

**THE EXPERIENCE OF RESTLESSNESS: A STUDY OF  
MOVEMENT IN THE SHORTER FICTION OF FRANZ KAFKA**

**by**

**SANIA REDDIG**

**A thesis submitted to  
The University of Birmingham  
for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of German Studies  
The University of Birmingham  
2009**

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

**University of Birmingham Research Archive**

**e-theses repository**

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

## ABSTRACT

Images of movement represent a ubiquitous element in Kafka's writings. This study explores the role of these images as a form of patterning in the fictions. With an eye to continuity and evolution, the study explores the patterns of movement pervading Kafka's early collection *Betrachtung* and a selection of texts written between 1915 and 1917. What emerges is a persistent concern with the condition of restlessness, its origins and consequences. The condition emerges from a conflict between the protagonists' desire for stability and purposive activity and their experience of dynamic forces that escape or resist any form of containment. This conflict results in an oscillating motion that dominates the physical, mental and narrative movements shaping Kafka's stories. Analysing the relation between early and later texts, the thesis argues that Kafka deploys this central conflict productively to capture a wide spectrum of states of mind. As he explores restlessness in ever wider circles of life, he explores psychological, social and ideological structures, as well as some of the grand narratives of life, death and myth. This differentiated view on the inner dynamics of Kafka's narratives provides a fruitful perspective on questions concerning the development of the oeuvre as a whole.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My deepest thanks go to Ronald Speirs for his inspiration and unwavering encouragement, and for the love of reading he instills in those around him.

I also wish to thank my family and friends, who have stood by me with support, patience and love through the last years.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>PART I: ‘BALD SCHAUKELTE ICH STÄRKER’: THE EXPERIENCE OF RESTLESSNESS IN <i>BETRACHTUNG</i></b>	8
1. A leap into pure motion – ‘Wunsch, Indianer zu werden’	12
2. The ‘Stellung in dieser Welt’ as a problematic experience ‘Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter’, ‘Der Fahrgast’, ‘Kleider’, ‘Die Bäume’	18
3. Permeable borders – experiencing restlessness ‘Der Kaufmann’, ‘Die Abweisung’, ‘Der Nachhauseweg’	34
4. The man by the window – restlessness as an experience of opposing pulls ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’, ‘Das Gassenfenster’, ‘Das Unglück des Junggesellen’	45
5. ‘Der plötzliche Spaziergang’ – transcending restlessness?	61
6. ‘Entschlüsse’ – resisting restlessness ‘Entschlüsse’, ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’	67
7. The problem of narrating restlessness ‘Der Ausflug ins Gebirge’, ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’	75
8. Narratives of restlessness ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’, ‘Unglücklichsein’	93
<b>PART II: EXPLORATIONS OF ORDER AND RESTLESSNESS – MOVEMENT IN SHORT PROSE 1915-1917</b>	128
1. Routine and childplay: the disruption of personal ‘Ordnung’ in ‘Blumfeld, ein älterer Jungeselle’	129
2. ‘...und daran hat es sich zerrieben’ – a challenge to the order of life ‘dans le vrai’ in ‘Die Sorge des Hausvaters’	151
3. The ‘Gracchus’-fragments: individual experience and the order of life and death	167
4. Unity or construction – the problem of individual and social order in ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’	198

<b>PART III: CONCLUSION: MOVEMENT AS A THEME WITH VARIATIONS IN KAFKA'S WRITINGS – THE 'RADIENPROJEKT'</b>	245
--	-----

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	268
---------------------	-----

## ABBREVIATIONS

- KA1 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), I: *Ein Landarzt und andere Drucke zu Lebzeiten*.
- KA2 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), II: *Der Verschollene*.
- KA3 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), III: *Der Proceß*.
- KA5 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), V: *Beschreibung eines Kampfes und andere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*.
- KA6 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), VI: *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer und andere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*.
- KA8 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), VIII: *Das Ehepaar und andere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*.
- KA9 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), IX: *Tagebücher. Band 1: 1909-1912*.
- KA10 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), X: *Tagebücher. Band 2: 1912-1914*.
- KA11 Franz Kafka, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), XI: *Tagebücher. Band 3: 1914-1923*.
- KKa/B1 Franz Kafka, *Schriften Tagebücher Briefe. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley, Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer): *Briefe 1900-1912*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 1999).

- KKK/B2 Franz Kafka, *Schriften Tagebücher Briefe. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed.by Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley, Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer): *Briefe 1913-März 1914*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 1999).
- KKK/D App. Franz Kafka, *Schriften Tagebücher Briefe. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed.by Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley, Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer): *Drucke zu Lebzeiten. Apparatband*, ed. by Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 1996).
- KKK/NS I Franz Kafka, *Schriften Tagebücher Briefe. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed.by App. Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley, Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer): *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente I. Apparatband*, ed. by Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 1996).

**PART I: ‘BALD SCHAUKELTE ICH STÄRKER’: THE EXPERIENCE OF RESTLESSNESS IN**

***BETRACHTUNG***

In December 1912, Franz Kafka writes to Felice Bauer, begging her to spare a few words for his ‘kleine[s] Buch’ (KKA/B1, 319) – the collection *Betrachtung*, his first booklength publication.<sup>1</sup> Having complained about Felice’s silence – as usual – Kafka then comments on his book in terms that seem to anticipate the responses of his future readers:

Es ist ja wirklich eine heillose Unordnung darin oder vielmehr: es sind Lichtblicke in eine unendliche Verwirrung hinein und man muß schon sehr nahe herantreten, um etwas zu sehn. (KKA/B1, 372)

Kafka judges his collection to represent a form of disorder without hope of resolution, but this invocation of eternal ‘Verwirrung’ is counterbalanced by an equally strong feeling that the texts exude rays of light, suggestive of an inner unity or meaningfulness within this confusion.

There seems to be unanimous agreement amongst commentators that *Betrachtung* represents a form of ‘Verwirrung’. This impression is due to the multiplicity of often strange and opaque images, constantly changing situations and a diversity of narrative modes with which the collection confronts readers. This apparent lack of imaginative

---

<sup>1</sup>The publication of *Betrachtung* in 1912 consists of 18 texts. In 1908, Kafka had already published eight of these texts in *Hyperion*, and in 1910, he assembled five texts for publication in *Bohemia*. ‘Kleider’ and ‘Die Bäume’ originally belong into the context of *Beschreibung eines Kampfes*. For details on the publication see KKA/D App, pp.33-47.; for the publication in *Hyperion* see Ludwig Dietz, ‘Franz Kafka und die Zweimonatsschrift Hyperion’, in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 37 (1963), 463-473.

coherence has motivated readings of *Betrachtung* as a form of juvenile doodling,<sup>2</sup> a ‘preparatory stage’<sup>3</sup> in Kafka’s oeuvre. Yet although such judgments seem to take the same line as Kafka when he makes these stories look small rather literally by calling them ‘Stückchen’ (KKA/B1, 166), it must not be overlooked that the author nevertheless selected them for a book publication, deviating from his famously cautious attitude towards authorising finalised versions of texts. This fact alone assigns *Betrachtung* an important place within Kafka’s oeuvre. One of the aims of this part of the thesis is to explore what the ‘Lichtblicke’ may have been that Kafka felt he had succeeded in articulating here.

In search of elements in *Betrachtung* that allow a more differentiated perspective on the relation between Kafka’s early and later works, more recent critics have taken to explore how the very characteristics that cause the impression of a ‘fluid, incoherent, unfinished’<sup>4</sup> style and a merely ‘lose miteinander verknüpft[e]’<sup>5</sup> series of individual texts may provide a fruitful starting point for inquiries into the ways in which the collection may – or may not – contain central elements of the later works and the extent to which these stories may

---

<sup>2</sup> Heinz Politzer tellingly calls the chapter in which he deals with the collection ‘Juvenilia’. Heinz Politzer, *Parable and Paradox* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp.23.

<sup>3</sup> Roy Pascal, *Kafka’s Narrators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Pascal 1982, p.15. Pascal nevertheless admits to the possibility that the very diversity of the collection may have ‘its own interest and value’.

<sup>5</sup> Wolf Kittler, ‘Die Erzählsammlungen als Einheit’, in *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden. Band 2: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, ed. by Hartmut Binder (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1979), pp.209-220, p.209. We know that Kafka was painfully concerned about the order of texts in the collection. After Felice’s visit during the final stages of preparing *Betrachtung* for publication, he writes to Max Brod that the visit may have influenced him ‘beim Ordnen der Stückchen’ (KKA/B1 166). This concern contributes to the impression that *Betrachtung* should be seen as an – in some way – coherent collection. Gerhard Kurz further points out rightly that the title *Betrachtung* – not ‘Betrachtungen’ – suggests that the texts are ‘Teile eines Betrachtungsaktes’. See Gerhard Kurz, ‘Lichtblicke in eine unendliche Verwirrung: zu Kafkas “Betrachtung”’, in *Franz Kafka*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: edition text+kritik, 1994), pp. 49-65, p.54.

– or may not – represent a conceptual whole.<sup>6</sup> Rather than searching for the qualities of a ‘gute Panzerplatte’,<sup>7</sup> readers tend to look out for elements of coherence that can be described as ‘Familienähnlichkeit[en]’<sup>8</sup> which may not only link the pieces in the collection but also grasp the relation between *Betrachtung* and later fictions.

In this part of the thesis, I seek to trace out the ways in which Kafka used movement images in this selection of texts and to explore the contribution these images make both to the effect of ‘Verwirrung’ and to the impression that the individual stories are related to each other in a meaningful way.<sup>9</sup>

Once we have been alerted to the ubiquity of movement images in the titles of the individual stories in *Betrachtung*, it is hard to overlook the pervading use of such imagery throughout the narratives. The seemingly eclectic character of texts like ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’ is partly due to the fact that they present us with a world which seems in constant motion. People, carriages and trains, i.e. movements which are part of the modern civilised world, feature alongside flying birds, twinkling stars and sweeping woods.

---

<sup>6</sup> Particularly since the publication of essays on *Der junge Kafka* in 1984, there has been an increased interest in Kafka’s early writings. See *Der junge Kafka*, ed. by Gerhard Kurz (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984). The number of papers dedicated to Kafka’s early writings during the conference ‘Kafka and Short Modernist Prose’, held in Oxford in September/October 2008 nevertheless suggests that although the cliché of Kafka’s neglected early writings no longer holds, there pervades a sense in Kafka criticism that the early writings have not been explored with sufficient detail.

<sup>7</sup> Max Brod emphatically declared the inner unity of his friend’s publication when he announced the ‘Ereignis eines Buches’ in the magazine ‘März’ in February 1913. See Born 1979, p.25.

<sup>8</sup> Kurz 1994, p.54.

<sup>9</sup> It has been observed before that movement is a widespread – and potentially unifying – characteristic of *Betrachtung*. James Rolleston observes that the interplay of sudden motion and equally sudden stasis, upward and downward movements is central to these texts, and Hans Geulen goes so far as to describe the texts as an ‘in problematische Formen der Bewegung und Bewegungslosigkeit verwickelnde “Drama”’, but these observations are made in passing and to my knowledge they have not yet been followed up on with a systematic analysis. See James Rolleston, ‘Betrachtung: Landschaften der Doppelgänger’, in *Der junge Kafka*, ed. by Gerhard Kurz (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984), pp.184-99; Hans Geulen, ‘Franz Kafka: Versuch und Risiko einer adäquaten Deutung’ in *Kafkas Betrachtung – Lektüren*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Scheuer, Justus von Hartlieb, Georg Höfner (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2003), pp.5-15, p.7.

Most of these movements belong to a world that we would be willing to accept as ‘reality’. Urban and natural surroundings provide the backdrop for characters’ walks from work to home, tram journeys and ascending motions in lifts and on stairs. Yet such quotidian forms of movement are interspersed with less conventional dynamic experiences. Protagonists go for sudden walks in the night, run along a horde of children through the countryside or, alternatively, lapse into equally sudden stasis. At times, protagonists find themselves confronted with concepts of movement that are not only odd but evade rational understanding altogether. Cities in which nobody sleeps and ghosts which step out of doors are quite distinctly removed from our ways of seeing the world. Once again, we seem to be offered a pattern of relation, which makes *Betrachtung* a promising starting point for our inquiry into the question whether the patterns outlined in the introduction to this thesis can be seen to represent key features of the ‘choreography’ of Kafka’s fiction.

Following Kafka’s advised method of ‘nahe herantreten’, I will undertake a series of close readings of the individual pieces in *Betrachtung*. In a way, it may seem counter-intuitive to analyse the texts in an order other than that authorised by Kafka. I will however analyse the individual stories in an order chosen for the sake of clarity. The ‘Blickführung’ suggested here is directed at exploring different kinetic experiences realised in the texts in a way that allows the relations and contrasts between them to emerge with the greatest possible luminance before commenting on the overall ‘choreography’ of *Betrachtung*.

## 1. A LEAP INTO PURE MOTION – ‘WUNSCH, INDIANER ZU WERDEN’

When considering the relative ‘normality’ of the settings introduced in *Betrachtung*, we are quick to identify the ‘odd one out’. ‘Wunsch, Indianer zu werden’ is not only one of the shortest pieces in the collection, but it also whisks us away into a dynamic experience so utterly extra-ordinary that it will remain one of its kind amongst these stories.

Wunsch, Indianer zu werden

Wenn man doch ein Indianer wäre, gleich bereit, und auf dem rennenden Pferde, schief in der Luft, immer wieder kurz erzitterte über dem zitternden Boden, bis man die Sporen ließ, denn es gab keine Sporen, bis man die Zügel wegwarf, denn es gab keine Zügel, und kaum das Land vor sich als glatt gemähte Heide sah, schon ohne Pferdehals und Pferdekopf. (KA1, 30)

In keeping with the title of the collection, the text starts with a form of reflection, the ‘Wunsch’ to become a Red Indian. The mental process indicated by this ‘Wunsch’, however, turns out to be exceptionally dynamic. As with most ‘Wünsche’, it is unconcerned with hows and whens – it is fervently directed towards its desired outcome, thus functioning as a bridge between something that is and something that is not, or not yet. In the title, the desired transformation is associated with a dynamic process of becoming (‘werden’). Yet in the expression of intense longing ‘wenn man doch ein Indianer wäre’, the wish for the future is imagined as a condition already realised in the present, as if it were possible to skip the step of ‘werden’ and thus to increase the speed of the transformation. With the ambiguous ‘erzitterte’ – which could be read as a continuation of the reflective conditional or a shift into past tense – the tone of the text

undergoes a change from contemplating a possibility to describing an experience. The text ‘ascribes imaginative force to the wish’:<sup>10</sup> simply formulating the ‘Wunsch, Indianer zu werden’ seems sufficient to initiate a dynamic process that carries the narrating voice from a wish for a future to a wish for the present and into the supposed reality of a recalled event.<sup>11</sup> The speed at which this process is realised mirrors the speed characterising the envisaged state of being a Red Indian.

As soon as the narrating voice has uttered the ‘Wunsch, Indianer zu werden’, it conjures up an image of a Red Indian on his horse, riding over (one assumes) the North-American plains. Discussing the potential reality value of the image, i.e. whether the ‘Heide’ represents the plains, and whether Red Indians ride with spurs and reins, however, merely leads us to conclude that the ‘Indianer’ in the text has even less in common with any model in reality than Karl May’s adventure stories. Instead, the ‘Indianer’ serves as an image which – along with its connotations of ‘Ferne’ and adventure outside familiar surroundings<sup>12</sup> – is suggestive of a specific experience envisaged by the writer. The intrinsic link between being a Red Indian and riding a horse in the text suggests that this experience is primarily characterised by movement.

