behauptung einfach genug durch Vorzeigen von Photographien, die gleichzeitig verkauft wurden, zu widerlegen, denn auf den Bildern sah man den Hungerkünstler an einem vierzigsten Hungertag, im Bett, fast verlöscht vor Entkräftung. Diese dem Hungerkünstler zwar wohlbekannte, immer aber von neuem ihn entnervende Verdrehung der Wahrheit war ihm zu viel. Was die Folge der vorzeitigen Beendigung des Hungern war, stellte man hier als die Ursache dar!… Noch hatte er immer wieder in gutem Glauben begierig am Gitter dem Impresario zugehört, beim Erscheinen der Photographien aber ließ er das Gitter jedesmal los, sank mit Seufzen ins Stroh zurück, und das beruhigte Publikum konnte wieder herankommen und ihn besichtigen. (D 341–2)

He would apologize publicly for the hunger artist's behaviour, which was only to be excused, he admitted, because of the irritability caused by fasting; a condition hardly to be understood by well-fed people; then by natural transition he went on to mention the hunger artist's equally incomprehensible boast that he could fast for much longer than he was doing; he praised the high ambition, the good will, the great self-denial undoubtedly implicit in such a statement; and then simply counteracted it by bringing out photographs, which were also on sale to the public, showing the hunger artist on the fortieth day of a fast lying in bed almost dead from exhaustion. This perversion of the truth, familiar to the hunger artist though it was, always unnerved him afresh and proved too much for him. What was a consequence of the premature ending of his fast was here presented as the cause of it!… Time and again in good faith he stood by the bars listening to the impresario, but as soon as the photographs appeared he always let go and sank with a groan back onto his straw, and the reassured public could once more come close and gaze at him. (ES 272–3)

While photography has an undeniable power over hunger artist and audience, its meaning is far from uncontested. Images of the hunger artist on the fortieth day of his fast are sold by the impresario who uses them to enforce his theory about the limits of the hunger artist's capacity. The hunger artist, in contrast, rejects this explanation as an inversion of the truth: in reality, his exhaustion is not the cause but the effect of the need to end his starvation period.

The conflict between these two interpretations stems from both the representational nature of photography and the particular nature of the hunger artist's art. An atemporal medium, photography arrests

the flow of time in static tableaux; unlike in painting or sculpture, however, where the depicted moment—in accordance with Lessing's dictum of the 'prägnantester Augenblick' ['most pregnant moment'][16]—is chosen for its meaningful potentiality, the meaning of a photograph is dependent on a more complicated combination of factors. Even in the most careful composition, the mechanical recording process diminishes human control over the resulting image; as a result, the understanding of a photograph depends, more than in traditional art, on a knowledge of the wider context. As the case of the hunger artist illustrates, this need for contextualization can lead to conflicting interpretations, an ambiguity exploited by the impresario.

Indeed, the atemporal nature of photography takes on a particular significance in the case of the hunger artist's trade. His art is effectively a performance and thus rooted in temporality; the only object in his cage is a clock (D 334/ES 268) which, together with a sign indicating the duration of his starving period, lends his physical appearance a wider context and significance. Like his photographs, the hunger artist's body must be situated within a wider temporal continuum, a time frame, however, which is experienced as restrictive by the hunger artist who in turn wishes his fasting to be permanent, that is, independent of such temporal frameworks. This conflict between temporality and permanence underlies the conflicting interpretations of his photographs.

The narrator does not take sides in this conflict. The contested images are described in detached, neutral terms as 'showing the artist on the fortieth day of a fast lying in bed almost dead from exhaustion'. Given the predominantly personal perspective of the narrative, the reader is inclined to side with the hunger artist who, as the sitter, would have the closest insight into the images and the context of their recording. Given the narrative trajectory and its conclusion, however, these photographs can also be read against the grain; although the impresario's manipulative intentions seem clear enough in the above passage, the photographs nevertheless take on an anticipatory, prophetic character with regard to the story's

[16] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon oder die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987), 115.

lethal conclusion. In this respect, the photographs contain an implicit counter-version to the hunger artist's own assessment of the situation and his more general capacities. Even in an apparently clear-cut conflict between truth and manipulation, essence and appearance, photographic meaning emerges as inherently ambivalent, containing perhaps layers of meaning unknown even to the sitter.

Whatever their 'true' significance, the photographs' effect within the story is highly revealing. The impresario employs the images as a disciplinary tool to make the hunger artist compliant with his fasting regime. Indeed, while the pictures depict the end of the hunger artist's starvation period, they also terminate another, more spontaneous public 'performance', namely his 'outburst of fury' in the face of an uncomprehending audience.[17] The hunger artist's rage transforms him from the docile object of the viewers' gaze into a wild animal, a metamorphosis which anticipates his replacement by the panther at the end of the story. On another level, however, the hunger artist's behaviour evokes a psychological condition prevalent around the turn of the century: his outburst is reminiscent of a hysterical attack, an association underlined by his rejection of food; psychologically speaking, anorexia has often been understood as the expression of a hysterical disposition.[18] This association is underlined by the impresario's 'therapeutic' use of the photographs employed to terminate the hunger artist's outburst. This strategy echoes a nineteenth-century psychiatric practice in which patients were supposedly cured by being confronted with photographs of themselves.[19] Sinking back into the straw after his attack, the hunger artist comes to resemble his own, disempowered self in the pictures. In Kafka's text, as in the portraits of psychiatric patients, the dissident subject is thus inserted into a photographic archive which serves to document, parade, and control his or her

[17] As in *Die Verwandlung*, photography is thus associated with the protagonist's animalistic existence. While photography acts as a catalyst for Gregor Samsa's escape from the constraints of human existence, the photographs of the hunger artist have the opposite effect, as they reinsert him into the regime determined by his impresario.

[18] On the connection between hysteria and anorexia, see Juliet Mitchell, *Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the Effect of Sibling Relations on the Human Condition* (London: Penguin, 2000).

[19] Sander Gilman, *The Face of Madness: Hugh W. Diamond and the Origin of Psychiatric Photography* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1976), 10, 21–3.

otherness.[20] Revealingly, the photographs depict the hunger artist in a bed rather than in his cage, suggesting that they were in fact staged for this recording. The bed lends the hunger artist's craft a pathological dimension while also investing his pictures with the melodramatic character of a deathbed scene.

Given the degree of control and manipulation exercised through the photographs, then, it is not surprising that this episode appears at a turning point of the story. It marks the transition between the hunger artist's years of success and his subsequent decline. Indeed, the photographic medium plays a constitutive role in this process, which is not limited to the impresario's cunning ploy. Although the pictures help to publicize the hunger artist's fasting more widely, they also undermine the uniqueness of his art, replacing his body with mass-replicated photographic simulacra. In his heyday, the viewers were able to touch the hunger artist's emaciated body (D 334/ES 268); this physical contact is now undercut by photographs which transform the body into a disconnected signifier circulated within a capitalist framework of exposure and exchange.

In 'Ein Hungerkünstler', Kafka thus traces a turning point in the history of art and entertainment, namely the replacement of traditional performance by the mass-replicated artefacts of the culture industry. In this new era, photographs and other technical media form the bedrock of fame and recognition; yet in this capacity they also threaten to replace this underlying reality altogether. Indeed, the hunger artist was a relatively common fairground attraction until the early twentieth century, but by the time Kafka was writing, this form of entertainment was in a process of decline.[21] No reports exist of

[20] On the use of photography in Charcot's treatment of hysteria, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Erfindung der Hysterie: Die photographische Klinik von Jean-Martin Charcot* (Munich: Fink, 1997).

[21] Walter Bauer-Wabnegg, 'Monster und Maschinen, Artisten und Technik in Franz Kafkas Werk', in Kittler and Neumann (eds.) *Franz Kafka: Schriftverkehr*, 316–82: 374–5. As Bauer-Wabnegg also points out, the particular status of Kafka's hunger artist is derived not solely from his (increasingly obsolete) profession as such but from the fact that he is a kind of hybrid combining two different spectacles. While his starvation periods follow the established conventions of 'hunger-art', his desire to starve himself beyond these temporal limits is more characteristic of the skeleton-man whose attraction is not bound up with a particular starvation period but whose main asset is his emaciated body.

Kafka seeing such a spectacle, and although this possibility cannot be ruled out with any certainty, it is more likely that he derived his knowledge from magazines such as *Der Artist* and *Proscenium* (B3 375/EL 176) and thus from the very media which contribute to his protagonist's decline.[22]

Both 'Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle' and 'Ein Hungerkünstler' thus explore the problematic impact of modern media culture on the individual. Photography encapsulates the mixture of distance and proximity, of estrangement and identification which informs the culture industry. While a staged magazine photograph provides the bachelor Blumfeld with an illusory screen for identification, the hunger artist's progressive alienation from his body and existence is emblematized by the photographs sold by the impresario. In both cases, then, photography is part of a wider culture of deception and manipulation, but also of mechanisms of dissemination and exchange from which the individual is increasingly excluded. In *Das Schloß*, Kafka once again returns to the question of photographic ambiguity; here, however, he associates this issue with more existential issues of (self-)knowledge and power.