Kafka’s frequent use of the horse image throughout his writings suggests that the relation between horse and rider was a source of fascination for him, carrying narrative potential that would find its most prominent realisation in texts like ‘Der neue Advokat’ and ‘Ein Landarzt’. Yet also the less prominent instances of horse imagery capture strikingly

---

<sup>10</sup> Judith Ryan, ‘Kafka before Kafka: The Early Stories’, in *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*, ed. by James Rolleston (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), pp.61- 83, p.77.

<sup>11</sup> For previous observations on this shift see for example Thorsten Feldbusch, ‘Franz Kafka: “Wunsch, Indianer zu werden”. Unwirklich sind die Dinge. Syntaktisches Reiten’, in: Scheuer 2003, pp.174-182.

<sup>12</sup> Feldbusch 2003, p.181.

dynamic experiences.<sup>13</sup> In 1914, for example, Kafka grasps the peculiar dynamics associated with riding in a brief diary entry: ‘Vorwärtsgerissen, auf dem Pferd.’ (KA10, 226).<sup>14</sup> The image illustrates a feeling of being passively carried along by a moving force, which, at most, can be given direction by the rider. At the beginning of ‘Wunsch, Indianer zu werden’, this sensation is expressed in terms of instability. The rider’s position of being both ‘auf dem rennenden Pferde’, ‘in der Luft’ and ‘über dem zitternden Boden’ creates a ‘schiefe’ perspective. This is accompanied by a lack of physical stability. The rider feels himself ‘immer wieder kurz erzitter[n]’, just as the ‘zitternd[e] Boden’ ceases to provide a stable point of reference.

This sensation, however, is perceived as a transitional state, lasting only ‘bis man die Sporen ließ, denn es gab keine Sporen, bis man die Zügel wegwarf, denn es gab keine Zügel’. This peculiar expression implies that in the kind of dynamic experience envisaged in the ‘Wunsch’, there is no room for any form of control over the horse. Once the separation of individual will and moving force has been resolved, the world surrounding horse and rider dissolves. The ‘Land’ is ‘kaum’ visible, turning into a featureless ‘glatt

---

<sup>13</sup> Throughout Kafka’s writings, horses populate the streets, carry ‘Indianer’ and “Herrenreiter” (KA1, 28), circle the ‘Manege’ of the circus, read law, turn up in pig stables and look through windows at the protagonists of Kafka’s fictional world. This apparent omnipresence, however, has not attracted much attention so far, and studies on the horse image or the relation between horse and rider are generally limited to individual stories – from which I cannot make an exception within the scope of this thesis. A more systematic approach is suggested by Marlene Baum who proposes a general analysis of the horse image in Kafka’s writing, coming from the observation that ‘neben Goethe gibt es außer Franz Kafka im deutschsprachigen Raum wohl keinen Dichter, in dessen Werk das Pferd eine so bedeutende Rolle spielt, ohne daß ihm je ein eigener Text gewidmet wäre [...]’. See Marlene Baum, “*Es schlug mein Herz, geschwind zu Pferde!*”: zur Poesie des Pferd demotivs in Goethes Alltag und in seinem Werk (Jena: Quartus, 2004), p.11.

<sup>14</sup> This diary entry grasps a brief dynamic experience without putting it in context. It is possible, however, that this entry belongs to a whole range of reflections in which Kafka relates horse imagery to his experiences with writing. It seems unsurprising that Kafka may have drawn on the literary tradition of interpreting the horse as a “Musenroß”, the winged horse Pegasus that opens the muses’ well with a step of his hooves; see: Ovid. *Metamorphosen* (Stuttgart: Reclam 1958), p.162, V.256-264. For a brief discussion of the Pegasus-motif in *Betrachtung*, see Tilly Kübler-Jung, *Einblicke in Franz Kafkas ‘Betrachtung’: Analyse und literaturgeschichtliche Einordnung* (Marburg: Tectum-Verlag, 2005), pp.220.

gemähte Heide'. This gradual dissolution is accompanied by a merging of horse and rider into a horse-man without 'Pferdehals und Pferdekopf', as if to turn the moving figures into a vision of pure dynamic force.<sup>15</sup>

This final stage of transformation suggests that the 'Wunsch, Indianer zu werden' is a wish for an experience of movement in which the physical world no longer features. Gregory Triffitt describes this 'sheer motion' without restrictions as an experience of 'supreme freedom and happiness of a completely untroubled, unself-aware vision in action', as a form of 'ideal human condition'.<sup>16</sup> This experience seems to grasp the paradoxical condition described by Zeno, which Kafka noted down in his diary in 1910:

Zeno sagte auf eine dringliche Frage hin, ob denn nichts ruhe: Ja der fliegende Pfeil ruht (KA9, 104)

The image of the flying arrow captures a state of perfect motion in perfect rest<sup>17</sup> that also seems to be the desired outcome of the 'Wunsch'. Triffitt views this state as a representation of an experience in which man feels his being on earth to be characterised

---

<sup>15</sup> The Red Indian is only one of several figures in Kafka's writing in which horse and man merge. The name Karl Roßmann evokes the figure of a horse-man, as does the curious advocate 'Bucephalus', who undertakes the transition in the opposite direction. Having turned into an advocate, his horse-roots are only detectable in his walk. In 'Wunsch, Indianer zu werden', the horse has been identified as a key image for expressing a specific experience of movement.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory Triffitt, 'Kafka, Paradoxo and "Die Bäume"', *AUMLA*, 63 (1985), 53-64, p.60.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Neumann alerts us to the fact that Kafka's diary entry deviates from Aristotle's report of Zeno's paradox as a way of demonstrating the impossibility of movement. Kafka's quote seems to suggest the exact opposite of Zeno's assertion that an arrow's flight – if divided into an infinite number of glimpses – is motionless at any point during its course. For Neumann, Kafka's use of the image is one of the 'logische Eigentümlichkeit[en]' that he takes to govern Kafka's writing, thereby contributing to the number of readings that view forms of movement in Kafka's writings in terms of language and thought structures. See Gerhard Neumann, 'Umkehrung und Ablenkung: Franz Kafka's Gleitendes Paradox', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 74 (1968), 702-744, p.703.

by certainty and stability.<sup>18</sup> The text, however, restricts this condition to the sphere of wishful thinking. Pure movement in perfect rest as described here entails liberation from physical substance. As horse and rider turn into a dynamic force, everything that constitutes being a Red Indian – ‘Heide’, horse and rider – dissolves. The fulfilment of the wish thus seems to deconstruct the very images it constructed to initiate this process.<sup>19</sup>

The narrative dynamic supports this effect. When horse and rider leap into pure motion, they expose the narrative flow to a sudden vacuum. The ‘Parforceritt’ of the narrative rhythm – which seems to mirror the thumping of the hooves in the ‘Materialität des Geschriebenen’<sup>20</sup> – ends as both hooves and ‘Boden’ disappear. This ‘Abbau’, however, suggests that horse and rider are not merely dismissed. The end of the text appears to point towards an experience that lies beyond the borders of the narrative.

Judith Ryan argues that in this text, ‘fantasy is shown to have tremendous powers, but at the same time to come up against insurmountable limitations [...]’ Both the ‘powers’ and the ‘limitations’, I wish to argue, lie in forms of movement. The initial wish – to be an ‘Indianer’ – ‘virtually creates the horse needed for its proper fulfilment’, the ‘fulfilment’ being the transformation into an ‘Indianer’ and the movement of riding. The ‘limitation’, according to Ryan, lies in the inability of the wish to ‘determine reality’.<sup>21</sup> The final fulfilment of the ‘Wunsch’ thus poses a profane problem: the impossibility of gaining an

---

<sup>18</sup> Triffitt 1985, p.60.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Hans-Thies Lehmann, ‘Der buchstäbliche Körper. Zur Selbstinszenierung der Literatur bei Kafka’, in: Kurz 1984, pp.213-241, p. 215. Lehmann points us towards a possible link between the word ‘Heide’ and ‘heidi gahn’, ‘verlorengehn’, which may be slightly farfetched, yet nevertheless supports the assumption that the end of the text evokes the impression in readers that rider and horse escape into immateriality.

<sup>20</sup> Feldbusch 2003, p.176.

<sup>21</sup> Ryan 2002, p.77.

imaginative grasp on an experience without material substance, of determining a reality that leaves the earthbound image of the ‘Indianer’ behind.

The image of the Red Indian on the prairie thus merely approaches what the ‘Wunsch’ really strives for. Evocative of ‘Fremde’ and adventure – something that is different from the familiar world of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Prague – it nevertheless remains within what can be accepted as ‘reality’. Taking a familiar image of ‘Fremde’ as a starting point, the ‘Wunsch’ then points towards the possibility of a further leap, out of the familiar ‘sphere’ of physical substance into pure motion. Yet even as the text approaches the ‘Wunsch, Indianer zu werden’, this last leap seems to lie beyond earthbound existence and thus has to remain in the sphere of a ‘Wunsch’ that cannot be articulated even by the imagination that has been set free in the act of narration.

As the story leaves the rider – and the reader – hovering in mid-leap, levitating between physicality and something else, it asserts the reality of an experience even as it enacts its negation. The ‘tremendous powers’ of fantasy thus lie in the capacity for conceiving of the wish as a ‘reality’ in its own right – the ‘reality’ of an experience of something approaching pure motion. What is more, the wish that finds expression in this dynamically charged narrative is communicable. However impossible by the standards of common-sense such a wish may be, the story expresses the conviction that not only the creative mind, but the reader, too, is capable of such intensely dynamic states of mind that challenge containment within the boundaries of consensual reality. The consequences of this ability form a central concern of the collection.

## 2. THE ‘STELLUNG IN DIESER WELT’ AS A PROBLEMATIC EXPERIENCE

The kind of perfect motion in perfect rest longed for in the ‘Wunsch’ remains tantalizingly beyond the imaginative grasp of the narrating consciousness, limited to an inaccessible ‘Ferne’. In the other stories in the collection, the protagonists tend to exist in more readily accessible spheres – the social and natural contexts that we perceive as familiar and everyday. The way in which protagonists experience being in this sphere, however, and the forms of movement expressing this experience, both contrast sharply with the dynamism of the ‘Indianer’ while at the same time hinting at the restlessness articulated in the wish.

### **‘Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter’ – existence as ‘Wettrennen’**

As we leave the Red Indian behind and join the “Herrenreiter”, whose equestrianism is quite different, horse and rider become part of a sports event. Here, the ground does not shake or flicker, spurs and reins remain firmly in place: the setting is the conventional world of a ‘Wettrennen’, complete with ‘Orchester’, ‘Tribünen’ and betting stalls. In contrast to the open prairie, the ‘Wettrennen’ exemplifies the ‘social sphere’, populated by ‘Gegner’, ‘Konkurrenten’, ‘einflußreiche[n] Leute[n]’ and ‘Damen’ (KA1, 28).

Throughout Kafka’s writing, the ‘Wettrennen’ – and even more often the ‘Laufbahn’ – is a common metonymy for being in the world, a variant of the ancient concept of the ‘Lebensweg’. Kafka’s use of the image of the ‘Laufbahn’ and ‘Wettrennen’, however,

relates the concept closely to the specific imperatives of bourgeois society with its particular conception of ‘progress’ as the criterion of a well-lived life.<sup>22</sup> For figures like Georg Bendemann and Josef K. ‘Fortschritt’ (KA1, 41) and ‘Laufbahn’ (KA3, 139) are measures of professional success, but the terms are also suggestive of movement through life in general, as becomes particularly obvious in Karl Roßmann’s endless search for a ‘Laufbahn’ (KA2, 15) and the ‘richtigen Weg’ (KA2, 22). When reflecting on his own perceived failure to perform a progressive motion through life, Kafka describes it as the ‘verspäteten Start [...] bei einem Wettlaufen’ (KA9, 32).

In ‘Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter’, winning the ‘Wettrennen’ is thus not only associated with passing the finishing line first, but also with social success, the ‘Ruhm, als der beste Reiter seines Landes anerkannt zu werden’ (KA1, 28). Contrary to the conventional view, however, the beginning of the text suggests that winning a horse race is utterly undesirable:

Nichts, wenn man es überlegt, kann dazu verlocken, in einem Wettrennen der erste sein zu wollen. (KA1, 28)

---

<sup>22</sup> Kafka’s use of the racecourse as an image for movement through life is a good example of the ways in which he draws on cultural knowledge when expressing experiences of being in life, thereby providing creative reformulations of familiar themes. As he employs the image of life as a ‘Laufbahn’, Kafka seems to reformulate and comment on the question of a well-lived life at the heart of Gryphius’ image of life as a ‘renne bahn’ and ‘laufplatz’ and the biblical tradition of this image. The expression of life as a race in the Old Testament has gained the status of a proverbial warning that the ‘race is not to the swift’ (Ecclesiastes 9:11). In the New Testament, a more optimistic position is taken. Here, the race is not taken to represent earthly success but the journey towards a metaphysical ‘Kleinod’ (Corinthians 9:24). In Kafka’s writings, the image is associated with the specific imperatives of bourgeois society, specifically the notion of progress as the criterion of a well-lived life.

The negative statement that nobody could possibly want to be the first in a race prompts the question ‘why not?’ The explanation lies in the ambivalent feelings of ‘Ruhm’ and ‘Reue’ associated with winning:

Der Ruhm, als der beste Reiter eines Landes anerkannt zu werden, freut  
beim Losgehn des Orchesters zu stark, als daß sich am Morgen danach  
die Reue verhindern ließe. (KA1, 28)

The joy of winning the race and gaining ‘Ruhm’ is given the status of a form of intoxication that will undeniably be followed by ‘Reue’ on the morning after. The ‘Reue’ lies in the negative sensations experienced once the brief excitement ‘beim Losgehn des Orchesters’ is over. In the narrator’s reflection, winning the race is not associated with ‘progress’ and social integration but with alienation and claustrophobia:

Der Neid der Gegner, listiger, ziemlich einflußreicher Leute, muß uns in  
dem engen Spalier schmerzen, das wir nun durchreiten nach jener  
Ebene, die bald vor uns leer war bis auf einige überrundete Reiter, die  
klein gegen den Rand des Horizonts anritten. (KA1, 29)

When reflecting on the race itself, the narrator recalls the sensation of racing through the ‘Ebene, die bald vor uns leer war’, while other riders apparently ‘gegen den Rand des Horizonts anritten’. This sensation, however, does not lead to a feeling of liberation, ready to leap into pure movement. Instead, it describes a brief period of riding through open spaces as part of the circular structure of the race-track. The relative openness of the ‘Ebene’ then creates a painful contrast to the ‘engen Spalier’ of the winner’s enclosure at the end of this circular movement.

After the end of the race, claustrophobia is accompanied by an intense feeling of alienation, causing the winner to perceive his 'Ruhm' as questionable. Intensely aware of the 'Neid der Gegner', he finds that his 'Freunde' seem more interested in their own 'Gewinn' (KA1, 29) than in him. They remain strangely distant, 'nur über die Schultern weg schreien sie von den entlegenen Schalern ihr Hurra zu uns', while the 'besten Freunde' turn out not even to have 'auf unser Pferd gesetzt'. The present 'Damen', too, fail to create in him a sense of social acknowledgement. To them, he appears 'lächerlich' because he cannot make anything of the 'ewigen Händeschütteln, Salutieren, Sich-Niederbeugen und In-die-Ferne-Grüßen' (KA1, 29) accompanying the ceremony following his success.

Instead of enjoying the 'Ruhm' of being the best rider of his country, the winner feels alienated within society, surrounded by enemies, false friends and indifferent women. This feeling of not-belonging is increased by the sensation of being forced into purely conventional patterns of behaviour that remain intrinsically nonsensical to the rider. Brief moments of relatively uninhibited motion in the 'Ebene' merely seem to increase the rider's sense of imprisonment within the 'Spalier' that this movement inevitably leads towards. To him, existence in the world as 'Wettrennen' is not characterised by progress and social integration but as a circular, contained and ultimately pointless motion.

According to the narrating voice, the supposed social success of winning a race merely provides a brief intoxicating distraction from an essentially problematic experience of being in the world. In the end, it does not seem to matter who won the race and who didn't, as the winner is not seen to have gained anything. By the end of the race, all riders appear strangely out of place. While the winner takes on the characteristics of a dog

performing tricks for an audience, the losers equally feel that they have been part in a ‘Kinderspiel’ (KA1, 29), a mere replacement for an ‘ernsthaftes’ race. Both horses and riders – instead of sharing a sense of completed motion – turn out to be keen to throw themselves into a new attempt at this ‘ernsthaftes’ race, as the restless fidgeting suggests, with which the men pat the ‘Häse ihrer meist wiehernden Pferde’ (KA1, 29). Eventually, this overall atmosphere of alienation and restlessness finds release in a peculiar example of the ‘pathetic fallacy’:

Endlich fängt es gar aus dem trüb gewordenen Himmel zu regnen an.  
(KA1, 29)

It is hardly possible to imagine a more extreme contrast between the wish for the liberated pure motion of the Red Indian on his horse and the experiences of movement described in ‘Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter’. The dynamic of the ‘Wunsch’ reflects a fervent desire to turn the idea of perfect motion in perfect rest into an achievable experience. In ‘Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter’, this dynamic is inverted. The rider’s experience particularly on the open part of the course hints at the restlessness articulated in the wish, but this restlessness does not give rise to feelings of liberation and escape. Instead, it is expressive of a sense of claustrophobia and alienation associated with the regular and predictable movement patterns within the social context. The intense dynamism of the ‘Wunsch’ is replaced with mental agitation that finds expression in the process of ‘Nachdenken’.

## **‘Der Fahrgast’ – uncertainty about the individual’s ‘Stellung in dieser Welt’**

In ‘Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter’, the rider’s contemplative mood corresponds to movements in his surroundings. This suggested link between external events and inner states is further established in ‘Der Fahrgast’, where the conventional motion of a tram journey gives rise to the formulation of an experience of life as fundamentally instable.

In this text, Kafka once again projects the traditional conception of life as a journey<sup>23</sup> onto an image that forms a part of everyday reality within the ‘social world’:

Ich stehe auf der Plattform des elektrischen Wagens und bin vollständig unsicher in Rücksicht meiner Stellung in dieser Welt, in dieser Stadt, in meiner Familie. Auch nicht beiläufig könnte ich angeben, welche Ansprüche ich in irgendeiner Richtung mit Recht vorbringen könnte. Ich kann es gar nicht verteidigen, daß ich auf dieser Plattform stehe, mich an dieser Schlinge halte, von diesem Wagen tragen lasse, daß Leute dem Wagen ausweichen oder still gehn oder vor den Schaufenstern ruhn. – Niemand verlangt es ja von mir, aber das ist gleichgültig. (KA1, 26)

The protagonist associates his position on the ‘Plattform’ with ambivalent sensations of being both static and mobile, passively carried along in a motion he cannot control, and during which he can only grasp the feeble ‘Schlinge’ for support. The co-existence of these seemingly conflicting experiences is awkwardly reminiscent of the co-existence of movement and rest in the flight of Zeno’s arrow. Yet here, the forms of movement and rest articulated in the image of the arrow are inverted, so that the experience of the

---

<sup>23</sup> This analogy has inspired readings of ‘Der Fahrgast’ as a journey towards death. Tilly Kübler-Jung, for example, reads the appearance of the girl in her black dress as an image of approaching death as the end of the journey. As it is the girl that gets off the tram – not the observer – I consider it more fruitful to concentrate on experiences of movement associated with the journey, not on speculations about its end. See Kübler-Jung 2005, p.36.

“Fahrgast” appears like a ‘bad copy’ of the motion envisaged in this flight. The protagonist’s position of ‘stehen’ on the platform is associated with instability, the sensation of being passively and restlessly carried along without any hope for ‘Halt’. This experience is expressive of the protagonist’s ‘Stellung in dieser Welt’, the spatial and social surroundings of ‘Stadt’ and ‘Familie’.

The intensity of this experience is emphasised in the protagonist’s description of his state as not only ‘unsicher’, but ‘vollständig unsicher’. Not even ‘beiläufig’ could he assert any sense of direction, and he is ‘gar nicht’ able to defend his position.

Unable to claim any ‘Halt’ within the world, or to formulate ‘Ansprüche in irgendeiner Richtung’, the protagonist feels incapable of justifying his being carried along by the carriage. As in ‘Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter’, the protagonist is unable to associate movement in the social world with a sense of progressive motion and the stability of social relations. The need to justify one’s position in the world is expressive of a sense of unfamiliarity already realised in the description of ‘Stadt’ and ‘Familie’ as ‘diese Welt’, not ‘die Welt’. As the title suggests, the protagonist does not feel at home in the world – he feels like a guest, just as he is a ‘Fahrgast’ on the tram.<sup>24</sup>

The protagonist perceives this state to be an individual condition that isolates him from other people. Gazing out of the window, he sees ‘Leute’ who ‘still gehn’, ‘dem Wagen ausweichen’ and ‘vor den Schaufenstern ruhn’ (KA1, 26). While the “Fahrgast” finds himself restlessly rushed along without any ‘Halt’, people around him appear perfectly

---

<sup>24</sup> Again, Kafka uses a common trope, that of man as a guest on earth, reformulating it in a subjective dynamic experience.

able to perform movements that are 'still', thus creating the impression that they enjoy, as he does not, motion in rest within the social sphere.

The contrast finds its strongest expression as the protagonist observes a girl who enters the tram with what he considers to be the natural certainty of someone fully at home in the situation. The "Fahrgast" describes her face, hair and dress with the unsettling amount of detail that we have become used to seeing as a characteristic of Kafka's writing. In this text, the detailed description is expressive of a sense of wonder arising from the protagonist's condition of alienation that, to him, makes the girl's ear just as astonishing as her dress.<sup>25</sup> Like a visitor from a different planet, or a foreigner unsure about whether to take off his shoes by the door or not, the "Fahrgast" is astonished by the seemingly careless 'Beheimatetsein' of her behaviour and her very appearance. This sense of wonder becomes so intense that the "Fahrgast" expects the girl to turn around and join him in this amazement at any moment:

Ich fragte mich damals: Wieso kommt es, daß sie nicht über sich verwundert ist, daß sie den Mund geschlossen hält und nichts dergleichen sagt? (KA1, 27)

The comparison between the "Fahrgast" and the girl on the tram is reminiscent of the different experiences of being in the world expressed in *Beschreibung eines Kampfes*. The sensation described by the "Fahrgast" hints at the kind of restlessness and instability that is described there as a form of 'Seekrankheit auf festem Lande' (KA5, 74), an intrinsic uncertainty about being in the world. The calm and quiet walk of people around him and

---

<sup>25</sup> Shimon Sandbank, 'Uncertainty in Style: Kafka's "Betrachtung"', *German Life and Letters*, 34 (1981), 385-97.

the seemingly unquestioning naturalness of the girl, on the other hand, are expressive of a sense of being at home in the world that is famously expressed in the statement ‘ich jause im Grünen’ (KA5, 76). The narrator in *Beschreibung eines Kampfes* cannot conceal his amazement about the simplicity of the statement, which asserts the possibility of an experience of existence as stable and self-justified that he feels unable to share.

The mode in which this condition of passive, alienated movement through the world is narrated supports the impression that the tram journey envisaged here is not so much a specific event as an analogy between an event in the world and one’s experience of being in it. The narrator’s expression ‘Ich fragte mich damals’ suggests that the text should be read as the memory of an isolated event, but it could also be read as a more general reflection on ‘one of those days’. The use of the present tense in the beginning of the text further supports this more general perspective.

### **‘Kleider’ – circular motion as a form of ‘abnützen’**

‘Der Fahrgast’ exemplifies well the notion of *Betrachtung* as both a visual and a mental process that establishes a link between external phenomena and inner states. The double motion involved here emerges with even greater clarity in ‘Die Kleider’ (KA1, 27) where the circular dynamics of the text develops from a visual impression to a mental process, which is then projected onto a different visual impression, that of the face:

Oft wenn ich Kleider mit vielfachen Falten, Rüschen und Behängen  
sehe, die über schönen Körper schön sich legen, dann denke ich, daß sie  
nicht lange so erhalten bleiben [...].

Doch sehe ich Mädchen, die wohl schön sind [...]. (KA1, 27)

The statement that this process occurs ‘oft’ establishes the situation not as an individual occurrence but as a general image for a specific experience of being in the world, for which the analogy between clothes and girls’ faces provides appropriate expression.

This analogy is further expressed in the repetition of the word ‘schön’ and the description of the face as a ‘Maskenanzug’, which emphasises the function of both clothes and face as external signs of a way of being in the world. In Western society, clothes are the primary means of signifying one’s gender, status and sense of propriety, thus representing the individual’s ‘belonging’ to society and its conventions. Just as clothes are a cultural signifier of one’s stable position as a member of society, albeit with some allowance for individual variation, so the face is assumed to represent one’s stable sense of self.

In ‘Kleider’, however, both these external signs of one’s ‘Stellung in dieser Welt’ are associated equally with a sense of fleetingness. Looking at clothes prompts the observer to reflect on their susceptibility to a process of fading and ageing. Within the ‘social sphere’, it would seem ‘lächerlich’, however, to make this process visible. As we change our clothes from day to day, we create an impression of stability that masks the passing of time. Projecting this process onto the face, which cannot be disguised in the same way, appears like a conventional variation on baroque allegory, the vanitas and memento mori theme of the fleetingness of human beauty. One’s face, like clothes, will age with the passing of time. In ‘Die Abweisung’, this theme takes a twist: one may change one’s

clothes to mask the passing of time, but as the fashions change, they – like the face – reveal precisely what they were trying to hide, namely that everything is fixed in time. Accordingly, Mark Anderson, who views clothes as a master-trope of Kafka's writing, reads the text as 'a metaphor for the instability and contingency of modern life, which has migrated to the surface of things'.<sup>26</sup>

Strikingly, this impression of fleetingness and instability is once again expressed in patterns of movement which are associated with existence within a social context. The 'wearing out' of clothes is described as the result of the actual motion of 'täglich das gleiche kostbare Kleid früh anzulegen und abends auszuziehn'. Similarly, the face is not 'gealtert', but 'abgetragen', as if to imply that ageing is the result of a similar repetitive enactment of socially determined activities. The daily act of putting a dress on and taking it off is mirrored in the gesture of 'das gleiche Gesicht in die gleichen Handflächen legen'. Strikingly, this process of wearing off through over-use is paralleled by a process of wearing off through over-exposure. In a twist of perspective, it is not only the motion of 'tragen' that wears away both dress and face, but also the gesture of letting it 'widerscheinen', of showing oneself both to others and oneself.<sup>27</sup> The text thus creates the impression that being in the 'social sphere' is in itself a form of over-exposure that leads to an experience of 'wearing out'.

The perspective suggested in 'Kleider' is strikingly reminiscent of the process of 'sehen lernen' undergone by the protagonist in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids*

---

<sup>26</sup> Anderson 1992, p.13.

<sup>27</sup> Sophie von Glinski discusses these links between wearing and showing, yet she does not understand the text as a reflection on dynamic experiences but as a 'scheinlogischer Argumentationsprozeß'. Sophie von Glinski, *Imaginationsprozesse. Verfahren phantastischen Erzählens in Franz Kafkas Frühwerk* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2004), p.105.

*Brigge*.<sup>28</sup> To see clothes and faces as resembling one another is to see their susceptibility to the passing of time. In ‘Kleider’, the erosion of any sense of stability is explicitly associated with the repetitive cycle of ‘zeigen’, ‘legen’ and ‘tragen’. While the reflection remains on the surface layer of clothes and the face, the idea of the face as the ‘Kleid der Seele’ suggests that the image of ‘abnützen’ also describes an experience with the world: the regular patterns of movement within the ‘social world’ are associated with an experience of being exposed to a process of slow corrosive repetition that destabilises one’s sense of self until it, too, becomes ‘kaum mehr tragbar’.

In the final sentence, this experience is projected onto the ‘Mädchen’, which suggests that the reflection grasps something more than an individual state:

Nur manchmal am Abend, wenn sie spät von einem Feste kommen,  
scheint es ihnen im Spiegel abgenützt, gedunsen, verstaubt, von allen  
schon gesehn und kaum mehr tragbar. (KA1, 27)

While the “Fahrgast” appears to suffer an experience that distinguishes him from other people in the world, thus isolating him from human society, the shift of perspective in

---

<sup>28</sup> Kafka’s use of this image once again shows that he is writing in a current of the time. The experience of fleetingness forms a central concern of turn of the century thought, along with questions concerning the possibility of a stable self. Kafka and Rilke use the same image as a way of expressing a problem of ‘depth’ and ‘surface’. In the opening pages of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, the protagonist describes the process of ‘sehen lernen’, by which he means a form of seeing that goes ‘deeper’ than before, not resting ‘wo es sonst immer zu Ende war’ (456). Impressions penetrate deeper into the self of the observer, but at the same time, Malte feels that he can see beyond the surface of things. His reflections on the problem of ‘depth’ and ‘surface’ find expression in the same image of the fleetingness of human faces that are wearing out ‘wie Handschuhe, die man auf der Reise getragen hat’. This analogy between clothes and faces is taken to the point where a woman, when startled, leaves her face in her hands, a ‘hohle Form’ (457). Malte’s fear of looking at the ‘bloßen wunden Kopf’ (458) is expressive of a concern about the possibility of a stable self that lies behind the surface. See Rainer Maria Rilke, *Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden. III: Prosa und Dramen*, ed. by August Stahl (Insel Verlag: Frankfurt a. M., 1996).

‘Kleider’ implies that the inability to perceive existence within conventional ‘reality’ as stable is a widespread or even general condition.

### **‘Die Bäume’ – uncertainty of movement**

In the group of texts discussed in this section of the thesis, the protagonists’ reflections are prompted by images taken from society and forms of movement associated with a modern, urban environment. The reflection in ‘Die Bäume’, however, develops from a comparison between an image drawn from the natural world and human existence, which contributes to the impression that the text represents an experience with aphoristic generality:

Denn wir sind wie Baumstämme im Schnee. Scheinbar liegen sie glatt auf, und mit kleinem Anstoß sollte man sie wegschieben können. Nein, das kann man nicht, denn sie sind fest mit dem Boden verbunden. Aber sieh, sogar das ist nur scheinbar. (KA1, 30)

The use of the nature image and the shift from the first person singular narrative or unspecific ‘man’ used in previously discussed texts contributes to the impression that ‘Die Bäume’ is a form of parable containing insight into human existence – and, by inversion, the existence of trees.