SURVEYING THE CASTLE

Written in parallel with 'Ein Hungerkünstler', Kafka's last novel *Das Schloß* is set in an environment apparently disconnected from modernity. The archaic atmosphere of village and Castle appears to be

[22] At the same time, however, the relationship between circus performance and the technical media is more complex than it might seem. Rather than being diametrically opposed to the realm of media technology, the attractions of fairground, circus, and variety show are intimately related both to the history of the technical media and to their early representational strategies. The first films were shown as a kind of sideshow act in circuses and fairgrounds and, as Tom Gunning argues, early film attempted to emulate the kinds of spectacles presented in circus and variety performance ('The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (eds.), *Early Cinema: Space—Frame—Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 56–62: 58). As a consequence, then, the photographs distributed by the impresario do not simply mark the end of an authentic artistic culture, but also illustrate that the attractions of the fairground and of the modern media are inextricably linked.

positively hostile towards modern life and its technological amenities. As it turns out, however, this impression is rather misleading: the feudal power structures are in fact supported by a complex network of bureaucracy and technology whose symbol is the telephone line connecting village and Castle.[23] Revealingly, however, Kafka's protagonist is unable to make constructive use of this triumph of modern mass communication: when K. picks up the receiver, the telephone only emits an indistinguishable sing-song of children's voices, and even once he gets connected to an official, the ensuing conversation does not yield any tangible results (GS 36–8/EC 19–20). Modern technology—be this the telephone or, as we shall see, photography—does not create interpersonal bonds but cements the individual's isolation.

Yet this is not to say that K. himself is unaccustomed to such inventions. He claims to be a land surveyor, a profession whose exploration of unknown territories is historically intertwined with technological innovation, not least in the visual domain. As John Zilcosky has pointed out, Kafka was an avid reader of the popular travelogues published in the *Grüne Bändchen* series (*Little Green Books*) which trace the adventures of European explorers in exotic locations. Several of these stories focus on the experiences of land surveyors who map out—and divide up—'uninhabited' foreign territories. The act of vision is integral to this process of colonization; above all, the fictional explorers aim to establish a sense of visual mastery over the surveyed territory.[24] An illustration from the novel *Im Hinterlande von Deutsch-Ostafrika* (*In the Hinterland of German East Africa*, 1910) highlights this juxtaposition of panoramic vision and colonial power. It depicts a European explorer who surveys the surrounding landscape with a pair of binoculars, thus figuring as 'the single, technologically mediated eye … in the picture's voyeuristic

[23] Upon his arrival, K. is both surprised and reluctantly impressed by the presence of such an apparatus in the old-fashioned inn: 'Wie, auch ein Telephon war in diesem Dorfwirtshaus? Man war vorzüglich eingerichtet. Im einzelnen überraschte es K., im Ganzen hatte er es freilich erwartet' (GS 10) ['What, there was even a telephone in this village inn? They were well equipped here. Specifically, this surprised K., in a general way he had expected it, of course' (EC 4)].

[24] John Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 130–4.

economy'.[25] Indeed, this undertaking has a second, psychological dimension; the surveying of unknown territories is inextrably linked to the 'business of self-discovery'.[26]

Kafka mobilizes various features of these colonial travelogues but, as with the criminological elements of *Der Proceß*, redeploys and reworks the conventions of the genre. Like his literary predecessors, K. aims to map out of his new surroundings; yet his efforts are undercut by various obstacles both external and internal. As the novel progresses, his understanding of the new environment becomes increasingly confused as his quest is beset by visual ambiguity and opacity. Far from being a tool of (self-)mastery, then, optical technologies in *Das Schloß* alienate the viewer from both himself and his surroundings.

Although K. was allegedly hired as a land surveyor by Count Westwest, he never gets to carry out his profession. What is more, he turns out to be entirely unequipped for his task, as none of the instruments which he sent for ever arrive.[27] The nature of these devices is never specified, but apart from the rather old-fashioned binoculars sported by the *Grüne Bändchen* explorers, one of the chief tools of a land surveyor would have been a camera. Since its invention in the nineteenth century, photography had gained a steadily increasing prominence in surveying and map-making both on the ground and from the air. As early as the 1850s, photography was employed for purposes of measurement in the thriving discipline of photogrammetry. From 1858, cameras were fitted with a level and compass, while a panorama apparatus was constructed to circumvent the narrow field of the lens. Particular emphasis was placed on the improvement of the field camera for military purposes, and in the

[25] Ibid., 131. [26] Ibid., 128.

[27] Upon his arrival, K. asserts 'daß ich der Landvermesser bin, den der Graf hat kommen lassen. Meine Gehilfen mit den Apparaten kommen morgen im Wagen nach', but he then continues, 'Ich wollte mir den Marsch durch den Schnee nicht entgehn lassen, bin aber leider einigemal vom Weg abgeirrt und deshalb erst so spät angekommen' (GS 9) ['that I am the land surveyor the Count sent for. My assistants will be following in the carriage tomorrow with the instruments. I was keen not to miss the walk through the snow, but unfortunately I wandered off the road a few times, which is why I was so late getting here' (EC 4)]. In a revealing juxtaposition, K.'s separation from his instruments is thus immediately reflected in his getting lost, underlining his reliance on such technologies for his own personal orientation.

First World War, aerial photography was extensively used to survey enemy territory.[28]

Given his profession, K. could have been Kafka's first photographer–protagonist. Indeed, a camera would have provided him with a vital tool in his mission to explore and comprehend the world of the Castle. Deprived of such optical devices, K. is not only unable to pursue his profession, but he is also severly disempowered in his day-to-day encounters in the village. Throughout the novel, K. aims to gain a controlling overview of his surroundings but is forever faced with partial, ambiguous, or highly unstable sights which do not add up to an overall 'bigger picture'. While modern technology aids the exploration of the world, Kafka's novel suggests that without such devices, the individual is exposed to forces both external and internal which undermine any sense of perceptual stability. In contrast to its portrayal in popular travelogues, then, vision in Kafka's last novel encapsulates the protagonist's profound inability to comprehend, and to engage with, the world around him. This effect is nowhere more evident than in relation to photography. Even though K. is himself deprived of a camera, he is repeatedly confronted with photographs and photographic configurations. These sights do not, however, provide a remedy for his sense of disempowerment. Indeed, in Kafka's last novel, photography poses problems not merely of interpretation but also of interpersonal communication, thwarting the protagonist's desire to be acknowledged and accepted by others.

AMBIGUOUS SNAPSHOTS

In many respects, K.'s situation resembles that of Karl Rossmann, Kafka's other exiled protagonist, although their attitudes towards memory and photography could not be more different. While Karl

[28] W. Sander, 'The Development of Photogrammetry in the Light of Invention, with Special Reference to Plotting from Two Photographs', in Otto von Gruber (ed.), *Photogrammetry: Collected Lectures and Essays*, trans. Guy T. McCaw and F. A. Cazalet (London: Chapman and Hall, 1932), 148–246: 148–9.

clings to the past, cherishing the one remaining photograph of his parents, K. seems curiously unaffected by his origins and free from any desire for remembrance or continuity. He claims to have a wife and child, but does not burden himself with photographs or other personal memorabilia; his attention is firmly focused on the present, on the task of orienting himself in his new surroundings.

An early scene highlights these priorities. Upon his arrival at the Brückenhof inn, K. is put up in a room which used to be inhabited by two maids and which he finds decorated with the peculiar combination of 'Heiligenbilder und Photographien von Soldaten' (GS 41) ['pictures of saints and photographs of soldiers' (EC 22)].[29] This scene replays a familiar narrative set-up; like Karl Rossmann and Josef K. before him, K. enters into a female living space which is marked out by photographs as a private domain. In Kafka's previous novels, such pictures exercised a particular fascination over the male intruder, who finds himself drawn to them perhaps in compensation for his own, anonymous, and uprooted existence. K. in *Das Schloß* displays no such attachment; not only does he seem markedly indifferent towards the images he finds in the maids' room, but he subsequently replaces these pictures with a different kind of document. When he receives a letter from the secretary Klamm which confirms his admission into the Count's services, K. 'nahm ein Bild von der Wand und hing den Brief an den Nagel, in diesem Zimmer würde er wohnen, hier sollte der Brief hängen' (GS 43) ['took a picture down from the wall and hung the letter on the nail, this was the room he would be living in, this was where the letter should hang' (EC 23–4)]. Unlike Kafka's previous protagonists, K. relies on textual rather than visual documents to bolster his sense of identity. Both physically and symbolically, the letter takes the place of personal photographs in its ability to confer a social identity on the owner. Indeed, K.'s

[29] Both types of images have a prehistory within Kafka's works. The images of saints have their equivalent in a 'picture of the Virgin' pinned to the wall of the stoker's cabin in *Der Verschollene* (GV 17/EA 8); the soldier portrait is, as I have demonstrated, a recurrent feature of Kafka's texts where it embodies the conflict between individuality and uniformity, authority and submission. However, while the soldier photographs featured in *Der Verschollene*, *Die Verwandlung*, and 'Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle' provoke an identificatory response in the viewer, K. seems immune to the appeal of this type of photograph.

indifference towards the pictures is even mirrored in the narrative itself; tellingly, the text does not specify which kind of image—a soldier photograph or the picture of a saint—is removed to put up the letter. Once again, the term *Bild* is used by Kafka in a non-specific way, conflating two categories of images which occupy diametrically opposed positions within the field of visual representation.

Unlike Karl Rossmann, then, whose adventures in the New World replay the power dynamics encapsulated in his family photograph, K. seems free from such emotional ties. On one level, this detachment from his origins has an emancipatory effect, as it enables him to make a fresh start uninhibited by previous experiences. However, K.'s attitude also comes at a price, as his disconnection from his past makes him more vulnerable in the present. Indeed, his uprooted position is reflected in his incessant struggle for acceptance by the Castle, his desire to find a 'home from home' which would provide him with a new sense of identity.[30]

K.'s encounters in the novel illustrate both his uprootedness and his concomitant desire for belonging. Driven by the goal of gaining access to the Castle, K. tries to foster bonds with various characters whom he regards as potential mediators; repeatedly, however, his attempts are thwarted by his lack of empathy with others, their feelings and motivations. This weakness is brought out in another photographic scene. The most cherished possession of Gardena, the landlady of the Brückenhof inn, is an old photograph which she keeps under her mattress and which has become 'vom Alter ausgebleicht, vielfach gebrochen, zerdrückt und fleckig' (GS 124) ['faded with age, badly cracked, creased, and blotchy' (EC 70)]. In an unexpected gesture of trust, she shows this treasured picture to K. who, however, struggles to make sense of it. Initially he has trouble recognizing anything in the faded image, and even once he has identified it as the photograph of a young man, his interpretation is thwarted by misunderstandings:

'Er liegt glaube ich auf einem Brett, streckt sich und gähnt.' Die Wirtin lachte. 'Das ist ganz falsch', sagte sie. 'Aber hier ist doch das Brett und hier liegt er', beharrte K. auf seinem Standpunkt. 'Sehen Sie doch genauer hin', sagte die

[30] On the central role of *Heimat*, of ideals of home and belonging, in Kafka's novel, see Elizabeth Boa, '*The Castle*', in Julian Preece (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 61–79.