The dynamic patterns represented in this text, I shall argue, grasp the experiences of being in the world described throughout this section in a nutshell – as problems of movement,

stasis, stability and instability. In three steps, the text challenges fundamentally our customary means of establishing certainty about movement in the world.

The text moves swiftly from a seemingly stable and static image – the ‘Baumstämme im Schnee’ – to an image associated with movement and instability, generated by the immediate optical stimulus: when looking at trees in the snow, they may seem strangely reminiscent of curling stones which could be pushed aside with the small effort of a ‘kleinen Anstoß’. This notion, however, is once again swiftly negated. Like a parent explaining an optical trick to a child, the narrative voice re-establishes the initial sense of stasis and stability, asserting that trees cannot be simply pushed aside at a whim because they are ‘fest mit dem Boden verbunden.’ This return to stability is presented as an increase in knowledge: science and experience teach us that trees are firmly rooted to the ground. These forms of knowledge thus go ‘deeper’ than the surface of the snow. In a final twist, however, this assumption is once again declared to be ‘scheinbar’. The text does not negate or replace the idea of trees as being stable and static, instead ending with a challenge to what we think we know about the world.

This challenge has been taken up readily by commentators who have offered critical responses otherwise unmatched by any other text in the collection.<sup>29</sup> The openness of the final sentence dares us to continue the dynamic of the text, the swinging motion from stability to instability. Does the final sentence point towards a ‘higher’ form of knowledge

---

<sup>29</sup> James Rolleston describes ‘Die Bäume’ as the ‘berühmteste aller Stücke der Frühzeit’. See James Rolleston, ‘Die Erzählungen: Das Frühwerk’, in *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden. Band 2: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, ed. by Hartmut Binder (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1979), pp.242-262, p.259.

with the power to resolve the intrinsic uncertainty of ‘scheinbare’ knowledge?<sup>30</sup> Or does it lead nowhere, merely directing us back to the starting point of the problem?<sup>31</sup> The dynamic of the text, swinging from assertion to doubt, stability to instability is not resolved, thus exposing us to a sensation similar to that of being unable to focus on either image contained in a ‘Vexierbild’: are trees – and, by extension, we – stable and static, ‘verwurzelt’? Or are trees – and we – mobile and unstable, ‘entwurzelt’? By presenting the question of man’s position in the world as a question of movement, the text – rather than presenting us with a static parable – realises the dynamic experience shared by protagonists in the texts throughout this section: an intrinsic uncertainty about movement and the possibility of stability in the world.

Unlike the Red Indian who invites us to dream of – quite literally – impossible forms of movement, the protagonists in the group of texts discussed in this section present us with reflections on the far more mundane expressions of movement within the ‘reality’ of everyday life, such as the motion of the ‘Wettrennen’, the journey on a tram, the daily

---

<sup>30</sup> Jörgen Kobs, for example points out that the expression ‘Aber sieh’ is suggestive of the rhetoric of biblical parable. In the Gospels, this is the demand to open one’s eyes to metaphysical insight. Opening one’s eyes to the ‘Scheinbarkeit’ of what we claim to know may thus lead to a ‘higher’ form of knowledge, establishing stability on a metaphysical level. See Jörgen Kobs, *Untersuchungen zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten*, ed. by Ursula Brech (Bad Homburg: Athenäum, 1970), p.8. The silence following the final sentence could thus be seen to express the knowledge that this metaphysical level cannot be grasped with the means of understanding available to us – including language. This assumption is further supported by Gregory Triffitt, who argues that ‘through its developed analogy, ‘Die Bäume’ actually represents three *degrès du savoir*’. See Triffitt 1985, p.61. A problematic aspect of this approach is the assumption that the text ‘actually’ represents three levels of knowledge. The apodictic tone of the last sentence may suggest this possibility, yet it does not confirm it.

<sup>31</sup> Both Jörgen Kobs and Gerhard Neumann use this text to illustrate the structures they understand as the key characteristics of Kafka’s writings. Kobs describes the openness of the text that invites the reader to turn back to its beginning as the representation of a ‘paradoxe Zirkel’ (14), and Neumann similarly takes the text to represent a frustrated logical dynamics when he uses it as one of the examples for his concept of the ‘gleitendes Paradox’ as a structural principle of Kafka’s writings. See Kobs 1970; Neumann 1968.

gesture of putting clothes on and off and the gaze at trees in a wood. What strikes us about these texts, however, is the way in which the regularity of such supposedly banal movements gives rise to protagonists' reflections on experiences of being in the world as fundamentally problematic.

In a way, these protagonists all assert and negate the possibility of the stability of trees. These figures reveal an attachment to the idea that the dynamics of the everyday may or should bring with it the promise of stability and progress, 'Ruhm' and a 'Stellung' within society. The sense that there exists a form of 'natural' being in the world, the possibility to simply 'jause[n] im Grünen', can be seen to be grasped in Flaubert's reported admiration of life *dans le vrai* which Kafka – so we are told – was fond of quoting.<sup>32</sup> Yet protagonists are unable to conceive of the world in such terms. They are overcome by feelings of not being 'at home' in 'dieser Welt', of being restricted and passive within an environment that is not their own. The physical movements in their surroundings correspond to protagonists' inner states of agitation, their restless 'Nachdenken'. To them, the process of 'Betrachtung' does not give rise to the intense dynamics of the 'Wunsch', but to a sensation of being in the world as repetitive, restless and instable. Here, restlessness does not appear as a transitory state but as an existential seasickness.

---

<sup>32</sup> Max Brod, *Über Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1974), p.89.

### 3. PERMEABLE BORDERS – EXPERIENCING RESTLESSNESS

Throughout the texts discussed in the previous section, protagonists are overcome by sensations of restlessness and uncertainty about being in the world that they find reflected in the movements around them. In other stories, however, protagonists experience dynamic impulses that not only cause them fleeting states of restlessness but powerfully challenge the boundaries of their existence within the ‘social’ world, as if to break down the borders between conventional ‘reality’ and a sphere of extra-ordinary dynamic experience that points towards the form of pure motion envisaged in the ‘Wunsch’. This form of dynamic trespassing becomes particularly obvious in ‘Der Kaufmann’.

#### **‘Der Kaufmann’ – the eruption of ‘Aufregung’**

Outwardly, the “Kaufmann” leads the kind of bourgeois existence so firmly associated with his name. His ‘Geschäft’, the external sign of his ‘Laufbahn’, makes his life appear to be directed at ‘progress’, and his modest professional status not only provides him entry into the world of commerce, but also grants him respect in the society of ‘Leuten meines Kreises’ (KA1, 22). The daily rhythm of this life, the cycle of going to work and returning in the evening is not only connected with the conventional order of things within society, but also with the ‘natural’ diurnal pattern of activity and rest. Yet for the “Kaufmann”, these patterns are not a source of satisfaction:

Mein kleines Geschäft erfüllt mich mit Sorgen, die mich innen an Stirne und Schläfen schmerzen, aber ohne mir Zufriedenheit in Aussicht zu stellen, denn mein Geschäft ist klein. (KA1, 22)

The “Kaufmann” is plagued by ‘Sorgen’ which appear to be directed at the unsatisfactory size of his business. Strikingly, however, the complaint seems to extend to the insufficient space his head provides for these concerns. The impression that the “Kaufmann” experiences a form of inner agitation that seems to challenge the borders of his physical being is further expressed in the direction his thoughts take during the day.

The mental movements of the “Kaufmann” constantly strive beyond the immediate circle of his ‘Kreis’. They do not allow him to settle in the present, forcing him to think ‘für Stunden im Voraus’ and to be constantly concerned with the ‘Moden der folgenden [Jahreszeit]’, which are furthermore the ‘Moden’ of ‘unzugänglichen Bevölkerungen auf dem Lande’ (KA1, 22). This mental displacement occasionally even leads the “Kaufmann” to contemplate imaginary circumstances:

Mein Geld haben fremde Leute [...] Vielleicht sind sie verschwenderisch geworden und geben ein Fest in einem Wirtshausgarten und andere halten sich für ein Weilchen auf der Flucht nach Amerika bei diesem Feste auf. (KA1, 22)

The reflections of the “Kaufmann” imply that the nature of his business constantly forces his thoughts out of the temporal framework and the spatial sphere of his own ‘Kreis’, but as the “Kaufmann” closes his business for the day, the ‘Geschäftssorgen’ turn out to be merely a way of releasing a far more fundamental form of agitation:

Wenn nun am Abend eines Werketages das Geschäft gesperrt wird und ich plötzlich Stunden vor mir sehe, in denen ich für die ununterbrochenen Bedürfnisse meines Geschäftes nichts werden arbeiten können, dann wirft sich meine am Morgen weit vorausgeschickte Aufregung in mich, wie eine zurückkehrende Flut, hält es aber in mir nicht aus und ohne Ziel reißt sie mich mit. (KA1, 22)

Although the needs of the business seem ‘ununterbrochen’, they nevertheless prove insufficient to absorb an inner ‘Aufregung’, which – only temporarily diverted into ‘Geschäftssorgen’ – swamps him in the evening ‘wie eine zurückkehrende Flut’. This description creates the impression that the ‘Sorgen’ are a moderated expression of a far more elemental force seeking release. This force is described as something both passively endured in the sensation of being carried along by some external force and nevertheless intrinsically the protagonist’s own, ‘meine [...] Aufregung’. As the “Kaufmann” seems unable either to ‘use’ or contain this impetus for movement, it releases itself in physical gestures of restlessness which mirror the movements of the ‘Flut’ trapped within him:

Ich gehe dann wie auf Wellen, klappere mit den Fingern beider Hände und entgegenkommenden Kindern fahre ich über das Haar. (KA1, 23)

To the “Kaufmann”, the way home – the threshold between the public sphere of the business and the private domestic sphere – gains importance as a place where it is possible to release his inner restlessness into rationally acceptable forms, such as the physical exertion of climbing stairs and controlled emotions like ‘Ärger und Ungeduld’ about a maid who delays opening the door. To the “Kaufmann” this passage from business to home appears to be particularly important because it would allow some form of relief from inner agitation before being ‘allein’ (KA1, 23) once again. Yet just as his head

appeared too small to contain his mental agitation, the shopkeeper's 'Weg ist zu kurz' to provide sufficient release of these dynamic forces in physical motion. As it is, he steps into the 'Lift', experiencing a moment of solitude. The mundane ascending motion of the lift then triggers what seems like an eruptive release of the hitherto suppressed energy with imaginary dynamism. The 'Treppengeländer' he sees as the lift ascends turns into a vision of 'stürzendes Wasser', as the protagonist's thoughts enter an imagined world. As if to channel the flood of his own restless agitation, the "Kaufmann" conjures up figures that he imagines flying into undefined distant spheres – 'Flügel, die ich niemals gesehen habe, mögen Euch ins dörfliche Tal tragen oder nach Paris' (KA1, 23). Within the sphere of the wish conjured up by the "Kaufmann", these figures are imagined seeing a whole spectrum of continuously changing events and experiencing the cascade of emotions which accompany them:

Doch genießt die Aussicht des Fensters, wenn die Prozessionen aus allen drei Straßen kommen, einander nicht ausweichen, durcheinander gehn und zwischen ihren letzten Reihen einen freien Platz wieder entstehen lassen. Winket mit den Tüchern, seid entsetzt, seid gerührt, lobet die schöne Dame, die vorüberfährt. (KA1, 23)

Eventually, the "Kaufmann" urges these figments of his imagination to join in the movements they witness, even to perform actions bordering on crime, unthinkable within the 'social sphere' ('Verfolget nur den unscheinbaren Mann und wenn Ihr ihn in einen Torweg gestoßen habt, beraubt ihn', KA1, 24). Through the sudden eruption of an impulse for movement into images of undirected, disorganised and unruly behaviour, the protagonist's inner agitation finally finds release. Yet the sense of mastery over his

experience proves to be short-lived and restricted to a brief escapist vision – a ‘Wunsch’. The realisation of uncontained motion is left to unidentified proxies. Movements that go beyond spatial boundaries and negate normative behaviour clearly are not possible in the “Kaufmann’s” world, except in fantasy and daydreams. The “Kaufmann” remains tied to the physical ‘realities’ of the ‘social world’, where the ascending motion of the lift has to end at some point before returning ‘hinunter’. When it comes to a stop, the “Kaufmann” steps out of the lift, just as he steps out of his imagined world and back into the conformity of the domestic sphere. The mechanical circularity of the lift seems to imitate the protagonist’s own daily travel from home to business and back to home ad infinitum. Rather than escaping into the alternative ‘reality’ of a wish, the “Kaufmann” remains imprisoned in restless stasis.

### **‘Die Abweisung’ – ‘schweigen’ as a sign of restlessness**

On the surface of things, shopkeepers are contented citizens, and people on a tram appear unconcerned about their existential stability. The texts discussed so far, however, revolve around experiences which suggest that even within externally conventional existence, there can emerge impulses that challenge the boundaries of ‘normal’ order to the point that they begin to dominate the dynamics of thoughts and physical gestures. In ‘Die Abweisung’ (KA1, 28), this conflict gives rise to reflections about the possibility of human relationships.

On the surface, the text describes a perfectly conventional scene. A man imagines asking a girl to ‘komm mit mir’, but the girl walks past without saying a word. The encounter thus seems to merely represent a girl’s decision to ‘abweisen’ a suitor. This brief scene, however, develops into a speculation about possible motivations for the girl’s silence. As in ‘Kleider’, the image of the ‘schöne[s] Mädchen’ causes a reflection on possible experiences hidden beneath the surface of social convention. To the “Fahrgast”, the girl who ‘den Mund geschlossen hält’ seems remarkable because she appears to be at ease with her being in the world. Yet ‘Die Abweisung’ suggests a very different reason for this silence, reading it as a form of containment for a bursting flood of words expressing a tendency in the girl that vehemently negates the spatial and social boundaries of the familiar world:

Du bist kein Herzog mit fliegendem Namen, kein breiter Amerikaner mit indianischem Wuchs, mit wagrecht ruhenden Augen, mit einer von der Luft der Rasenplätze und der sie durchströmenden Flüsse massierten Haut, Du hast keine Reisen gemacht zu den großen Seen und auf ihnen, die ich weiß nicht wo zu finden sind. Also ich bitte, warum soll ich, ein schönes Mädchen, mit Dir gehn? (KA1, 28)

The girl’s imagined ‘Abweisung’ of the man is interpreted by him as the expression of an underlying desire to transgress the boundaries of her existence, her thoughts opening up an entire world of such imagined trespassing. The evocation of a ‘Herzog mit fliegendem Namen’ does not merely express a wish for social advancement within ‘reality’, but for a status so far out of reach that it seems as ‘fliegend’ as the imaginary winged companions of the “Kaufmann”. This sense of ‘going beyond’ the limits of the everyday is equally present in the longing for an ‘Amerikaner mit indianischem Wuchs’ – not quite a wish to

become a Red Indian, but close to it. This male figure is associated with the ‘Luft der Rasenplätze’, ‘Flüsse’ and ‘Reisen [...] zu den großen Seen und auf ihnen’, thus conjuring up the image of an intensely desired ‘Ferne’. This ‘Sehnsucht nach der Ferne’ is expressed in a way reminiscent of the Romantic desire not just for travel, but for movement away, ‘N’importe où hors du monde’.<sup>33</sup> It therefore not only entails the longing to get ‘away from here’, but also the realisation that ‘somewhere else’ is so completely beyond the familiar that ‘es ist ja zum Glück eine wahrhaft ungeheure Reise’.<sup>34</sup>

This imagined response of the girl has a counterpart in the man’s own thoughts about her:

Du vergißt, Dich trägt kein Automobil in langen Stößen schaukelnd durch die Gasse; ich sehe nicht die in ihre Kleider gepreßten Herren Deines Gefolges, die Segenssprüche für Dich murmelnd in genauem Halbkreis hinter Dir gehn; Deine Brüste sind im Mieder gut geordnet, aber Deine Schenkel und Hüften entschädigen sich für jene Enthaltbarkeit; Du trägst ein Taffetkleid mit plissierten Falten, wie es im vorigen Herbste uns durchaus allen Freude machte, und doch lächelst Du – diese Lebensgefahr auf dem Leibe – bisweilen. (KA1, 28)

The man, too, wishes for something other than what the appearance of the girl could offer. Her being does not promise the imagined travel in an ‘Automobil’, nor the superiority of having a ‘Gefolge’ whose ‘Segenssprüche’ would endow her with nearly divine status. Further, the man seems to wish for a kind of beauty not to be found in ‘reality’. Taking up the image of clothing as an image of being in society, the man dismisses the girl’s dress as dated, subject to changing fashion. He equally regards her body with disdain, thus expressing a desire for beauty transcending the limitations set by physical imperfection – a

---

<sup>33</sup> Baudelaire, Charles. *The Poems in Prose*. Vol. II, ed. by Francis Scarfe (London: Anvil Press Poetry 1989), p.190.

<sup>34</sup> In a notebook entry, Kafka incidentally gives expression to the desire to go ‘Weg-von-hier’ in connection with a horse ride (KA8, 11).

judgment reminiscent of the experience expressed in ‘Kleider’. Neither clothes nor face can hide the fleetingness of existence fixed in time, but show it with painful clarity. The imagined dialogue ends in mutual agreement:

Ja, wir haben beide recht und, um uns dessen nicht unwiderleglich  
bewußt zu werden, wollen wir, nicht wahr, lieber jeder allein nach  
Hause gehn. (KA1, 28)

This agreement suggests that both individuals are subject to a tendency powerful enough to render a ‘Begegnung’ in the ‘social world’ impossible. This impulse, however, is not ‘unwiderleglich bewußt’, thus taking on the quality of a fleeting sensation. The man’s initial suggestion to the girl expresses a desire for a change from being alone to a form of ‘Miteinander’ – a gesture recurring throughout Kafka’s writings in the theme of ‘Aufnahme’.<sup>35</sup> Yet rather than engaging in a ‘real’ relationship that could only ever remain a ‘bad copy’ of the desired escape into an imagined ‘Ferne’, he feels drawn towards the isolation of his home. The scene thus presents an ambivalent experience, developing out of opposing pulls of attraction and repulsion. Ironically, the narrator’s interpretation implies that individuals suffer from an insurmountable isolation within

---

<sup>35</sup> It has been noted that throughout Kafka’s writings, the theme of ‘Aufnahme’ is linked with the possibility of arrival. Friedrich Beißner, for example, uses the literary sketch ‘Heimkehr’ (KA8, 162-163) as an example for the theme of ‘mißlingende Ankunft’. See Beißner 1983, pp.64-65. Unable to enter the house – which would signify the physical arrival in the ‘Heimat’ as well as social ‘Aufnahme’ into the family – the protagonist remains the ‘Horcher’ by the door, the eternal prodigal son. This link between arrival and ‘Aufnahme’ is most prominently explored in *Der Verschollene* where Karl Roßmann finds himself caught in a self-repeating cycle of banishment and ‘Aufnahme’. John Zilcosky’s reading of the novel as a reversal of the ‘lost and found’-structure of exotic *Selbstfindung* and the Bildungsroman-tradition is based on this observation of a cyclic repetition of ‘banishment, disorientation, and, finally, relocation’ that gives Karl’s character – and the novel – its ‘non-progressive, amnesiac structure’. See Zilcosky 2003, pp.41-43.

society, which results from a common experience that goes deeper than the ‘social’ face would ever show.

### **‘Der Nachhauseweg’ – mastery and isolation**

The impulse for uninhibited motion appears to erupt particularly powerfully within protagonists’ existence during periods which mark transitional states within the movement patterns that pervade their lives. When walking down the street and ascending in a lift, protagonists pass thresholds between work and home, inside and outside. These transitional movements seem less rigidly constrained by convention and thus more susceptible to stimuli which challenge ‘normal’ patterns of activity.

In ‘Der Nachhauseweg’ (KA1, 25), the individual initially directs the energy emerging from such a state not away from society, but back into it. The impulse does not take the form of an escapist fantasy directed at transgressing the boundaries of the familiar world. Instead, it seems to transcend the protagonist’s being in the ‘social world’ without actually leaving it. The protagonist feels himself to be at the centre of a universal sense of movement that unites all aspects of the world around him, a feeling imbued with an enthusiastic sense of certainty. The weather conditions contribute to this by exuding ‘Überzeugungskraft’, while his own ‘Verdienste’ in the social world ‘überwältigen mich’, which results in a kind of super-human sensation of being not only ‘in step’ with the ‘Tempo dieser Gassenseite’, but of being responsible for all the workings of a substantial life force vitalising the world as a whole:

Ich marschiere und mein Tempo ist das Tempo dieser Gassenseite, dieser Gasse, dieses Viertels. Ich bin mit Recht verantwortlich für alle Schläge gegen Türen, auf die Platten der Tische, für alle Trinksprüche, für die Liebespaare in ihren Betten, in den Gerüsten der Neubauten, in dunklen Gassen an die Häusermauern gepreßt, auf den Ottomanen der Bordelle. (KA1, 25)

In this text, restlessness is not experienced as transgressive, but as integral to the being of the entire world. The protagonist is thus filled with a sense of mastery, expressed not only in an omniscient perspective on the activities in this world, but also the course of time:

Ich schätze meine Vergangenheit gegen meine Zukunft, finde aber beide vortrefflich, kann keiner von beiden den Vorzug geben und nur die Ungerechtigkeit der Vorsehung, die mich so begünstigt, muß ich tadeln. (KA1, 25)

This experience conjures up an image of the protagonist as an inversion of Schopenhauer's universal Will – a kind of momentary imaginative megalomania. It seems that for a brief moment, the eruption of an extra-ordinary dynamism within the individual's being brings with it the promise of an expansive sense of oneness with the world. This sensation, however, only lasts for as long as it takes to walk from the man's business to his home.

Just like the "Kaufmann", the protagonist in 'Der Nachhauseweg' eventually enters his room, and it turns out that neither imaginative flights from the world nor its transcendence into vital motion provide lasting release for the dynamism feeding these sensations. Having failed to direct this impulse from the last physical motion of 'Treppensteigen' into 'etwas Nachdenkenswertes', the protagonist enters the solitude of his room in a state of 'Nachdenklichkeit'. As already suggested in 'Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter', even

‘nachdenken’ involves movement for Kafka, the mental agitation of those who cannot simply take a picnic in the garden but whose minds are engaged in restless wanderings. The initial situation of physical and imaginative dynamism is inverted into physical stasis combined with painful mental unrest.

In what seems like a final attempt at releasing this ‘Nachdenklichkeit’, the protagonist then opens his window, letting in ‘Musik’ played in a garden in the neighbourhood. Yet as for most of Kafka’s protagonists, music ‘hilft mir nicht viel’. In Kafka’s imaginative world, access to music as a form of movement seems to be the privilege of ‘vermin’, dogs and mice.

#### 4. THE MAN BY THE WINDOW – RESTLESSNESS AS AN EXPERIENCE OF OPPOSING PULLS

Transitional states in individuals' daily activities are not necessarily marked by physical motion. In 'Der Nachhauseweg', the protagonist turns towards the window in a final – and unsuccessful – attempt at releasing his inner restlessness, which points us towards the possibility that within the everyday world, there are thresholds of various kinds. The window, for example, represents a threshold between inside and outside, an ambivalent place between isolation and activity, physical stasis and the movement of the gaze.

#### **'Zerstreutes Hinausschaun' – the movement of the gaze as a means of releasing restlessness**

In 'Zerstreutes Hinausschaun' (KA1, 24), the gesture of opening the window forms the starting point of the narrative. On turning to the window, the protagonist observes a man walking past a girl in the street. The intensity of this seemingly unremarkable scene, I would like to argue, lies in the ways in which the protagonist engages with the movements presented to him in the outside world.

In the opening sentence of the text, the protagonist associates the approach of spring with an obligation to become active:

Was werden wir in diesen Frühlingstagen tun, die jetzt rasch kommen?  
Heute früh war der Himmel grau, geht man aber jetzt zum Fenster, so ist man überrascht und lehnt die Wange an die Klinke des Fensters. (KA1, 24)

The dynamics of the ‘rasch kommen[den]’ ‘Frühlingstagen’ corresponds to an impulse for movement in the protagonist, who describes himself as part of a ‘wir’. This address, however, appears out of place in the protagonist’s solitary position, as does his call for action which is at odds with the tired gesture of ‘lehnt die Wange an die Klinke des Fensters’. This protagonist does not conjure up proxies to project the impulse for activity into a dreamt escape towards fantastic realms. In the solitude of the protagonist’s room, there is no active ‘wir’, only a contemplative ‘man’, whose mental agitation takes on a far less extravagant form, that of being ‘nachdenklich’ to the point of ‘Zerstreuung’.

Mental ‘Zerstretheit’ signifies a state of absent-mindedness, i.e. of being unable to keep one’s mind together and ‘in one place’. The text re-vivifies this dead metaphor by linking it to the movement of the gaze: the title ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’ makes the text exemplary of the link between visual perception and mental alertness in the double process of *Betrachtung*. Looking out of the window seems like a way of ‘dispersing’ or ‘scattering’ inner restlessness into an equally undirected movement of the gaze, allowing the individual to ‘do’ something, be it only to register the movements which present themselves to him in the outside world:

Unten sieht man das Licht der freilich schon sinkenden Sonne auf dem Gesicht des kindlichen Mädchens, das so geht und sich umschauf, und zugleich sieht man den Schatten des Mannes darauf, der hinter ihm rascher kommt.  
Dann ist der Mann schon vorübergegangen und das Gesicht des Mädchens ist ganz hell. (KA1, 24)

The everyday character of the scene is described with a seemingly disproportionate sense of detail, which has provoked readings directed at charging the scene with sexual tension<sup>36</sup> or approaching danger.<sup>37</sup> I consider it more fruitful, however, to concentrate on the ways in which this impression of tension is created. Carolin Duttlinger observes that the remarkable intensity of the scene lies not in the incident itself, but results from the heightened sense of awareness with which the narrator registers details in the surroundings. This heightened – or altered – awareness, she continues, arises from the protagonist’s distracted mental state.<sup>38</sup> In the following, I will show that this link is established by means of movement.

The description of the scene reveals an intense awareness of movements expressed as change in the protagonist’s surroundings. To the protagonist, the initial observation of weather conditions changing from a grey morning to a sunny evening involves both a change in season and the time of day. The detailed description of the light patterns on the girl’s face, changing from light to darkness and back to light as the man passes her by, creates the impression that the shifts in the natural surroundings are connected to movements of people in the street or vice versa. These physical movements further seem expressive of the possibility of dynamic changes on a social level. While the description of a ‘kindliches Mädchen’ and a ‘Mann’ is evocative of the possibility of a contact between

---

<sup>36</sup> Kurz 1994, p.62.

<sup>37</sup> Roland Reuß assumes that the scene contains hints at the ‘Szenario einer Vergewaltigung’. See Roland Reuß, ‘Augen weit geschlossen: zu Franz Kafkas kleiner Geschichte “Zerstreutes Hinausschaun”’, in *Die kleinen Formen in der Moderne*, ed. by Elmar Locher (Innsbruck: Edition Sturzflüge, 2001), pp.219-230, p.225.

<sup>38</sup> See Carolin Duttlinger, ‘Between alterness and paranoia: Kafka’s poetics of attention from “Betrachtung” to “Der Bau”’ (unpublished paper given at the conference ‘Kafka and Short Modernist Prose’ in Oxford, September/October 2008). The contributions to this conference will be published, publication details to be confirmed.

male and female, the following text highlights the difference between ‘Kind’ and ‘Mann’, thus shifting emphasis onto the difference between childhood and adulthood. The scene is thus comprised of a striking variety of threshold moments: the change from winter to spring, day to night, isolation to community, and from child to adult.

These transitional moments mirror the protagonist’s own position at the window, at a threshold between inside and outside, but also between the isolation of the individual and community. Throughout Kafka’s writings, protagonists turn towards the window in order to deal with inner states.<sup>39</sup> The movements in the surroundings present the man by the window with a sense of movement and change, a shifting dynamics that corresponds to his own inner state of ‘Zerstreutheit’. Once this momentary sense of change has passed, the dynamic potential in the external world appears to dissolve and the process of visual ‘Zerstreuung’ comes to a halt. The protagonist’s flickering gaze temporarily dissolves the unity of the socialised self, allowing a free-wheeling potential of the mind, of the kind that caused the “Kaufmann” to send out his proxies into an imagined world of heightened experience. Yet the relation between internal states and external world remains ambivalent. As the stable self disperses into the multiplicity of impressions in the world, we feel reminded of the sensations expressed by early readers of Ernst Mach’s *Analyse der Empfindungen*,<sup>40</sup> who, shocked by the idea that they may be mere receptors of impressions in the world, felt that they were losing their stable sense of self. In view of this loss of a stable core, they too felt that the question ‘was sollen wir tun?’ had become

---

<sup>39</sup> John Grandin discusses the role of the window in Kafka’s writings as a threshold between isolation and society, see John Grandin, ‘Defenestrations’, in *The Kafka Debate*, ed. by Angel Flores (New York: Gordian Press, 1977), pp.216-222. For a discussion of the window as a place to which protagonists regularly turn (and often unsuccessfully) to cope with inner states, see Hartmut Binder, *Kafka in neuer Sicht* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976), pp.560.

<sup>40</sup> See Ernst Mach, *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1886).

highly problematic. Who, after all, was there to ‘tun’ anything?<sup>41</sup> The release of restlessness in ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’ thus articulates both an intrinsic uncertainty about the stability of the self and a desire to let go of this ‘socialised’ unity in order to release an inner state of ‘Zerstreutheit’, of inner agitation that cannot be contained in the individual’s static and isolated state.

### **‘Das Gassenfenster’ – subjection to opposing pulls**

The protagonists in ‘Der Nachhauseweg’ and ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’ find themselves in a position of physical stasis and loneliness. In this situation, the window can take on an ambivalent role, both enclosing the protagonist in his room and at the same time almost providing a bridge to the world outside the ‘Zimmer’.<sup>42</sup>

In ‘Das Gassenfenster’, this ambivalent potential of the window as a place of dispersal and orientation, isolation and integration is deployed with striking clarity. The protagonist’s gaze out of the window presents him with a similar sight to that in ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’. The constant ‘Veränderungen der Tageszeit, der Witterung, der

---

<sup>41</sup> As empiricist theories became more well-known by the educated public, Judith Ryan writes, ‘panic began to spread. If there was no such thing as the self, the basis for decisions and actions seemed to have been removed.’ See Judith Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.21. The relation between self and world is clearly a central theme throughout literature (and painting) at the time, and the ambivalent way in which this relation is experienced by Kafka’s protagonists continues to be of concern for his readers. In her essay on Kafka’s early works, Ryan explores how the experience of being in the world associated specifically with the psychologies of Franz Brentano and Ernst Mach may be seen to be reflected in the experiences of some of Kafka’s early protagonists. Interestingly, she does not comment on ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’ in her discussion on *Betrachtung*. See Ryan 2002.