Wirtin ärgerlich, 'liegt er denn wirklich?' 'Nein', sagte nun K., 'er liegt nicht, er schwebt und nun sehe ich es, es ist gar kein Brett, sondern wahrscheinlich eine Schnur und der junge Mann macht einen Hochsprung.' 'Nun also', sagte die Wirtin erfreut, 'er springt, so üben die amtlichen Boten, ich habe ja gewußt daß Sie es erkennen werden. Sehen Sie auch sein Gesicht?' 'Vom Gesicht sehe ich nur sehr wenig', sagte K., 'er strengt sich offenbar sehr an, der Mund ist offen, die Augen zusammengekniffen und das Haar flattert.' 'Sehr gut', sagte die Wirtin anerkennend, 'mehr kann einer, der ihn nicht persönlich gesehen hat, nicht erkennen. Aber es war ein schöner Junge, ich habe ihn nur einmal flüchtig gesehn und werde ihn nie vergessen.' 'Wer war es denn?' fragte K. 'Es war', sagte die Wirtin, 'der Bote, durch den Klamm mich zum ersten Mal zu sich berief.' (GS 124–5)

'He's lying on a board, I think, stretching his limbs and yawning.' The landlady laughed. 'That's quite wrong', she said. 'But here's the board and here he is, lying', K. insisted. 'Look more closely', said the landlady, annoyed, 'is he really lying?' 'No', K. now said, 'he's not lying, he's in the air and I can see now it's not a board, it's probably a rope and the young man is doing the high jump.' 'There you are', said the landlady, pleased, 'he's jumping, that's how the official messengers practise, I knew you'd see it. Can you make his face out, too?' 'I can see very little of the face', said K., 'he's clearly making a great effort, his mouth is open, his eyes are screwed up, and his hair is streaming.' 'Very good', the landlady said appreciatively, 'that's all someone who's not seen him in person could make out. But he was a handsome young man, I only glimpsed him once, and I'll never forget him.' 'So who was he?' asked K. 'He', said the landlady, 'was the messenger Klamm had summon me to him the first time.' (EC 70)

This dialogue recasts various elements which are familiar from Kafka's correspondence with Felice Bauer. Once again, photography figures as both symbol and object of desire; as Gardena reveals, the photograph is a souvenir of her affair with the secretary Klamm twenty years ago. Curiously, however, the image depicts not Klamm himself but the messenger who first summoned her to the secretary. In this respect, the photograph takes on a doubly fetishistic character: a cherished souvenir of a past affair, it also replaces the actual object of desire with an image of his mediator.[31] In this respect, the

[31] Although Gardena has only seen the messenger for a brief, fleeting moment, she claims that this experience has made a permanent impression on her. Personal memory thus gains a photographic dimension, as the minuscule moment of 'exposure'

snapshot shifts the emphasis from the affair itself to the preceding exchange, a feature which is also familiar from Kafka's relationship with Felice. Indeed, for Gardena, as for Kafka, the snapshot is not merely a substitute for a person but an object of fascination in its own right. Her description of the messenger as a 'handsome young man' reveals her libidinal investment in the picture itself, rather than just in the encounter it symbolizes, just as the messenger's stretched-out pose and his facial expression lend the picture a latently erotic dimension. As in the letters, however, the actual interpretation of the photograph is a precarious undertaking which defies the (male) viewer's interpretative faculties. Few critics have commented on the above passage, perhaps because this dialogue about a photograph seems rather disconnected from the wider themes of the novel. In fact, however, K.'s misinterpretation of the picture marks a crucial moment within the narrative, drawing together its underlying themes and concerns.

The significance of the photograph extends far beyond its role within the plot of the novel; indeed, it points towards two groundbreaking shifts in the history of human achievement. On 18 May 1912, the American athlete George Horine was the first man to cross the two-metre barrier. Horine had developed a new high-jumping technique, the so-called 'Western' style, also known as the 'Horine' style, in which the centre of gravity was lower than in the 'Scissors' style commonly used at the time.[32] The messenger's stretched-out, horizontal pose in Gardena's picture is clearly modelled on this new style, which soon became the standard high-jumping technique. Horine's world

is inversely proportionate to its subsequent inscription into a permanent memory-image. In the actual photograph, however, these two temporal dimensions are juxtaposed with a third one: even after its recording, the photograph continues to testify to the gradual passing of time through the stains and creases which have accumulated on it over the course of twenty years (Wolf Kittler, 'Schreibmaschinen, Sprechmaschinen: Effekte technischer Medien im Werk Franz Kafkas', in Kittler and Neumann (eds.), *Franz Kafka: Schriftverkehr*, 75–163: 114). As a result, the recorded image is in a process of fading which belies its permanence, thus forming a 'caricature of eternity' (Stephen D. Dowden, *Kafka's Castle and the Critical Imagination* (Columbia: Camden House, 1995), 60).

[32] Robert Lyman Templeton, *The High Jump: The Most Comprehensive Textbook Ever Compiled on the Subject*, Spalding's Athletic Library (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1926), 9–13; see also Kittler, 'Schreibmaschinen', 114.

22. The Stanford student George Horine demonstrates his 'Western'-style high-jumping technique.

record attracted particular attention in continental Europe because of its symbolic significance within the metric system. However, the picture also bears an intriguing connection to a previous, equally crucial moment, in this case in the history of photography. Horine, a Stanford student, set his world record in Palo Alto, California, where his jump was captured on camera. Thirty-four years earlier, in 1878, Palo Alto had been the site of another historic achievement. It was here that the British-born photographer Eadweard Muybridge carried out his first experiments with serial photography and succeeded in capturing the movement of a horse in motion in twelve individual stills.[33] One year later, Muybridge returned to Palo Alto for a different experiment; this time, he took photographs of the athletes of the Olympic Club, capturing them while boxing, fencing, and jumping.[34]

Gardena's snapshot thus alludes to both a historic sporting achievement and the photographic innovation which made this image possible in the first place. Indeed, this is not the first time that Kafka alludes to Muybridge's invention; the episode in *Das Schloß*

[33] Rebecca Solnit, *Motion Studies: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 191–2.
[34] Ibid., 198–9.

echoes his comparison between film stills and photographic snapshots in a letter to Felice Bauer almost ten years earlier. Commenting on the film *Der Andere*, Kafka prefers the snapshot of a jumping horse over film stills of the actor Bassermann which he criticizes for their fragmenting effect on human vision (see Chapter 2). Kafka's response echoes the debates surrounding Muybridge's invention, whose experiments marked a turning point in the history of visual representation: 'Photography had always shown approximately what the human eye could see.... With Muybridge's breakthrough, it became something that could see more than the eye and thereby expand vision into a new realm.'[35] Muybridge's shots of galloping horses in particular contradicted established pictorial practice and challenged the validity of human vision and artistic imagination.[36] As a result, the parameters of human perception had to be adjusted to match the new technology, an effect reflected in Kafka's novel.

Although snapshot and serial photography had lost their novelty by the 1920s, *Das Schloß* echoes the initial reactions sparked by these inventions. By casting K. as an ignorant viewer who must be instructed in the art of photographic viewing, Kafka brings out the ambiguous, misleading nature of photographic representation, thus counteracting the cliché of the medium's immediacy. His protagonist misinterprets Gardena's picture on several levels; not only does he fail to recognize that he is dealing with a snapshot, but he also mistakes its rope for a plank of wood.[37] In his understanding of the picture, K.

[35] Solnit, *Motion Studies*, 193.

[36] As contemporary critics argued, those sights of reality which were only accessible to an apparatus were intrinsically alien to human perception and thus false according to artistic criteria. See Bernd Busch, 'Das Rauschen der Bilder', in Andreas Hiepko and Katja Stopka (eds), *Rauschen: Seine Phänomenologie und Semantik zwischen Sinn und Störung* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2001), 165–80: 375.

[37] Indeed, K.'s confusion alludes to a recurrent debate within photography criticism since its invention, namely the medium's capacity to blur the distinction between animate and inanimate sights, between movement and stasis and—ultimately—between life and death. Kafka alludes to this ambiguity in his early account of the Kaiser Panorama, where he undermines the distinction between photographs of people and of statues. Ralf Nicolai has argued that this merging of oppositions such as sleep and waking, movement and stasis is characteristic of Kafka's novel more generally (*Ende oder Anfang: Zur Einheit der Gegensätze in Kafkas Schloss* (Munich: Fink, 1977), 132).

is thus dependent on Gardena, who instructs him in this 'new' way of seeing.