<sup>42</sup> James Rolleston views the window within his general framework of thresholds as places between the ‘Möglichkeit’ and ‘Unmöglichkeit’ for finding orientation in life. See Rolleston 1984.

Berufsverhältnisse und dergleichen' (KA1, 29-30), expressive of the 'normal' course of life in the 'social world', are experienced as fleeting and restless. Yet while the protagonist in 'Zerstreutes Hinausschaun' seemed to give himself up gladly to this restless flow of impressions, the protagonist in 'Das Gassenfenster' wishes for an 'beliebigen Arm' (KA1, 30), a *pars pro toto* expression for human contact as something one can hold on to in a world perceived as intrinsically restless. In this state, the protagonist declares, one cannot survive without a 'Gassenfenster'. The window is thus introduced as a place of possible orientation, providing the individual with the slightest possibility of 'sich doch hie und da irgendwo anschließen' (KA1, 29). Yet the window as a threshold remains ambivalent:

Und steht es mit ihm so, daß er gar nichts sucht und nur als müder Mann, die Augen auf und ab zwischen Publikum und Himmel, an seine Fensterbrüstung tritt, und er will nicht und hat ein wenig den Kopf zurückgeneigt, so reißen ihn doch unten die Pferde mit in ihr Gefolge von Wagen und Lärm und damit endlich der menschlichen Eintracht zu.  
(KA1, 30)

The 'Gassenfenster' allows a view downwards towards the 'Publikum' and the possible goal of 'menschliche[n] Eintracht', but also permits the gaze to drift in the opposite direction, towards the 'Himmel' in an ascending motion. There is no indication as to whether the 'Himmel' is associated with heaven, i.e. the possibility of a form of 'Eintracht' other than that of humanity, or simply with the empty sky above. Yet even without the hope of transcendence, the direction is suggestive of a tendency diametrically opposed to the pull towards the 'Gasse'. This direction has previously been taken by the 'Lift' in 'Der Kaufmann', which appeared as a weak and restricted copy of the direction

taken by the protagonist's undefined addressees on their unseen wings. These ascending movements are thus associated with the powerful impulse to realise uninhibited motions which transgress the limitations posed by natural law and social convention.

The protagonist by the window, exposed to pulls in both directions, remains in a state of restless stasis. His gaze wanders 'auf und ab', and 'er will nicht', which seems to be not so much expressive of a will against anything in particular but an inability to will at all. On the one hand pulled towards humanity, he nevertheless holds his 'Kopf zurückgeneigt' as if to escape this pull.

The protagonist supposedly wants to escape his isolation, yet his desire for human company only goes as far as the wish to 'sich hie und da irgendwo anschließen'. This expression does not suggest a strong will but a 'möchte', a noncommittal, half-repressed wish that is further qualified in the vagueness of its being directed towards a 'hie und da' and 'irgendwo'. This undecided state is reflected in the shifting movement of the protagonist's gaze, which 'gar nichts sucht'. This ambivalence has been observed previously in the protagonist of 'Die Abweisung', who feels drawn towards a 'Begegnung' with the girl, while also rejecting it as a weak replacement of something else that cannot be grasped within the limitations of the 'social sphere'.

The protagonist's state as a 'müder Mann' can thus be read as a fundamental fatigue which results from being exposed to pulls from different directions. Drawn between isolation, 'Publikum' and 'Himmel', he eventually gives in to the strongest pull rather than actively strive towards either direction. The description of this passive surrender, however, does not suggest that the situation has been resolved.

This final pull is greeted with the relief of ‘endlich’ being hauled away from static isolation, ‘der menschlichen Eintracht zu’. Yet the protagonist’s description of the disorder of horses, carriages and noise is at odds with the protagonist’s supposed wish for stability within humanity. The end of the text maintains the ambivalent state of the protagonist, to whom even the ‘menschliche Eintracht’ is associated with incompatible images of restlessness. The protagonist’s relation to humanity remains distant, limited to a brief surrender to the pull of this sphere, which is furthermore only followed by the movement of his gaze, not actual contact. To make the position even more fragile, this shifting of the gaze is both welcome and finite: ‘endlich’.

### **‘Das Unglück des Junggesellen’ – ‘sein’ and ‘bleiben’ as measures of social integration**

As we have seen, the stories in *Betrachtung* revolve around a variety of threshold situations. Changes between seasons, times of the day, inside and outside spaces, stasis and movement form a central theme throughout the collection, but also Kafka’s writing as a whole.<sup>43</sup> As we could see in ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’, thresholds in the natural world correspond to social thresholds, the change between isolation and community as well as

---

<sup>43</sup> Hartmut Binder identifies these ‘Gelenkstellen’ as a dominant area of imagery particularly in the diaries. Without following up on this link, he associates them with a change in movement by stating that ‘dazuhin wird jeweils ein innerer Stillstand, Unglück und Mißlingen durch eine kräftige Bewegung fortgesetzt’. See: Hartmut Binder, ‘Kafkas Literarische Urteile. Ein Beitrag zu seiner Typologie und Ästhetik’, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 86 (1967), 211-249, p.218.

from childhood to adulthood.<sup>44</sup> When stepping to the window, the protagonist of ‘Das Gassenfenster’ becomes intensely aware of the two pulls exerted on him, yet at the same time, his position allows him to experience these pulls without any commitment towards an actual motion towards the ‘menschliche Eintracht’ or away from it. In ‘Das Unglück des Junggesellen’, this state of hovering over a threshold between isolation and community is expressed in the image that has come to be seen as Kafka’s key trope for the problem of social integration: ‘Junggesellentum’. The text opens with the statement ‘Es scheint so arg, Junggeselle zu bleiben’, which is followed by a description of situations in an individual’s existence that illustrate what it is to be a ‘Junggeselle’.

Es scheint so arg, Junggeselle zu bleiben, als alter Mann unter schwerer Wahrung der Würde um Aufnahme zu bitten, wenn man einen Abend mit Menschen verbringen will, krank zu sein und aus dem Winkel seines Bettes wochenlang das leere Zimmer anzusehn, immer vor dem Haustor Abschied zu nehmen, niemals neben seiner Frau sich die Treppe hinaufzudrängen, in seinem Zimmer nur Seitentüren zu haben, die in fremde Wohnungen führen, sein Nachtmahl in einer Hand nach Hause zu tragen, fremde Kinder anstaunen zu müssen und nicht immerfort wiederholen zu dürfen: »Ich habe keine«, sich im Aussehn und Benehmen nach ein oder zwei Junggesellen der Jugenderinnerung auszubilden.

So wird es sein, nur daß man auch in Wirklichkeit heute und später selbst dastehen wird, mit einem Körper und einem wirklichen Kopf, also auch einer Stirn, um mit der Hand an sie zu schlagen. (KA1, 21-22)

Bachelorhood is described in terms of stasis and isolation. The bachelor is a person who, like the man behind the window ‘verlassen lebt und sich doch hie und da irgendwie anschließen möchte’. Yet this desire for human contact merely results in an intense

---

<sup>44</sup> On Kafka’s particular interest in figures at the border between childhood and adulthood see Judith Ryan, ‘Durch kindische Mittel gerettet : zu einem Motiv bei Franz Kafka’, in: *Zeitgenossenschaft. Zur deutschsprachigen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Egon Schwarz zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by Paul Michael Lützeler, Herbert Lehnert, Gerhild S. Williams (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum, 1987), pp. 48-60.

awareness of one's isolation in the middle of society. For the bachelor, human contact is only possible at the cost of losing any sense of dignity. 'Aufnahme' in society is not a given, and even a single 'Abend mit Menschen' becomes something that one has to beg for – not even like a guest, but an asylum seeker.

In the image of the bachelor as a sick person lying in his bed, isolation is accompanied by an intense sense of stasis. To the physical immobility of the bachelor who has withdrawn into the last 'Winkel seines Bettes' is added a complete lack of visual stimuli. Without even the possibility for the visual wandering of 'Zerstreutes Hinausschaun', the bachelor's room gains the claustrophobic quality of a prison cell.<sup>45</sup> This sense of inescapable isolation is further increased by the fact that even the 'Seitentüren' merely lead to 'fremde Wohnungen'. Here, the experience of being 'allein' and 'verlassen' that follows the climb up the stairs to one's room in 'Der Kaufmann' and 'Der Nachhauseweg' is taken to an extreme.

In 'Das Unglück des Junggesellen', the problematic experience of being in the world is described as the result of not having a 'Frau' and 'Kinder', i.e. to deviate from the socially determined understanding of life *dans le vrai* that will find its most determined representative in 'Die Sorge des Hausvaters', which will be discussed in detail in Part II of this thesis: an existence that draws its sense of self-justification from the deeply felt conviction that the individual is integrated in a family and the extended household. The bachelor is aware of the fact that his existence represents a severe break with social

---

<sup>45</sup> In view of the importance of the window as a place of both 'Besinnung' and 'Zerstreuung' throughout these texts, it seems unsurprising that being cut off from external stimuli is here associated with extreme stasis. Carolin Duttlinger emphasises the extreme impact of this state on the individual as a condition predestining paranoia. See Duttlinger 2008.

convention. The narrator considers this break with the social norm as so intense that it will eventually become visible to his surroundings in his 'Aussehn und Benehmen'. His experience will eventually turn him into a recognisable, abnormal type, along with the 'Junggesellen der Jugenderinnerungen'.

Both the opening of the text – 'es scheint so arg, Junggeselle zu bleiben' – and the introduction to the last sentence – 'so wird es sein' – suggest that 'Das Unglück des Junggesellen' is not so much a reflection on an actual experience, but rather a reflection on experiences that are expected to follow from a particular condition, that of 'Junggeselle zu bleiben.' This condition is peculiar in that it expresses an irredeemably static condition of 'bleiben'.

A comparison with the diary entry this text is based on suggests that the state of 'Junggeselle bleiben' is different from the state of 'Junggeselle sein' (KA9, 194). In the earlier text, bachelorhood appears as a developmental stage within the movement patterns constitutive of what is considered to be a successful life in accordance with social convention. Here, bachelorhood is described as part of a dynamic process of 'wachsen'. This process is realised in the cycle of generations. As a child, the individual's integration in this cycle is granted by the 'Ehe seiner Eltern', which then has to be replaced by 'die eigene' (KA9, 194). Bachelorhood is thus perceived as a stage in a growth process, something one is expected to 'grow out of'. The social imperative to marry and have children is thus associated with an organic image. Not growing out of being a bachelor, i.e. not to pass the developmental threshold, is to turn into an anomaly, which is expressed

in a temporal antagonism, the ‘unveränderliches Altersgefühl’ of the eternal bachelor.<sup>46</sup> The description of ‘kranksein’ could thus be read as an existential rather than a momentary state, illustrating both the sense of stasis associated with the experience as well as the divergence it presents from the ‘normal’, i.e. ‘healthy’ activity of life in the world of social convention.

The shift between the diary entry and ‘Das Unglück des Junggesellen’ thus seems to represent the change from the worries of a young man who *is* a bachelor and the experience of a man whose life has ceased to ‘wachsen’, who experiences the existential stasis of ‘Junggeselle [zu] bleiben’.<sup>47</sup> The reading is supported by the increase in isolation, claustrophobia and stasis between the two texts. In ‘Das Unglück des Junggesellen’, the ‘Verwandten’ and the ‘Eltern’ have disappeared, and the individual finds himself surrounded merely by undefined ‘Menschen’. What is more, the complete absence of a window to glance through in the later text appears like a rigid elimination of the ‘Troost der Aussicht aus seinem Fenster’ (KA1, 194) that still remains open to the individual in the earlier text. To the eternal bachelor, there is ‘Troost’ neither in ‘Halt’ nor in ‘Zerstreuung’, however limited these prove when put to the test.

The intrinsic sense of loneliness and exclusion which results from a failure to pass the threshold from bachelorhood to married life seems to illustrate what is at stake for figures like Eduard Raban and Georg Bendemann, who are about to make the transition from ‘Junggeselle [zu] sein’ to ‘verheiratet sein’. Not to perform this movement in accordance

---

<sup>46</sup> This image is most famously realised in the figure of the ‘Freund in Russland’ in ‘Das Urteil’. He, too, is an eternal bachelor who appears like an ‘altes Kind’ (KA1, 40) to Georg.

with social convention means to join the ranks of Kafka's eternal bachelors, most prominent amongst them Georg's 'Freund in Russland'.

In 'Das Unglück des Junggesellen', eternal bachelorhood is dealt with as a kind of undeserved fate, an 'Unglück'. Yet while the narrating voice seems to assert that not being able to follow the pull into society is 'arg', he also makes slips of the tongue which suggest that his hovering over the existential threshold of bachelorhood is due to a tendency which is at odds with this supposed desire for integration. The strange ambivalence contained in the statement that the bachelor has to 'fremde Kinder anstaunen müssen und nicht immerfort wiederholen zu dürfen: »Ich habe keine«'<sup>48</sup> for example, creates the impression that the state of being childless is actually a 'favour bestowed upon him'.<sup>49</sup> An even more obvious case of such a form of destabilising rhetoric can be observed in the diary entry. The protagonist describes a sense of 'die Fremdheit seiner Verwandten zu spüren bekommen', which again invites different readings. It does not become clear whether the 'I' feels the 'Fremdheit' towards the 'Verwandten' or vice versa. Does the young man feel a foretaste of the 'Fremdheit' he would have to suffer in the event of an unsuccessful development – or does he feel 'Fremdheit' towards his family, a tendency negating life in accordance with social convention?

As in 'Das Gassenfenster', the protagonist appears to be subject to opposing pulls. Here, both tendencies seem to emerge from the protagonist's rhetoric, in which tendencies directed at integration seem to be challenged by a kind of disruptive rhetoric. As the opening passage reveals, the reflection only implies that 'es scheint so arg, Junggeselle zu

---

<sup>48</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> Politzer 1962, p.34.

sein’, not ‘es ist so arg’. As if to support the ambivalent narrative dynamic, the narrator ends with a peculiar gesture:

So wird es sein, nur daß man auch in Wirklichkeit heute und später selbst dastehen wird, mit einem Körper und einem wirklichen Kopf, also auch einer Stirn, um mit der Hand an sie zu schlagen. (KA1, 21-22)

The gesture of ‘sich mit der Hand an die Stirne schlagen’ can express different emotions: an awareness of having forgotten something, frustration about one’s own folly, or the sudden acquisition of insight. In the light of the analysis of narrative strategies employed in the reflection, it seems likely that the gesture is an outward expression of the protagonist’s inner agitation. This end presents the reader with one of the peculiar and ambivalent gestures that have long been assigned a key role in Kafka’s writing<sup>50</sup> - small and seemingly unremarkable physical movements which nevertheless seem like intimations of a meaningful and yet opaque relation between inner life and external motion, so that the reader becomes reluctant to read them as ‘personal quirks’.<sup>51</sup> Here, the baffling of the reader seems to mirror the overall ambivalence of the text. It ends on a note of restlessness.

---

<sup>50</sup> Walter Benjamin describes Kafka’s entire oeuvre as a ‘Kodex von Gesten’, thus addressing the striking sense Kafka exhibits for the narrative potential of gestures. See Walter Benjamin, ‘Franz Kafka. Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages’, in *Walter Benjamin. Ein Lesebuch*, ed. by Michael Opitz (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), pp.222-251, p.231. The strange discrepancy between what Martin Puchner describes as Kafka’s ‘obsessive attention to details of gestures’ (p.179) on one hand, and the strangely unmotivated character of these small scale movements on the other, as well as the ambivalent relation between words and gestures – the potential to introduce gestures as ‘Kontrapunkte zu den Worten’, as Theodor Adorno states – has been widely discussed. See for example Theodor Adorno, ‘Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka’, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), X.1: *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I. Prismen. Ohne Leitbild*. pp.254-287; Martin Puchner, ‘Kafka’s Antitheatrical Gestures’, *The Germanic Review*, 78/3 (2003), 177-193; Binder 1976.

<sup>51</sup> I am taking the liberty to extend Ritchie Robertson’s verdict on Kafka’s use of gesture in *Der Proceß* to Kafka’s use of gesture as a whole. See: Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka. Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.57.

What emerges from these analyses is that Kafka uses images of movement to capture experiences of being in the world and states of mind rather than specific events. The common concern of these texts is a condition that finds expression in the conflict between dynamic pulls. Protagonists find themselves drawn between a pull towards ‘menschliche Eintracht’, habitual movements and the assertion of a stable sense of self, and a pull towards very different, extra-ordinary forms of movement. Within human existence, these texts suggest, there emerges an impulse for the kind of perfect motion in perfect rest that is envisaged in the ‘Wunsch’. This impulse, however, radically opposes the regular and contained patterns of activity of which protagonists’ lives consist. ‘Wunsch, Indianer zu werden’ may appear like a cautious assertion of the possibility of this wish, but within the narrated ‘reality’, sudden dynamic bursts do not give rise to the elated dynamism of the Red Indian. Protagonists find themselves exposed to dynamic impulses of uncertain nature and direction that challenge the very boundaries of their being. Unable to release them in any other way than fleeting fantasies and dreams, but equally unable to contain them, they find themselves in a kind of dynamic limbo, drawn between seemingly irresolvable pulls. The condition arising from this conflict is best described as restlessness, a form of static agitation that manifests itself in ‘Nachdenklichkeit’, restless gestures and a general sense of being in the world that may be described as seasickness.

The analyses so far suggest that the different and conflicting patterns outlined at the outset of this thesis play a central role in the inner dynamics of Kafka’s earliest writings. Throughout the collection, Kafka explores different ways in which the conflict arising from these patterns manifests itself within human existence, from fleeting states of ‘Zerstreuung’ to more fundamental disruptions to individuals’ existence within society.

Throughout the texts, protagonists generally reflect on their condition of restlessness as an isolated occurrence that draws them out of society, but occasionally stories touch on the possibility that restlessness may be a human condition. As we have seen, Kafka uses images of movement in general and the conflict at the heart of the condition of restlessness in particular to explore questions concerning the possibility of a stable self as well as problems regarding the possibility of integration. While this variety gives us an idea of how fruitful these images can be employed to touch on concerns about existence, there remains the question: can restlessness ever be resolved?

## 5. 'DER PLÖTZLICHE SPAZIERGANG' – TRANSCENDING RESTLESSNESS?

'Der plötzliche Spaziergang' (KA1, 19-20) is unmatched within the texts in *Betrachtung* in that it provides a brief glimpse of what it could possibly be like to escape the static restlessness arising from the conflict between a desire for stability and the wish for movement beyond the boundaries of conventional 'reality'. The solution to the problem seems simple enough: one has to go for a walk.

In the opening scene of the text, the protagonist finds himself in a situation which is in perfect accordance with the movement patterns associated with social 'normality':

Wenn man sich am Abend endgültig entschlossen zu haben scheint, zu Hause zu bleiben, den Hausrock angezogen hat, nach dem Nachtmahl beim beleuchteten Tische sitzt und jene Arbeit oder jenes Spiel vorgenommen hat, nach dessen Beendigung man gewohnheitsmäßig schlafen geht, wenn draußen ein unfreundliches Wetter ist, welches das Zuhausebleiben selbstverständlich macht, wenn man jetzt auch schon so lange bei Tisch stillgehalten hat, daß das Weggehen allgemeines Erstaunen hervorrufen müßte, wenn nun auch schon das Treppenhaus dunkel und das Haustor gesperrt ist [...]. (KA1, 19)

In the evening, the individual is 'zu Hause' with his family, engaged in leisurely activities that habitually precede going to bed. It is striking to see how in this scene, the movement patterns of everyday life are closely linked to temporal, spatial and social structures. Evening as a threshold between day and night is associated with a return from the public sphere of the street to the private 'zu Hause', where the individual – following the diurnal rhythm of activity and rest – takes a rest from his daily errands and takes on a relatively static position by the table before going to bed. Even the surroundings seem to comply

with these patterns. The 'Wetter' is 'unfreundlich', the 'Treppenhaus dunkel' and the 'Haustor gesperrt', which makes 'das Zuhausebleiben selbstverständlich'. This close link between natural, social and individual patterns of movement supports the impression that this situation represents the 'natural' course of things, a state in which the individual is integrated not only into a social unit, but also the 'natural' processes of the world as a whole. The structure of the sentence – the series of 'wenn'-sentences – supports the impression that this motion is intrinsically self-justified, representing a 'natural' order.

Yet the 'wenn' is not followed by the expected 'dann'. Instead, the protagonist acts 'trotz alledem', thus expressing an awareness of the severe breach his action represents within this 'natural' order of social convention. His non-conforming action is described as the result of a 'plötzlichen Unbehagen'. A closer analysis of the first passage, however, demonstrates that the 'Unbehagen' is not a sudden experience causing a change in the initial situation, but a forceful breakout of a sensation slowly building up over the course of the text.

As in 'Das Unglück des Junggesellen', the rhetoric applied in this first passage reveals a tendency in the individual that negates his initial, supposedly integrated state. A reading of the social imperative of 'zu Hause zu bleiben' as a natural process is destabilised by expressions which suggest that this state is not associated with rest, but with stasis and restriction. 'Bleiben' can be read as a form of 'Aufnahme', yet also as a state of existential stasis, as suggested in 'Das Unglück des Junggesellen'. This impression is further supported by the emphasis on the 'endgültig[e]' character of this state. The protagonist does not seem at rest, but 'stillgehalten', which suggests that his externally calm appearance masks an inner impulse for movement that challenges the

‘gewöhnheitsmäßige’ dynamics of the situation. Accordingly, he is not ‘entschlossen’, but ‘scheint’ ‘[sich] entschlossen zu haben’.

This underlying sense of suppressed agitation suggests that the ‘wenn’-sequence could express a sense of monotony within the ordered and controlled patterns of daily life.

In a sudden burst of energy, the protagonist’s inner restlessness is released into ‘Der plötzliche Spaziergang’, which takes him out not only of the immediate circle of the family, but seems to carry him beyond any restrictions of ‘normal’ existence:

[...] und wenn man nun trotz alledem in einem plötzlichen Unbehagen aufsteht, den Rock wechselt, sofort straßenmäßig angezogen erscheint, weggehen zu müssen erklärt, es nach kurzem Abschied auch tut, je nach der Schnelligkeit, mit der man die Wohnungstür zuschlägt, mehr oder weniger Ärger zu hinterlassen glaubt, wenn man sich auf der Gasse wiederfindet, mit Gliedern, die diese schon unerwartete Freiheit, die man ihnen verschafft hat, mit besonderer Beweglichkeit beantworten, wenn man durch diesen einen Entschluß alle Entschlußfähigkeit in sich gesammelt fühlt, wenn man mit größerer als der gewöhnlichen Bedeutung erkennt, daß man ja mehr Kraft als Bedürfnis hat, die schnellste Veränderung leicht zu bewirken und zu ertragen, und wenn man so die langen Gassen hinläuft, – dann ist man für diesen Abend gänzlich aus seiner Familie ausgetreten, die ins Wesenlose abschwimmt, während man selbst, ganz fest, schwarz vor Umrissenheit, hinten die Schenkel schlagend, sich zu seiner wahren Gestalt erhebt. (KA1, 20-21)

In a quick succession of movements, the protagonist leaves the house and walks down the street, the intense mobility of his ‘Schnelligkeit’ and ‘besondere Beweglichkeit’ forming a remarkable contrast to his previously static position, just as the ‘unerwartete Freiheit’ of this movement replaces the state of restrained ‘stillhalten’. This sudden dynamism remains undirected as the protagonist embarks on a run ‘die langen Gassen hin’.

The eruptive release of the protagonist’s inner impulse for undirected and uninhibited movement is further associated with ‘Entschlußfähigkeit’, the ability to ‘bewirken’ a

‘Veränderung’. ‘Mit größerer als der gewöhnlichen Bedeutung’, the protagonist grasps this potential for change, and what started as the relatively modest gesture of ‘aufstehen’ eventually leads to the existential elation of ‘sich zu seiner wahren Gestalt erheben’.

In this text, the experience of restlessness, the ‘Unbehagen’ felt within the social constraints of ‘normal’ life, is conceived as being capable of transcendence. Once released, the impulse which pulls the individual out of these social constraints seems to raise the self into a ‘Gestalt’ truer than the suddenly ephemeral familiar sphere. Once he is ‘gänzlich aus seiner Familie ausgetreten’, the protagonist feels a new sense of stability in his ‘Umrisenheit’, while the family ‘ins Wesenlose abschwenkt’.<sup>52</sup> While the “Kaufmann” only briefly toyed with the possibility of a dissolution of the ‘real’ world, it is now described as essentially spectral, as if it had lost any significance for the elated individual. Yet, although his movements of ‘hinten die Schenkel schlagend’ evoke the image of the protagonist turning into a horse and escaping into the free movement imagined in the ‘Wunsch’, the walk makes a different turn:

Verstärkt wird alles noch, wenn man zu dieser späten Abendzeit einen  
Freund aufsucht, um nachzusehen, wie es ihm geht. (KA1, 30)

The decision to visit a friend can be read in different ways. A positive view would suggest that the turn represents the successful balance of an elated state and existence in society in

---

<sup>52</sup> John Grandin observes that the protagonist’s ascent and the family’s descent into dissolution is accompanied by an ‘ascending’ complexity of vocabulary. Concrete objects – such as the ‘Hausrock’ and the ‘Tisch’ – are replaced with abstract concepts such as ‘Entschlussfähigkeit’. Interestingly, Grandin does not comment on the representation of this shift from the ‘reality’ of the domestic sphere in physical movements, which supports the assumption that images of physical movement tend to be taken for granted even by critics who are interested in dynamic processes of the text. See John Grandin, ‘Kafka’s “Der plötzliche Spaziergang”’. *MLN*, 89 (1974), 866-72.

equilibrium.<sup>53</sup> Does the experience of ‘sich zu seiner wahren Gestalt erheben’ raise the protagonist above the previous struggle between two pulls exerting their force on him? A less euphoric stance is suggested in a reading of the final turn as a return into the sphere of social convention. The slightly unusual time of the day aside, the decision to visit a friend seems strangely ordinary after the prior sense of escape from all boundaries. The protagonist does not remain in his ‘splendid isolation’<sup>54</sup> and the moment of liberation remains temporary.

We may at this point think of a similar brief moment of soaring movement in *Beschreibung eines Kampfes*, the moment when the protagonist finds himself flying over the ‘Pflaster’ of the square and ‘umkreiste schwimmend jede Heiligenstatue, der ich begegne’ (KA5, 111) until his ‘Bekannter’ takes his hand and brings him back down to earth. In this image, the two pulls working on the protagonist can be associated with a desire for liberation from the gravitational force of rationally graspable existence on one hand and ‘Erdenschwere’<sup>55</sup> on the other. In ‘Der plötzliche Spaziergang’, I would like to argue, the conflict between these two pulls is not resolved.

When reflecting on his newly found ‘Kraft’, the protagonist states that he has ‘mehr Kraft als Bedürfnis’, which articulates a reluctance to realise the potential of the impulse.

---

<sup>53</sup> This positive reading is advocated by James Rolleston, who argues that the end of the text expresses the ability to ‘in Gesellschaft treten’ and nevertheless maintaining a floating unbound state. See Rolleston 1984, p.196.

<sup>54</sup> Ryan 2002, p.79.

<sup>55</sup> Kafka uses this term in one of his aphorisms: ‘Es wäre denkbar daß Alexander der Große trotz der kriegerischen Erfolge seiner Jugend, trotz des ausgezeichneten Heeres, das er ausgebildet hatte, trotz der auf Veränderung der Welt gerichteten Kräfte die er in sich fühlte, am Hellespont stehn geblieben und ihn nie überschritten hätte und zwar nicht aus Furcht, nicht aus Unentschlossenheit, nicht aus Willensschwäche, sondern aus Erdenschwere’ (KA6, 234). The crossing of the Hellespont is thus described in terms of a struggle between the pull towards the stability of the ‘Heimat’ (‘Erdenschwere’) and a pull beyond this familiar sphere, a powerful impulse directed at the ‘Veränderung der Welt’.

Similarly, he declares himself able ‘Veränderung leicht zu bewirken und zu ertragen’, which supports the assumption that there is a tendency in the protagonist which experiences the change passively and remains averse to it. This ambivalent reaction to the liberated motion suggests that the moment of elevation remains temporary, limited to ‘diesen Abend’ – or even less. These instabilities support a reading of the end of the text as an expression of the protagonist’s inability to fully escape the gravitational pull of society, just as the opening of the text demonstrated his inability to fully surrender to ‘Erdenschwere’. The fact that the ‘wenn’-series is continued throughout the text would then suggest that the entire dynamics of the text is part of a monotonous motion, an irresolvable ambivalence that results from the restlessness caused by the co-existent force of both pulls. The final statement that ‘verstärkt wird alles noch’ could therefore be read as a reference to an intense awareness of this irresolvable ambivalence.

As it turns out, ‘Der plötzliche Spaziergang’ is unique amongst the texts in *Betrachtung*. Although tinged with a notion of ambivalence, it allows for the possibility that an initial experience of restlessness can be transcended in a liberating motion which elevates the individual beyond the restrictions of social conventions and the rational grasp of the ‘normal’ world into something intrinsically extra-ordinary, thus introducing the possibility of an optimistic interpretation of this condition. This moment, however, is fleeting and the optimism articulated in this text is not repeated in the collection.

## 6. 'ENTSCHLÜSSE' – RESISTING RESTLESSNESS

### 'Entschlüsse' – an attempt at stasis

Immediately following 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang' in the collection, 'Entschlüsse' (KA1, 20) has the effect of a comment on the possibility of willfully bringing about an equilibrium of elated dynamism and social integration in an experience of a more authentic mode of being. Yet in this story, the initial decision to follow an impetus for movement is swiftly reversed into its opposite: absolute immobility.