K.'s misinterpretation of the snapshot might seem rather surprising given his professional background. Photography played, as we have seen, a key part in the discipline of land surveying, where it helps to transform familiar landscapes into abstract geometrical structures. What is at stake in Gardena's snapshot, however, concerns a very different issue. Here, photography does not alter the perception of space but transforms the temporal parameters of vision. Although the snapshot offers a scientifically correct image of reality, it nevertheless runs contrary to the parameters of human experience. In unmediated perception, discrete moments are perceived only as part of a temporal continuum; by eliminating time from the resulting image, the snapshot simultaneously eliminates the subject from the realm of perception.[38]

It is no coincidence that in *Das Schloß* this dimension is brought out by the image of a Castle messenger. Throughout the text, the Castle appears as an institution which resists visual scrutiny and analysis, an effect which applies to building and people alike. Gardena's photograph is a case in point. The image depicts not Klamm himself but merely his messenger, who is in turn captured in a transitional, ambiguous state. Rather than introducing a sense of stability into the visual field, then, photography underlines the ambiguity surrounding visual perception and representation in Kafka's novel.

THE INACCESSIBLE PORTRAIT

If Gardena's photograph is merely a substitute for her former lover, then this theme of indirect representation is also extended into other parts of the novel. On his first morning in the village, K.'s attention is drawn to a portrait which is on display at the inn:

Im Fortgehn fiel K. an der Wand ein dunkles Porträt in einem dunklen Rahmen auf. Schon von seinem Lager aus hatte er es bemerkt, hatte aber in der Entfernung die Einzelnheiten nicht unterschieden und geglaubt, das

[38] Busch, 'Das Rauschen der Bilder', 376–7.

eigentliche Bild sei aus dem Rahmen fortgenommen und nur ein schwarzer Rückendeckel zu sehn. Aber es war doch ein Bild, wie sich jetzt zeigte, das Brustbild eines etwa fünfzigjährigen Mannes. Den Kopf hielt er so tief auf die Brust gesenkt, daß man kaum etwas von den Augen sah, entscheidend für die Senkung schien die hohe lastende Stirn und die starke hinabgekrümmte Nase. Der Vollbart, infolge der Kopfhaltung am Kinn eingedrückt, stand weiter unten ab. Die linke Hand lag gespreizt in den vollen Haaren, konnte aber den Kopf nicht mehr heben. 'Wer ist das?', fragte K., 'der Graf?' K. stand vor dem Bild und blickte sich gar nicht nach dem Wirt um. 'Nein', sagte der Wirt, 'der Kastellan.' (GS 15)

As K. walked away, his attention was drawn to a picture on the wall, a dark portrait in a dark frame. He had noticed it before, from his bed, but at that distance, unable to make out details, he had thought the actual painting had been removed from the frame, leaving only a black backing-sheet visible. However, it was in fact a painting, as it now emerged, a half-length portrait of a man of perhaps fifty. He had his head sunk so low on his chest that very little could be seen of his eyes, the apparent cause of the sinking being his high, heavy forehead and large hooked nose. The beard, forced in at the chin by the way the head was held, stood out farther down. The left hand lay splayed in the thick hair but was no longer capable of lifting the head. 'Who is that?' K. asked, 'the Count?' Planted in front of the picture, K. did not even look round at the landlord. 'No', said the landlord, 'the Castellan.' (EC 7–8)

As in the case of the snapshot, K. is faced with an image whose combination of clarity and obscurity resists easy interpretation. The person depicted is not, as K. assumes, Count Westwest, but merely his administrator. Although this image symbolizes the Castle's authority over the village, then, it offers only an indirect insight into its power structures; as in the case of Gardena's photograph, the higher Castle officials remain outside the sphere of representation. What is more, like the photograph this portrait undermines K.'s desire for visual mastery. Initially he is unable to discern anything at all in the picture, which from a distance appears to be nothing more than an empty frame. On closer inspection, this void is filled as K. finds himself confronted with the rather striking portrait of the Castellan. His broad forehead, bushy beard, and bent nose evoke stereotypes of Jewish physiognomy;[39] yet while his striking features contrast with the

[39] Sander Gilman, *Franz Kafka: The Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 50–1.

initial impression of emptiness, they do not amount to an accessible portrait. On the contrary, his features seem to weigh down his head, thus resulting in a pose which flouts pictorial conventions. Although his bent head stands in stark contrast to Titorelli's portraits of judges, as it suggests subordination rather than domination, this pose does not allow K. a superior viewing position. The Castellan's bent head obscures his face and in particular his eyes, thus depriving K. of a sense of recognition by the authorities.

The picture's precarious status is underlined by its textual description. As in the case of the images pinned up in K.'s room at the inn, the generic term *Bild* obscures the portrait's representational status. In this case, the Castellan's official capacity might point in the direction of a painted portrait, but his bent head suggests a failure, or even refusal, to comply with established pictorial conventions, thus pointing more in the direction of a failed photographic snapshot. In any case, the ambiguity surrounding the portrait's representational nature—Deleuze and Guattari call it a 'portrait–photo'[40]—further underlines its opacity.

Although Gardena's snapshot and the Castellan's portrait might appear to occupy opposing positions within the history of visual representation, they both illustrate K.'s precarious struggle for visual mastery. While the snapshot reveals K.'s 'illiteracy' as a photographic viewer, the posed portrait likewise thwarts his attempts to relate to the image. This parallel structure implies that K.'s problem is not caused solely by the redefinition of visual codes and conventions. Rather, both pictures point towards a more fundamental challenge to visual certainty in the novel, where neither traditional images nor the technical media render the world legible and comprehensible.

KLAMM: THE DEFLECTED GAZE

Visual perception and interpretation thus play a problematic role in K.'s quest for acknowledgement by the Castle. The encountered

[40] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, fore. Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 5.

images offer themselves as objects of scrutiny, yet they ultimately defy his struggle for mastery and comprehension. This precarious mechanism, however, is not limited to the field of visual representation; instead, instability and ambiguity also affect perception in the novel at large. As the narrative unfolds, K.'s perceptual acuity is progressively challenged in his encounters with the Castle and its representatives. In *Der Proceß*, the spectacles of the Court are perceived by Josef K. with photographic sharpness, yet this does not reveal their underlying meaning. *Das Schloß* takes this sense of visual uncertainty a step further; its protagonist is unable to gain any stable and reliable impression of his surroundings. This mechanism is nowhere more evident than in relation to the Castle itself, whose shifting visual appearance is an expression of its opaque power structures.

Throughout the novel, the Castle attracts K.'s attention, yet he is unable to gain any stable impression of its appearance. This lack of visual clarity is introduced in the opening passage, which posits the Castle as an invisible, unattainable sight shrouded in fog and darkness. This void is subsequently filled with a series of vivid yet rather unstable sights which do not add up to one coherent picture. Rather, the Castle is presented as a visual conundrum which Kafka's land surveyor tries to master yet which resists his efforts through a combination of external and internal factors. Having no clear external boundaries, the Castle appears blurred;[41] as a result, it serves as a screen for K.'s projected memories, fantasies, and desires. In particular, the Castle expresses K.'s desire for stability and belonging and his search for a new *Heimat* as a substitute for the home he has left behind.[42]

[41] The Castle's visual instability can be traced back to a diary entry from 1911, in which Kafka describes the multiperspectival appearance of Wallenstein's castle in Friedland (TB 935/ED 429). Whereas during this early trip to Friedland, the Kaiser Panorama offers a respite from this sense of instability, in *Das Schloß* photography no longer enables an escape from uncertainty but serves to heighten and compound it.

[42] 'Flüchtig erinnerte sich K. an sein Heimatstädtchen, es stand diesem angeblichen Schlosse kaum nach, wäre es K. nur auf die Besichtigung angekommen, dann wäre es schade um die lange Wanderschaft gewesen und er hätte vernünftiger gehandelt, wieder einmal die alte Heimat zu besuchen, wo er schon so lange nicht gewesen war' (GS 17–18) ['K. had a fleeting memory of his own home town, it was scarcely inferior to the so-called Castle, if K. had been interested only in sightseeing it would have been a waste of all the travelling, he would have done better to revisit his old home, where he had not been for so long' (EC 9)].

Ultimately, of course, the Castle fails to fulfil this desire, just as K.'s striving for visual mastery and stability remains unsuccessful.

K.'s failing struggle for acceptance and self-assertion is highlighted not only by the Castle itself but also by its representatives, and most notably by Klamm, the secretary. He is the author of the letter which acknowledges K.'s arrival in the village and, as the narrative unfolds, gains a central role in his struggle for acceptance. However, just as K.'s attempts to gain access to the Castle yield few tangible results, Klamm becomes an increasingly troubling figure for his quest. Indeed, like no other character within the novel, he symbolizes K.'s disempowerment as a viewer, thus heightening his irreducible separation from the Castle.

To start with, Klamm's physical appearance is as elusive and unstable as that of the Castle. The Czech word *klam* means 'illusion',[43] and Klamm's function within the novel seems to be less that of a real character than that of a focalizing device which reflects the dispositions and expectations of his observers.[44] As Olga comments,

> einzelne haben ihn gesehn, alle von ihm gehört und es hat sich aus dem Augenschein, aus Gerüchten und auch manchen fälschenden Nebenansichten ein Bild Klamms ausgebildet, das wohl in den Grundzügen stimmt. Aber nur in den Grundzügen. Sonst ist es veränderlich und vielleicht nicht einmal so veränderlich wie Klamms wirkliches Aussehn. (GS 277–8)
>
> some people have seen him, everyone's heard of him, and from eye-witness accounts, rumours, and also a good many distorting ulterior motives a picture of Klamm has emerged that is probably correct in its essentials. Only in its essentials, though. Otherwise it varies, maybe not even as much as Klamm's actual appearance. (EC 158)

For K., whose sense of self is closely related to his capacity as an observer, the attempt to grasp, fix, and comprehend Klamm's appearance becomes paradigmatic of his more general struggle for acknowledgement and self-mastery. Like the Castle, however, Klamm acts more like a distorted mirror which deflects K.'s gaze, preventing him from asserting himself in the act of viewing.

[43] Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka: Parable and Paradox*, ext. and rev. edn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 383.

[44] Gerhard Neumann, 'Franz Kafkas "Schloß"-Roman: Das parasitäre Spiel der Zeichen', in Kittler and Neumann (eds.), *Franz Kafka: Schriftverkehr*, 199–221: 215.

Although Klamm's appearance defies visual clarity, he is himself invested with almost superhuman perceptual powers. In his two letters to K., Klamm stresses his role as an all-seeing observer; in the first letter, he states 'Trotzdem werde aber auch ich Sie nicht aus den Augen verlieren' (GS 40) ['Nevertheless, I shall also not lose sight of you' (EC 22)], while closing his second letter with the ominous phrase, 'Ich behalte Sie im Auge' (GS 187) ['I am keeping an eye on you' (GC 107)]. On the whole, then, Klamm seems to embody the kind of visual mastery which K. is so sorely lacking. Gardena highlights this discrepancy when she claims that Frieda, by leaving Klamm for K., has given up her affair with an 'Adler' ['eagle'] for that with a 'Blindschleiche' (GS 90) ['slow-worm' (EC 50)]. Although K. initially rejects this claim, he later adopts this image himself and refigures it in terms which further reinforce the discrepancy between Klamm's visual omnipotence and his own disempowerment:

> Klamm war fern, einmal hatte die Wirtin Klamm mit einem Adler verglichen und das war K. lächerlich erschienen, jetzt aber nicht mehr, er dachte an seine Ferne, an seine uneinnehmbare Wohnung …, an seinen herabdringenden Blick, der sich niemals nachweisen, niemals widerlegen ließ, an seine von K.'s Tiefe her unzerstörbaren Kreise, die er oben nach unverständlichen Gesetzen zog, nur für Augenblicke sichtbar—das alles war Klamm und dem Adler gemeinsam. (GS 183–4)

> Klamm was remote, the landlady had once compared Klamm to an eagle and it had struck K. as absurd, but not any more, he thought of his remoteness, of his impregnable dwelling …, of his piercing downward gaze that could never be proven, never refuted, of the indestructible circles that, viewed from down here where K. was, he traced in the air according to incomprehensible laws, visible only for moments—all this Klamm had in common with the eagle. (EC 104)

Klamm's superior visual position must be seen in contradistinction to K.'s own disempowered stance. The image of Klamm as an eagle attributes to him the superior overview which in K.'s profession would be achievable through aerial photography. K. himself, however, continuously fails to gain such an overview, as he 'can never sufficiently organize the village as a view, can never frame or map it'.[45]

[45] Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels*, 138.

Why, however, does K. come to accept Gardena's judgement, which he had previously rejected? The reasons for this change of mind can be traced back to an earlier scene which exemplifies K.'s visual disempowerment as well as his proneness to (self-)deception. On first sight, indeed, this episode seems to reverse the imbalance between K. and the secretary. During K.'s first visit to the Herrenhof inn, his future mistress Frieda reveals to him that Klamm is sitting in a private room next door. On his request, she even allows him to observe Klamm through a peephole in the door: 'Durch das kleine Loch, das offenbar zu Beobachtungszwecken gebohrt war, übersah er [K.] fast das ganze Nebenzimmer' (GS 60) ['The little hole, which had clearly been drilled for observation purposes, gave him [K.] a view of almost the whole of the next room' (EC 34)]. While the spyhole has been put into the door for purposes of observation, it is left unclear which side is meant to be the target of this surveillance. The hierarchy between village and Castle suggests that Klamm might use the hole to survey the inn, yet in this scene K. reverses this set-up by subjecting Klamm to his observation. While the peephole thus seems to invest K. with an unexpected mastery, this position is subtly undermined by the remark that he can see 'almost' the entire room. Kafka here makes strategic use of the verb *übersehen*, which can mean either 'to look over' or 'to overlook'. While this verb refers to K.'s profession as a land surveyor, it also alludes to one of the novel's central paradoxes: the more he strives for the kind of visual mastery associated with his profession, the more he is prone to overlook important details of his surveyed surroundings. Like no other scene in the novel, K.'s observation of Klamm underlines this dilemma:

An einem Schreibtisch in der Mitte des Zimmers in einem bequemen Rundlehnstuhl saß grell von einer vor ihm niederhängenden Glühlampe beleuchtet Herr Klamm. Ein mittelgroßer dicker schwerfälliger Herr. Das Gesicht war noch glatt, aber die Wangen senkten sich doch schon mit dem Gewicht des Alters ein wenig hinab. Der schwarze Schnurrbart war lang ausgezogen. Ein schief aufgesetzter, spiegelnder Zwicker verdeckte die Augen. Wäre Herr Klamm völlig beim Tisch gesessen hätte K. nur sein Profil gesehn, da ihm aber Klamm stark zugedreht war, sah er ihm voll ins Gesicht. Den linken Elbogen hatte Klamm auf dem Tisch liegen, die rechte Hand, in der er eine Virginia hielt, ruhte auf dem Knie. Auf dem Tisch stand ein

Bierglas; da die Randleiste des Tisches hoch war, konnte K. nicht genau sehn, ob dort irgendwelche Schriften lagen, es schien ihm aber, als wäre er leer. (GS 60–1)

At a desk in the centre of the room, seated in a comfortable round-backed easy chair, starkly lit by an electric light bulb dangling in front of him, was Herr Klamm. A fat, large-bodied man of medium height. The face was still smooth but the cheeks already sagged slightly with the weight of age. The dark moustache was drawn out wide. A pince-nez, worn askew, reflected the light and so hid the eyes. Had Herr Klamm been sitting at the desk, K. would have seen only his profile, but since Klamm was sharply twisted towards him he could see the man full-face. Klamm had his left elbow on the desk, his right hand, holding a cigar, rested on one knee. On the desk stood a beer glass; the desk had a high rim, so K. could not quite make out whether there were any papers lying there, but he had the impression it was empty. (EC 34)

In contrast to many previous sights, this observed scene appears clear, vivid, and stable. The concise yet evocative description of Klamm, his physical appearance and male regalia of cigar and beer glass, testifies to K.'s confident gaze, which takes in the whole sight and its various constitutive parts. Indeed, given the mystery surrounding Klamm, his actual appearance is disappointingly banal, an 'epitome of bourgeois sedateness, a towering image of trivial virility'.[46]

The peephole in the door thus seems to provide K. with a rare, perhaps unique opportunity to reassert his perceptual mastery over a figure who elsewhere eludes his grasp and comprehension. Indeed, this change in power dynamics is no coincidence but is tied to a more specific association created by the scene. Klamm does not sit facing the table but is turned towards the peephole, as if to comply with some previously given instruction. Although he is holding a cigar, moreover, he is sitting perfectly still in his armchair, in a pose which seems to be specifically adopted for his observer. Given these various details, the whole scene casts Klamm as the sitter in a photographic studio.[47] This effect is further enforced by the bright light which illuminates Klamm's face, throwing it into sharp relief, which is

[46] Politzer, *Parable and Paradox*, 238.

[47] Ronald Gray comments that Klamm's physical description 'would suit well the photographs of Kafka's father' (*Franz Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 147).

reminiscent of a photographer's spotlight, or indeed of the flash of a camera. The most revealing part of this analogy, however, is K.'s position behind the peephole. In a rare moment of empowerment, he takes on the role of the photographer looking through the aperture.

K's. gaze through the peephole thus reverses the novel's more general power dynamic in which Klamm appears as K.'s all-seeing invisible observer. The quasi-photographic set-up enables K. to scrutinize Klamm from a physically and mentally detached perspective; unfortunately, however, this photographic sense of mastery is soon undermined by the recurrence of ambiguity and uncertainty. Despite its clarity, the observed scene contains some elements which challenge its overall meaning. To start with, Klamm's appearance seems strangely distorted, an impression which suggests that his sight might be subject to a disfiguring process of projection. His moustache is 'drawn out wide', his pince-nez 'worn askew', and his body 'sharply twisted' ['stark zugedreht'], an awkward posture which introduces an element of tension into this static scene. Kafka uses a similar phrase when describing one of his own photographs; in a letter to Grete Bloch, he describes his 'schiefgedrehte Fratze' ['twisted mug'] in one picture (B3 51/EF 401), a formulation which combines Klamm's 'stark zugedreht' pose and his 'schief aufgesetzter … Zwicker'. As we have seen, Kafka's letters repeatedly stress the distorting effect of photography, in particular where his own portraits are concerned. K.'s photographic sight of Klamm is affected by a similar, destabilizing sense of distortion and misperception.

This is not the only element, however, which undermines K.'s visual mastery. Looking at the scene, he has the impression that the table in front of the secretary is empty, yet from his perspective he cannot confirm this impression. To gain absolute certainty, he has to enlist the help of another viewer:

> Der Sicherheit halber bat er Frieda durch das Loch zu schauen und ihm darüber Auskunft zu geben. Da sie aber vor kurzem im Zimmer gewesen war, konnte sie K. ohneweiters bestätigen, daß dort keine Schriften lagen. K. fragte Frieda, ob er schon weggehn müsse, sie aber sagte er könne hindurch schauen, so lange er Lust habe. (GS 61)

> To make sure, he asked Frieda to look through the hole and tell him what she saw. She had been in the room only recently, however, and could confirm at

once that no papers lay there. K. asked Frieda if he should move away now, but she said he could go on looking for as long as he liked. (EC 34)

This dialogue replays the power dynamic of K.'s conversation with Gardena. As in the case of the messenger photograph, K. must rely on a female authority to supplement his own flawed interpretation; unable to survey the entire scene, he needs Frieda to supply the missing information. Indeed, as in the scene with Gardena, this female commentator radically reverses K.'s own interpretation. Although she confirms his impressions that the table in front of Klamm is empty, her subsequent throwaway comment that Klamm is actually asleep undermines K.'s own judgement:

'Wie!' rief K., 'er schläft? Als ich ins Zimmer gesehn habe, war er doch noch wach und saß bei Tisch.' 'So sitzt er noch immer', sagte Frieda, 'auch als Sie ihn gesehen haben, hat er schon geschlafen—hätte ich Sie denn sonst hineinsehn lassen?—das war seine Schlafstellung, die Herren schlafen sehr viel, das kann man kaum verstehn. Übrigens, wenn er nicht soviel schliefe, wie könnte er diese Leute ertragen.' (GS 65–6)

'What!' exclaimed K., 'he's asleep? When I looked into the room he was still awake, he was sitting at his desk.' 'He still sits like that', said Frieda, 'even when you saw him he was asleep—would I have let you look in otherwise?—that was his sleeping position, the gentlemen sleep a great deal, it's hard to know why. Come to think of it, if he didn't sleep so much, how could he stand these people.' (EC 36)

As in the case of Gardena's snapshot, the scene viewed through the aperture thus turns out to be inherently ambiguous, allowing for two conflicting, mutually exclusive interpretations. Its decisive blind spot is Klamm's 'pince-nez, worn askew' which conceals his eyes, making it impossible to judge whether they are open or closed. Far from being a marginal detail, the pince-nez turns out to be the scene's ambivalent *punctum*. In a fetishistic manner, K.'s gaze is drawn to its shiny surface which reflects the light from the bulb, thereby concealing an underlying absence—Klamm's gaze. As in the case of the Castellan's portrait, then, this 'photographic' scene deprives the observer of a sense of recognition as it precludes the eye contact between viewer and sitter. In this scene, however, this absence is further compounded by another element. On one level, Klamm's pince-nez could be seen to compensate for his absent gaze, as it has

the capacity to reflect K.'s own gaze back at him, thus enabling a moment if not of acknowledgement then at least of self-recognition. Yet the role of these spectacles is doubly precarious; not only do they conceal what lies behind them, but they are also 'worn askew'; as a result, they deflect rather than reflect the viewer's gaze, preventing his identification with the observed sight. In a highly symbolic twist, then, the pince-nez, a device designed to aid and support human vision, becomes a confusing and opaque spectacle in its own right. In this respect, its function within the observed scene echoes the discussion of photography in Kafka's letters, where the nodal point of a photographic image harbours the potential for confusion and ambiguity. As in the correspondence, then, the initial, epiphanic sense of clarity and recognition is subsequently dismantled, giving way to a sense of fundamental uncertainty which is only enforced by any supplementary information provided by the female observer.

However, K.'s shocked reaction to Frieda's revelation is not simply motivated by his realization that he has misinterpreted Klamm's appearance. Rather, his response touches on a more fundamental interpersonal dynamic. The attraction of the peephole is not restricted to the opportunity for secret surveillance; K.'s response suggests that what he truly seeks is Klamm's acknowledgement of, and complicity with, his own perceptual agency. Indeed, within Kafka's works, such compliance is a crucial factor in the power dynamics created by photography. At various points in Kafka's writings, the act of being photographed is figured as synonymous with a process of conditioning and coercion. Typical examples are Karl Rossmann's family portrait, in which he is forced to face the camera as a symbol of his own subjection, or Gregor Samsa's insertion into the de-individualizing iconography of the soldier portrait. Kafka's personal antipathy against his own photographic portraits and his remarks about his 'simian' childhood picture point in the same direction. While in all these cases, the gaze of the camera is an extension of restrictive social norms, and its effect is founded on the subject's knowing subjection to this conditioning photographic process, Klamm lacks this compliance. Although his posture is in line with photographic conventions, the fact that he is asleep makes him immune to the psychological dynamics of the recording process. K. here gets to adopt the position of the photographer, but this victory

is tainted by his 'sitter's' incomplete subordination. In this respect, Kafka's last novel adds a crucial element to the debate on photography in his works, namely the medium's role as a grid for interpersonal power dynamics.

This is further underlined in a subsequent passage where K.'s contested position as an observer again becomes apparent, this time in relation to the Castle. While he is waiting for Klamm outside the inn, K. looks up at the Castle, investing it with a human quality:

> Wenn K. das Schloß ansah, so war ihm manchmal, als beobachte er jemanden, der ruhig dasitze und vor sich hinsehe, nicht etwa in Gedanken verloren und dadurch gegen alles abgeschlossen, sondern frei und unbekümmert; so als sei er allein und niemand beobachte ihn; und doch mußte er merken, daß er beobachtet wurde, aber es rührte nicht im Geringsten an seine Ruhe und wirklich—man wußte nicht war es Ursache oder Folge—die Blicke des Beobachters konnten sich nicht festhalten und glitten ab. (GS 156)

> Looking at the Castle, K. felt at times as if he was watching a person who was sitting there quietly, gazing straight ahead, not so much lost in thought and hence cut off from everything as free and unconcerned; as if the person had been alone, with no one watching him; he must be aware that he was being watched, but it did not affect his calm in the least and in fact—there was no telling whether this was cause or effect—the observer's gaze found no purchase and kept sliding away. (EC 89)

K.'s anthropomorphized image of the Castle is clearly inspired by his earlier experience in the inn; yet what initially seemed to be a mere coincidence is here transformed into a more fundamental visual aporia. While Klamm was unaware of K.'s presence because he was asleep, the Castle's immunity to his gaze appears to be the result of a conscious rejection. Within the succession of scenes which chart K.'s visual disempowerment, this episode is the most radical and also the most revealing. It shows that visual mastery and assurance in Kafka's last novel is not a one-sided process but is dependent upon mutual acknowledgement, the validation of the viewer's own position by the viewed other. In the world of the Castle, the mutuality of such visual encounters is replaced by an all-pervading sense of ambiguity, opacity, and isolation, just as K.'s desire for recognition is progressively eroded in the act of viewing: 'je länger er hinsah, desto weniger erkannte er,

desto tiefer sank alles in Dämmerung' (GS 156–7) ['the longer K. looked, the less he could make out, the deeper everything sank into semi-darkness' (EC 89)].

BEYOND PHOTOGRAPHY?

In his 'Kafka' essay, Walter Benjamin writes: 'Im Film erkennt der Mensch den eigenen Gang nicht, im Grammophon nicht die eigene Stimme. Experimente beweisen das. Die Lage der Versuchsperson in diesen Experimenten ist Kafkas Lage' (BGS II 436) ['Experiments have proved that a man does not recognize his own gait on film or his own voice on the phonograph. The situation of the subject in such experiments is Kafka's situation' (BSW II 814)]. This argument can be extended to the medium of photography; Kafka's writings after *Der Proceß* display an increasing scepticism towards photography as a medium of knowledge and (self-)recognition. Blumfeld is misled by the staged immediacy of a political photograph, while the hunger artist sees his own pictures being used for equally manipulative purposes. In both cases, the protagonists are confronted with images and ideologies fabricated by others. In *Das Schloß*, this theme of visual disempowerment is embodied in the figure of the land surveyor deprived of his optical instruments. Just as K. is uprooted from his previous life and profession, he is unable to orient himself in the world of the Castle, an effect highlighted by his inability to interpret the snapshot photograph. Even when he is able to adopt the metaphorical position of the photographer, K. realizes that this role precludes the acknowledgement by others. Photographs and quasi-photographic configurations thus prevent, rather than enable, meaningful encounters between people and, by implication, thwart K.'s quest for recognition.

In his letters, Kafka reflects on this aporia while also gesturing towards alternative modes of communication. In the winter of 1919–20, he entered into a correspondence with the eighteen-year-old Minze Eisner, whom he met during a sanatorium stay in Schelesen. Although Kafka's interest in Minze is somewhat paternal in nature, the correspondence at first develops along familiar lines; once again,

he requests, and receives, photographs from his female correspondent.[48] When asked for his own portrait, Kafka responds with familiar recalcitrance, yet this time he offers a different justification:

Was waren das für Wünsche, die ich vergessen habe. Doch nicht etwa mein Bild. Das habe ich absichtlich nicht geschickt. Sind meine Augen in Ihrer Erinnerung, Minze, wirklich klar, jung, ruhig, dann mögen sie dort so bleiben, dann sind sie dort besser aufgehoben als bei mir, denn hier sind sie trüb genug und immer unsicherer geworden mit kleinen Schwankungen in 36 jährigem Offen-sein. In der Photographie kommt das zwar nicht heraus, aber dann ist sie desto unnötiger. Sollten meine Augen einmal schöner, reiner werden, dann bekommen Sie ein Bild, aber dann wird es auch wieder nicht nötig sein, denn dann würden sie doch mit der Kraft, die reine Menschenaugen haben, bis nach Karlsbad Ihnen geradeaus ins Herz sehn, während sie jetzt nur mühsam in Ihrem doch aufrichtigen und deshalb lieben Brief herumirren. (B 260)

What were those wishes of yours that I have forgotten? You're surely not referring to my picture. I deliberately did not send one. If you remember my eyes really as clear, young, tranquil, then let them remain so in your memory, for they are better conserved there than with me. Here they are dim enough and ever more unsure, with little flickerings from being open these 36 years. Of course that does not come out in the photograph, but then it's all the more unnecessary. If my eyes should ever become finer, clearer, then you will get a picture, but then again it would be unnecessary, for then they would be able to see all the way to Karlsbad and straight into your heart (such power have clear human eyes), whereas now they can only painfully drift about in your sincere, and for that reason precious, letter. (EL 224)

Unlike in his letters to Felice, Kafka's justification for his refusal is not the distorting quality of photography; rather, he refers to his own, progressively diminishing capacity as a viewer—his increasingly murky and uncertain gaze—as the chief obstacle. He attributes this effect to the '36 jährigem Offen-sein' of his eyes, casting the very process of viewing as detrimental to the clarity of his gaze. In a paradoxical turn of his argument, Kafka concedes that this effect would not even be visible in the photograph, thus simultaneously questioning the adequacy of the medium and his fitness as a sitter.

[48] Cf. B 256–7, 265–6, 268–9, 277–8/EL 221, 227–8, 231–2, 240–1. On Kafka's emotionally involved correspondence with Minze Eisner, see Peter-André Alt, *Franz Kafka: Der ewige Sohn* (Munich: Beck, 2005), 533–4.

What connects this letter and Kafka's last novel is the emphasis placed on visual perception as a means of interpersonal communication. As in *Das Schloß*, this process is beset with obstacles both interior and exterior; the decline in his visual powers, combined with the more general inadequacies of the photographic medium, prevents a meaningful encounter between Kafka and Minze Eisner. Even in its negative form, however, the above letter prefigures an issue which becomes central in the novel, namely the need for mutual acknowledgement through which the individual is affirmed in his or her identity.

As Kafka concedes, however, this goal can be achieved neither through photography nor, indeed, through the unmediated act of viewing. Instead he suggests an alternative, non-visual model of communication, hoping perhaps to escape the failed encounters of photography: 'Was die Bilder betrifft, so lassen wir es bitte, Minze, dabei bleiben, schon deshalb, weil man im Dunkel (ich meine: wenn man einander nicht sieht,) einander besser hört. Und wir wollen einander gut hören' (B 262) ['As for the pictures, Minze, let's drop the matter, shall we, if only because in the dark (I mean, when people do not see each other) they hear each other better. And we want to hear each other well' (EL 225)].

Conclusion: Kafka the Photographer?

Kafka's writings on photography display, as we have seen, both richness and diversity. Despite his extensive engagement with the medium, however, Kafka rarely arrives—or even aims to arrive—at more abstract, theoretical conclusions. Indeed, what is striking throughout his writings is his reluctance to subordinate photography to totalizing frameworks or, conversely, to extrapolate such frameworks from his dealings with individual pictures. Unlike Brod, who produced various essays about modern media technology, Kafka was no essayist, and his photographic explorations take the form of mini-narratives which mobilize specific images and details as a springboard for his literary imagination. In his diary account of the Kaiser Panorama, Kafka explores photography's representational qualities, and in particular its supremacy over film; even such general comments, however, are interspersed with evocative descriptions of particular images—an approach which suggests that, for Kafka, reflection about photography as a medium invariably emerges from an engagement with individual pictures.

On the whole, then, Kafka's prime interest is less in photography than in photographs; in his writings, he adopts a casuistic approach, judging each image on its own terms. What emerges from this strategy is a poetics of the specific which abstains from universal claims and self-contained theories. In this respect, Kafka's textual practice prefigures that of his early critics, Adorno, Kracauer, and Benjamin, who likewise privilege close readings over totalizing interpretation.

Despite the breadth and complexity of his engagement with the medium, Kafka's relative obscurity as a commentator on photography might well derive from precisely this reluctance to abstract from the

particular to the general. Although he is cited by two of the most influential photography theorists, Susan Sontag in *On Photography* and Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*,[1] the claims they use are in fact taken from an apocryphal source, and one which offers precisely the kinds of sweeping statements so noticeably absent from Kafka's actual writings. Gustav Janouch's *Gespräche mit Kafka* (*Conversations with Kafka*, 1951) purport to supplement and illuminate Kafka's texts with easily accessible, punchy slogans. Janouch, the son of one of Kafka's colleagues, met the writer in 1920, when he himself was only 17 years old. In his memories of their conversations, first published over three decades later, Janouch records several instances when Kafka comments on photography from a general, and often rather critical, perspective. At one point, for instance, Kafka is said to reject the medium's superficiality, claiming that 'Die Photographie fesselt den Blick an die Oberfläche. Damit vernebelt sie gewöhnlich das verborgene Wesen, das wie ein Licht- und Schattenhauch durch die Züge der Dinge hindurch schimmert. Dem kann man mit den schärfsten Linsen allein nicht beikommen' ['Photography chains one's gaze to the surface. As a result it obscures the hidden essence which glimmers through the outlines of things like a play of light and shade. One can't catch that even with the sharpest lenses'],[2] while elsewhere, he even associates photography with a deliberate desire for oblivion: 'Man photographiert Dinge, um sie aus dem Sinn zu verscheuchen' ['One photographs things in order to get them out of one's mind'].[3]

The reliability of Janouch's recollections, which contain many sweeping statements allegedly made by Kafka about art, literature, and politics, has been emphatically discredited.[4] Indeed, although these statements harbour an undeniable attraction in their aphoristic concision, a considerable gulf exists between these categorical claims and Kafka's highly ambivalent stance towards the medium. Rather

[1] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), 206; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 2000), 53.

[2] Gustav Janouch, *Gespräche mit Kafka*, 2nd rev. and enlarged edn (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1968), 195–6; *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. Goronwy Rees, 2nd rev. and enlarged edn (London: Deutsch, 1971), 144.

[3] Janouch, *Gespräche*, 54; *Conversations*, 24.

[4] See Hartmut Binder (ed.), *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1979), ii. 556–62.

than encapsulating Kafka's 'true' views about photography, they can at best serve as an argumentative backdrop which brings out the complex and often contradictory agenda of his actual photographic explorations. Even so, while the above statements are at odds with Kafka's own approach in both form and content, they nonetheless raise two issues which are at the heart of Kafka's engagement with the medium: the dialectic of essence and appearance, and the precarious relation between photography and memory.

Many of Kafka's characters encounter photography as a superficial and deceptive medium designed to captivate the viewer; this mechanism is particularly apparent in staged images such as soldier portraits, family photographs, and photographs recorded for propaganda and advertising purposes. Yet while such pictures encapsulate the force of societal norms and restrictions, they also have a more positive, enlightening capacity; they expose the superficial, staged, and deceptive character of photography, and hence the psychosocial power dynamics manifested in and through such pictures. Although some of Kafka's characters might thus remain naïvely entrapped by photographic surfaces, their predicament can in turn spark a more subversive impulse: the desire to dismantle the photographic facade, and hence to subject the medium to scrutiny and critique. Janouch's Kafka only stresses the superficiality of photography, claiming that even the sharpest lenses cannot compensate for this inherent weaknesses. Kafka's writings, in contrast, not only address this problem but mobilize it to constructive effect, uncovering aspects which are both concealed and inscribed within the photographic surface.

Janouch's second quotation above raises comparable issues. Here, the implied contrast is not one of essence and appearance but of remembering and forgetting, as the act of photographic recording is said to supersede personal recollection. This claim casts photography as a psychological defence mechanism, a shield against potentially unsettling sights and experiences. Once again, the sentiment behind this remark is both echoed and complicated by a comparison with Kafka's works. In texts like *Der Verschollene* or *Die Verwandlung*, photographs provide the sole connection to a past which is not actively remembered or represented within the narrative. Yet photography, and indeed these very same photographs,

can also emblematize the unsettling persistence of the past and its continuing hold over the present. Although photographic images sometimes come to replace the actual memory of an experience, they rarely become synonymous with oblivion and repression; on the contrary, in the letters and diaries as in the fiction, photographs gain an almost obsessive hold over the viewer's imagination, leaving an inerasable imprint on his mind. Kafka's notebooks contain one isolated, aphoristic sentence which highlights this persistence of images over unmediated memories: 'Nichts, nur Bild, nichts anderes, völlige Vergessenheit' (N2 355) ['Nothing, only image, nothing else, complete oblivion'].

When read alongside Kafka's own texts, Janouch's statements thus need to be modified and expanded, and the apparent simplicity of their message complicated by more dialectical readings. However, there is also another issue which links the two quotations and sets them apart from Kafka's own texts. Both remarks are uncharacteristic of Kafka in that they are written from the perspective of the photographer rather than from that of the viewer. Despite his lifelong fascination with photography as a social and technological phenomenon, Kafka places remarkably little emphasis on the actual recording process.

The clearest evidence for this revealing blind spot is the fact that photographers do not make much of an appearance in Kafka's writings. The one protagonist who is associated with photography through his profession is K. the land surveyor; yet even here photography is notable only through its absence, as he is stranded in the village without the tools of his trade. The only other allusion to a professional photographer in Kafka's fiction is a mere fleeting memory on the part of Karl Rossmann, who recalls how he and his parents had had their picture taken. In this scene, the photographer merely acts as the executor of his parents' wishes and as the passive operator of his camera; his agency, then, is usurped by that of the apparatus, as his sole function is to compel Karl to face the photographic lens. This episode suggests that for Kafka, taking photographs is little more than an impersonal, mechanical, and socially restrictive process which leaves no room for individual creativity.

A similar sense of disempowerment can be discerned in Kafka's personal writings. Although he probably did not own a camera, Kafka

took pictures when on holiday with friends or family members.[5] In his writings, however, he rarely mentions taking pictures, and when he does it is mainly to stress the flaws and obstacles which beset this undertaking. During the 1912 trip to Weimar, the failure to take 'good' photographs forms, as we have seen, a prominent theme in Kafka's diaries, though in this case Kafka tries—equally unsuccessfully—to use this failure as a pretext to win more time with Margarethe Kirchner. In the letters to Felice Bauer, however, a similar setback is invested with a deeper, melancholy significance. When in June 1915 Kafka and Felice finally come to spend some time together in the spa town of Karlsbad, photography casts a retrospective shadow over this precious time of personal closeness. As Kafka writes after the journey:

> Liebe Felice, etwas Schlimmes habe ich geahnt, aber etwas derartiges nicht. Auf den Films ist kein lebendiger Hauch, wir haben mit dem Deckpapier statt mit den Films photographiert. Ich reiche die Films in Dein Zimmer, Du wirfst sie in meines zurück—alles sinnlos, die Juden laufen vor Deinem Apparat weg, ich schaue in Ellbogen zu Dir auf, glaube es sei für die Dauer, alles sinnlos und sinnlos. Dir ist nichts geschehn, Du hast den Apparat und Dich, aber wie wirst Du mich trösten? (B3 137)
>
> Dear Felice, I suspected something serious might happen, but nothing as bad as this. There is no living trace on the film; we took the photographs with the protective cover instead of the film. I pass the films to your room, you throw them back to mine—all in vain; at the sight of your camera the Jews take to their heels; glancing up to you at Ellbogen, I believe it will be forever—all in vain and in vain. You are all right, you have the camera, and yourself, but how are you going to console me? (EF 455–6)

The light-hearted tone of Kafka's letter does not conceal its underlying melancholy. It is ironic that in a relationship whose changing fortunes were so closely reflected in photography, no photographs have survived from this rare period of intimacy. Indeed, the absence of any such pictures comes to anticipate the relationship's subsequent decline; as Kafka remarks with prophetic gloom, 'I believe it will be

[5] During his stay in Zürau in 1917, for instance, Kafka took a group photograph of his sister Ottla, a cousin, his secretary Julie Kaiser, and her fiancé. See Klaus Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka: Bilder aus seinem Leben*, 2nd ext. edn (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1994), 212.

forever—all in vain and in vain.' In this letter, photography thus becomes synonymous with a more general failure of recording and remembrance; the sight of the Jews running away from the camera symbolizes the existential transience of life.

As in Janouch's statement, then, photography here becomes associated with oblivion rather than recollection, as the apparatus fails to preserve the encountered impressions. Kafka's response, however, reveals his belief that the camera can in fact confer a sense of permanence and stability. Bemoaning the fact that he does not own the camera in question, he suggests that the lost images may somehow still be preserved within the apparatus, which in turn harbours the possibility of future, more successful recordings. Even when faced with his own failure as a photographer, Kafka thus retains a faith in the medium. His own reaction to this fiasco, however, is to resort to a different strategy, as he re-evokes the lost images within his letter.

Kafka's failings as a photographer thus lead him to the same response which he adopts when faced with ambivalent or confusing images: he turns to writing as a way of coping with the inadequacies of the medium. This strategy lies at the heart of Kafka's lifelong fascination with photography. By stressing the flaws of the medium—its superficiality and ambiguity, and its complicity with mechanisms of power, oppression, and conformity—Kafka mobilizes these problems to productive effect. Alongside an intense, at times obsessive fascination with photographic images, it is the critique of photography as representational paradigm and social phenomenon which acts as one of the principal driving forces behind his literary explorations.

This approach also sheds light on another curious omission within Kafka's otherwise extensive engagement with the medium. Just as he pays little attention to the photographer as the controlling force behind the recording process, he seems equally uninterested in photography as an art form. Despite the liveliness of Prague's artistic scene, Kafka does not appear to have engaged with this dimension of photography; his literary discussions, in any case, remain limited to studio portraits, amateur snapshots, and images disseminated within the mass media. Yet Kafka's lack of engagement with photography as art cannot be explained away by biographical reasons. Rather, this blind spot within his writings follows an inner logic pertaining to his literary mobilization of the medium.

In contrast to amateur photography, artistic uses of the medium place greater emphasis on technical skill, arrangement, and composition in order to achieve the envisaged result. Accordingly, the likelihood of technical flaws and accidents and the impact of chance on the resulting picture are reduced within this process. Yet while the same could be said about other professional forms of photography, such as the studio portrait, the concept of art photography introduces another crucial factor into this equation. In its most basic definition, the notion of photography as an art form attributes a creative dimension to the recording process, thus positing the photographer as the 'author' of the resultant images, rather than the mere operator of an apparatus. By implication, the resulting photograph is not a mere mechanical replication of a reality, but the product of careful arrangement and even manipulation.

In the correspondence with Minze Eisner, Kafka is confronted with images which have a more artistic touch. Upon his request, he receives various studio portraits of his addressee which lie on the boundary between creative and commercial photography and which thus raise questions about artistic agency. Kafka comments,

> Sie sind ja eine erstaunliche Schauspielerin oder richtiger Sie haben das erstaunliche Material einer Schauspielerin oder Tänzerin und die (im hohen Sinn) göttliche Frechheit des Angeschaut-werden-könnens und Des-dem-Blicke-standhaltens. Das hätte ich nicht gedacht. Aber, das fürchte ich, dieses Material ist bei dem Photographen, ein so ausgezeichneter Mensch er sonst sein mag, in keiner guten, verständigen Hand. Was daran gut ist, sind deutlich Sie selbst, in I macht er etwas z. B. aus Schnitzler Anatol, in II eine Kameliendame, in III etwas Wedekindsches, in IV endlich die Kleopatra (des ersten Abends), vorausgesetzt, daß es nicht die Fern Andra ist. So mischt er die Dinge und hat ja gewiß überall ein wenig Recht, aber im ganzen meinem Gefühl nach niemals, da sind sie ihm durch die Finger gelaufen. (B 256)

> You really are an amazingly good actress or, more accurately, you have the amazing potentiality of an actress or a dancer—the divine forwardness (in the best sense) of enjoying being looked at, the power of standing up to the public gaze. This I would not have thought. But I am afraid that the photographer, excellent person though he may be otherwise, has not handled this potentiality well and sensibly. Whatever is good in the photographs is simply you yourself. In No. 1 he makes you into a character out of Schnitzler's *Anatol*. In No. 2 he makes you the Dames aux Camélias, in No. 3 someone

out of Wedekind, while in No. 4 you are Cleopatra (as she was the first evening) if not Fern Andra. So he mixes things up and yet there is something partially right in all of them. On the whole, though, to my mind you have slipped through his fingers. (EL 221)

Kafka not only rejects the pictures' specific style, their contrived theatricality, but he denies the photographer any creative input, asserting that the pictures' value lies entirely in their sitter: 'Whatever is good in the photographs is simply you yourself.' This letter is symptomatic of Kafka's more general rejection of artistic photography. Whenever he is faced with studio portraits which display such aspirations, he responds with similar criticism. He dismisses a portrait of Milena Jesenská as 'ein übertriebenes Propaganda-Bild' (GM 156) ['an exaggerated propaganda picture' (EM 92)], while in the correspondence with Felice Bauer, he criticizes her attire in one portrait as too theatrical: 'der Kragen trübt das Bild. Mephisto trägt, wenn ich nicht irre, einen solchen Kragen, auch Strindberg habe ich so gesehn, aber Du Felice?' (B3 162) ['the collar somewhat mars this one. Mephisto, if I am not mistaken, wears that kind of collar; I have also seen Strindberg in one, but you, Felice?' (EF 469)].

At first sight, such comments appear surprising and rather counter-intuitive, as they seem at odds with Kafka's fascination with images which transcend the realm of bourgeois normality. In his letters to Felice in particular, he likes to bring out those elements within a picture which invest it with a more fantastical, dramatic, or mysterious dimension, and it is such photographic narratives which in turn fuel his literary imagination. In all of these cases, however, the resulting sense of suspense and ambiguity is created through textual commentary. When looking at photographs, Kafka brings out hidden aspects which were not envisaged by either sitter or photographer, thus uncovering dimensions of photographic meaning which are only latently present within the original image. This approach, however, leaves no room for the photographer's own artistic intentions. Through their ostentatious theatricality, Minze Eisner's portraits thwart Kafka's own predilection for imaginatively investing images with a dramatic dimension. What is at stake here is thus the issue of authorial control. For Kafka, artistic uses of photography reduce the scope for the viewer's own analytical and imaginative engagement;

throughout his writings, photographic meaning emerges through a process of viewing and interpretation. Accordingly, the most productive elements for Kafka are those aspects which escape the control of the photographer, since these allow most scope for creative appropriation.

In this respect, Kafka's stance prefigures later critical responses to the medium. Walter Benjamin speaks of the 'winzige Fünkchen Zufall' (BGS II 371) ['tiny spark of chance' (BSW II 510)] which can invade even the most carefully composed photograph, investing it with an appeal which extends far beyond its immediate time and context. Roland Barthes's *punctum* builds on this notion by supplanting a picture's general socio-cultural significance with the viewer's entirely subjective, unpredictable response. What is at stake in both of these theories, then, is the writer's desire to go beyond the picture's manifest, intended meaning, to usurp the position previously held by the photographer, and thus to appropriate the medium's creative potential in the act of interpretation.

Kafka's texts prefigure these approaches. In his writings, photography becomes the site of an ambivalent struggle for authorial self-definition in the age of mechanical reproduction. Photographs are fascinating for Kafka not because they embody an ideal of self-evidence or clarity but, on the contrary, because of their very resistance to the investigations which they continuously provoke. Rather than determining and 'fixing' the meaning of photography, however, his literary explorations merely reinforce the pictures' indeterminacy and opacity.

Although Kafka does not employ the literal camera to productive or creative effect, his texts thus emulate the position of the photographer on various levels. Not only do they compete with the photographer in a struggle for interpretative mastery, but they also adopt more general representational strategies associated with the medium. In his texts, Kafka subjects both photographs and other spectacles of modern life to a disquieting second exposure, revealing those elements which undermine their supposed stability and familiarity. The emphasis on apparently random details which suddenly undermine the overall meaning of a scene; the focus on surfaces, facades, and appearances; and, above all, the rift between photographically detailed descriptions and their promise of underlying meaning are all strategies which Kafka

adopts and appropriates from his engagement with photography. In his letter to Benjamin, Adorno describes Kafka as a photographer who uses his imaginary camera to record the haunting scenes of modernity from a 'redeemed' perspective. In the light of this study, however, we might need to modify Adorno's remark. It is not the world which is redeemed by Kafka the photographer; rather, it is Kafka the writer who redeems the failings of photography in his refusal to transcend them.

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