Like 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang', 'Entschlüsse' develops out of a reflection on possible reactions to a state of 'Unbehagen' – here, the situation is described as an 'elender Zustand'. In a gesture reminiscent of the 'aufstehen' that initiates the elevating experience of the protagonist in 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang', the protagonist of 'Entschlüsse' makes a willful effort 'sich zu erheben' and to release his inner state into dynamic movement:

Ich reiße mich vom Sessel los, umlaufe den Tisch, mache Kopf und Hals beweglich, bringe Feuer in die Augen, spanne die Muskeln um sie herum. Arbeite jedem Gefühl entgegen, begrüße A. stürmisch, wenn er jetzt kommen wird, dulde B. freundlich in meinem Zimmer, ziehe bei C. alles, was gesagt wird, trotz Schmerz und Mühe mit langen Zügen in mich hinein. (KA1, 20)

Once risen, the protagonist forcefully 'reiß[t] [sich] vom Sessel los', thus revealing a similar sense of being 'stillgehalten' and the desire for 'Freiheit' expressed in the previous text. The movements performed by the protagonist are characterised by active decision, he willfully makes his limbs 'beweglich', brings fire into his eyes and tenses muscles. Such

efforts at physical dynamism are connected to the desire for social integration. The initial 'Entschluss' can thus be seen to be directed at the kind of equilibrium between elated motion and social contact achieved in the walk, yet without detour via the 'Gasse'.

The protagonist's efforts, however, are in vain. He runs around the table in a circular motion like that performed by the "Herrenreiter" in a 'Wettrennen' or the artiste in 'Auf der Galerie'. Furthermore, the protagonist's contact with people is endured rather than embraced. His will to create a sense of community is expressed as painful and laborious, which creates the impression that the protagonist is fighting an inner aversion to this contact.

The experience lacks the 'plötzlich' and 'unerwartet' dynamics so characteristic of 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang'. Instead, it is described as constructed and forced, the result of 'gewollte Energie', which reduces it to an obscured copy of the kind of movement expressed in the previous text. By presenting himself as the controlling consciousness attempting to generate a dynamic experience, the protagonist makes this motion susceptible to doubt:

Aber selbst wenn es so geht, wird mit jedem Fehler, der nicht ausbleiben kann, das Ganze, das Leichte und das Schwere, stocken, und ich werde mich im Kreise zurückdrehen müssen. (KA1, 20)

The protagonist does not fully trust himself to maintain control over the situation. Like every process controlled by a human being, it is open to human error. Thinking about the 'Fehler, der nicht ausbleiben kann', however, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. By relativising the possible success of his own strategy in this way, the protagonist-narrator

brings his own momentum to a halt ('stocken')<sup>56</sup> and the 'Kreis' intended to provide a starting point for movement 'aus einem elenden Zustand' is reversed into the motion of 'mich im Kreise zurückdrehen' – it becomes a mere 'Laufbahn' that takes the protagonist back to where he started.

The implosion of his initial desire for expansion causes the protagonist to reverse his decision into its own opposite, the second of the titular 'Entschlüsse':

Deshalb bleibt doch der beste Rat, alles hinzunehmen, als schwere Masse sich verhalten und fühle man sich selbst fortgeblasen, keinen unnötigen Schritt sich ablocken lassen, den anderen mit Tierblick anschauen, keine Reue fühlen, kurz, das, was vom Leben als Gespenst noch übrig ist, mit eigener Hand niederdrücken, d. h., die letzte grabmäßige Ruhe noch vermehren und nichts außer ihr mehr bestehen lassen. (KA1, 20)

The protagonist's advice 'alles hinzunehmen' is not the passive 'nicht wollen' of the man by the 'Gassenfenster', but an active decision to 'als schwere Masse sich verhalten', unresponsive to all pulls towards movement, ordinary or extra-ordinary. Accordingly, he rejects any engagement with society, which he wills himself to observe with the impassive 'Tierblick' that avoids any emotional engagement – which could result in a feeling of 'Reue'.

The reversal of the initial 'Entschluss' seems completed when the ascending motion of 'erheben' is turned into its opposite, the gesture of 'was vom Leben als Gespenst noch übrig ist, mit eigener Hand niederdrücken.' To this protagonist, too, life seems to be

---

<sup>56</sup> In the diary entry this text is based on, the link between this sudden loss of certainty and the individual's tendency for rational relativisation is made even more evident: 'Nun ist es zwar möglich, daß mir einzelnes davon ziemlich vollständig gelingen würde, aber mit jedem deutlichen Fehler – und die können nicht ausbleiben – wird das Ganze [...].' (KA10, 31).

slipping away into instubstantiality. Without hope for the ‘Umrissenheit‘ of a different mode of being, the individual is left with ‘was vom Leben als Gespenst noch übrig ist‘, which is likely to refer to movement within society, but equally to the faint notion of movement outside ‘normal‘ boundaries. The decision to actively ‘niederdrücken‘ any hold on ‘Leben‘ – however spectral – is directed at rejecting any impetus for movement and surrendering to ‘grabmäßige Ruhe’. Bereft of any elemental ‘Feuer’, such ‘Ruhe‘ is not the ‘behaglich[e]‘ existence within society, nor the perfect rest in pure movement of the ‘Wunsch’. Instead, the absolute immobility of ‘grabmäßige Ruhe‘ conjures up the same image of hopeless stasis Kafka describes in a diary entry in 1910, where children ‘sich im Winter hie und da [...] in den Schnee legen, um zu erfrieren’ (KA9, 91).

The sequence of ‘Entschlüsse’ seems to suggest that restlessness cannot be transcended deliberately into an extra-ordinary experience of elation. The only escape from restlessness, it implies, is surrender to an experience of existential stasis and isolation, the ‘grabmäßige Ruhe’ of being buried alive in the middle of society.

This is not the end to the story, however. The individual does not and presumably cannot follow his own ‘Rat, alles hinzunehmen’:

Eine charakteristische Bewegung eines solchen Zustandes ist das  
Hinfahren des kleinen Fingers über die Augenbrauen. (KA1, 20)

The final gesture betrays the protagonist’s inability to fully suppress any impetus for movement, thus adding a slightly ironic twist to the supposed enforcement of ‘Entschlüsse’ in this text. Having groped for various ‘Entschlüsse’ that may promise

release from restlessness, the protagonist performs a gesture which demonstrates that the dynamic impulse at work in the individual is not subject to the force of will – restlessness, we are assured, cannot be controlled by the will, but only experienced.

### **‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’ – being tired of restlessness**

The protagonist in ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’ (KA1, 25-26) finds himself quite unable or unwilling to settle on ‘Entschlüsse’. Instead, he embarks on a form of rational discourse that appears to be directed at talking his way out of a dynamic impulse. As in previous texts, the opening of ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’ introduces an initial situation with a ‘wenn’-sentence which is followed by a hypothetical reflection on what course of action could follow from the event set out:

Wenn man in der Nacht durch eine Gasse spazieren geht, und ein Mann, von weitem schon sichtbar – denn die Gasse vor uns steigt an und es ist Vollmond – uns entgegenläuft, so werden wir ihn nicht anpacken, selbst wenn er schwach und zerlumpt ist, selbst wenn jemand hinter ihm läuft und schreit, sondern wir werden ihn weiter laufen lassen. (KA1, 25)

The narrator’s account of the scene implies that the initial ‘wenn’ provokes an immediate action, a logical ‘dann’ – which he nevertheless decides not to realise. The repetition of ‘selbst wenn’ supports the impression that the narrator’s passivity is essentially counter-intuitive. As if to justify his decision by means of rational reasoning, he then provides various possible reasons for it:

Denn es ist Nacht, und wir können nicht dafür, daß die Gasse im Vollmond vor uns aufsteigt, und überdies, vielleicht haben diese zwei die Hetze zu ihrer Unterhaltung veranstaltet, vielleicht verfolgen beide einen dritten, vielleicht wird der erste unschuldig verfolgt, vielleicht will der zweite morden, und wir würden Mitschuldige des Mordes, vielleicht wissen die zwei nichts von einander, und es läuft nur jeder auf eigene Verantwortung in sein Bett, vielleicht sind es Nachtwandler, vielleicht hat der erste Waffen. (KA1, 25-26)

The sequence of reflections suggests that the protagonist does not act because he does not understand the situation fully enough to judge whether it would be sensible to intervene, the sevenfold repetition of the world 'vielleicht' illustrating this uncertainty. The impression that the narrator's 'paralysis' results from an inability to establish factual certainty,<sup>57</sup> however, seems to merely invite the reader to plunge into the series of reflections, thus dashing past the initial reason given in the reflection: 'Denn es ist Nacht, und wir können nicht dafür, daß die Gasse im Vollmond vor uns aufsteigt [...]'. Here, stopping the man is not reflected on in terms of moral necessity, i.e. as a question of what is the right thing to do if one was to act as a 'good citizen'. The narrator's rational discourse appears rather like an attempt at understanding his desire to leap after the man in a way that can be rationally grasped – and thus argued against.

The encounter occurs while the narrator 'durch eine Gasse spazieren geht'. This situation is reminiscent of 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang', where a nightly walk provides a way of releasing restlessness into physical movement, which makes it reasonable to assume that the narrator in 'Die Vorüberlaufenden' follows a similar impulse. The man rushing past him, along with the sight of the 'Gasse' which 'im Vollmond vor uns aufsteigt' can be seen as further dynamic stimuli. The narrator, however, rather than grabbing the chance

---

<sup>57</sup> Sandbank 1981, p.387.

for acceleration, applies different strategies directed at finding explanations for not having to follow this impulse. Having exhausted possible rational reasons for not following the man, he falls back on the simple explanation that ‘es ist Nacht’. This reference to time is already made at the beginning of the text, and then taken up again in the end: ‘Und endlich, dürfen wir nicht müde sein, haben wir nicht soviel Wein getrunken?’ (KA1, 26). The protagonist thus explains his unwillingness to follow the man with a reference to the ‘normal’ course of daily activity: at night, one is entitled to be tired and go to bed.

The narrator’s position is strikingly similar to that of the ‘müder Mann’ by the ‘Gassenfenster’, who – exposed to pulls into society and isolation, ordinary and extraordinary movement as well as stasis – ‘nicht will’. Similarly, the protagonist’s resistance to engaging with the events in his surroundings can be seen to be the result of a similarly fundamental fatigue caused by the constant exposure to different pulls, an experience of restlessness for which ‘wir können nichts’. With the final retreat into a defensive ‘Und endlich, dürfen wir nicht müde sein’, the protagonist not only rejects any impulse for engaging in movement – in society or otherwise – but also refuses to reflect further on the conflict.

A striking characteristic of this text is the change from the impersonal ‘man’ to the first person plural ‘wir’. Shifts between a first person singular or plural and a general ‘man’ are characteristic of the collection as a whole, which creates an effect of uncertainty about whether the experience described is an individual event, a state affecting a group of individuals or a general human condition. This shift could thus be expressive of an attempt at ascribing the experience not only to an individual, but to a group of people – a potential

generalisation that has previously been observed in ‘Die Abweisung’: ‘wir’ as human beings never engage with each other in meaningful ways because we are intrinsically tired of a problematic experience of being in the world that finds its expression in restlessness. The shift into ‘wir’ could further express a plurality within the self. The conflict between opposing dynamic tendencies that draw the self into different directions leaves the plurality of the organism, the ‘wir’, ‘müde’ of such tribulations. This reading would support the assumption that changes between personal pronouns throughout the texts in *Betrachtung* provide a way of articulating the individual’s difficulties in establishing a stable sense of self.

This suggested plurality, I would like to argue, may further allude to the double function of the narrator as a possible agent in the text and the creative consciousness controlling the flow of the reflection. In ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’, the narrative dynamics develops along with the protagonist’s mental movements, first following his circular reflections in a series of ‘vielleicht’ and eventually coming to a halt when the protagonist succumbs to mental and physical inertia. The parallel appears like a curious comment on the mechanism of story-telling: the possibility of plot seems to depend as much on an agent’s ‘willingness’ for action as the willingness of the creative mind to acquire mastery over the plot by snapping out of a hesitant circular reflection into a linear storyline.<sup>58</sup> The ambivalent condition of restlessness and the resulting ‘Müdigkeit’ thus become a problem of narrative dynamics: how is it possible to narrate restlessness?

---

<sup>58</sup> A similar parallel can be observed in ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’. Here, the narrative appears to end at the point when the dynamic stimuli presented in the surroundings – the potential for change inherent to the situation – are exhausted.

## 7. THE PROBLEM OF NARRATING RESTLESSNESS

Throughout the texts discussed so far, restlessness manifests itself in protagonists' lives in a variety of ways. In some of these texts, movement images are not only used to give expression to restlessness and its origins, but also to capture possible consequences arising from this condition. Restlessness, it appears, is not only a conflict but also a dynamic situation that contains imaginative possibilities. Yet as the narrating consciousness draws out ever new conjectures about what could emerge from the pull towards pure motion, the stories more often than not remain within the sphere of experiences and situations that fail to develop into plot. Strikingly, the protagonists in these texts seem constantly in motion, transported by carriages, going about their daily business or leaving the house for a nightly walk. Such movements, however, are contained within conventional 'reality'. Impulses towards the extra-ordinary are generally experienced as escapist fantasies, obscure and fleeting impulses for physical motion or erupting imagined movements – 'Aufregungen' which merely disrupt habitual patterns of activity without finding more lasting expression. Tendencies directed at pure motion are thereby restricted to rationally graspable phenomena, mere copies of what the impulse seems to point towards. Within the narrated 'reality' of these texts, such tendencies cannot find adequate expression: they are directed at the impossible.

Even in the sphere of the 'Wunsch', where the impossible is asserted with greater force than anywhere else, the narrative imagination has to let go of horse and rider as they turn into pure movement and lose physical substance. While images of movement are a staple

of story-telling, developing a story out of the experience of inner dynamism seems to be a different kettle of fish.

### **‘Ausflug ins Gebirge’ – movement that remains ‘so lala’**

‘Ausflug ins Gebirge’ (KA1, 21) invites us to read it as a quasi self-ironic comment on the impossibility of turning a dynamic impulse that is essentially without physical substance into a story. The opening of this text is different from others in that the narrative voice seems strangely insubstantial, performing a ‘gesture’ that remains purely rhetorical:

»Ich weiß nicht«, rief ich ohne Klang, »ich weiß ja nicht. Wenn niemand kommt, dann kommt eben niemand. Ich habe niemandem etwas Böses getan, niemand hat mir etwas Böses getan, niemand aber will mir helfen. Lauter niemand. (KA1, 21)

The narrative voice seems to answer a question that remains unknown, thus creating the impression that the statement is part of a conversation – a dynamic impetus realised in mental and vocal processes. Yet the implicit question is merely answered with the statement ‘ich weiß nicht’, which would be the end to any problem-solving process. To make things worse, the impulse for communication results in the insubstantial cry ‘ohne Klang’, as if to emphasise the fundamental lack of a vehicle that could carry the dynamic impetus any further. As in previous texts, this state is associated with uncertainty (‘ich weiß ja nicht’), isolation (‘niemand kommt’), and the sense that the experience is

undeserved because ‘ich habe niemandem etwas Böses getan, niemand hat mir etwas Böses getan’.

Without a ‘Gestalt’ of its own, and without somebody who could ‘help’ to give physical substance to the dynamic impetus that initiated the ‘Ruf’, the narrating voice engages in a circular reflection. The repetition of the word ‘niemand’ and the circular structure of the phrases ‘ich weiß nicht [...] ich weiß ja nicht’, ‘wenn niemand kommt, dann kommt eben niemand’, ‘ich habe niemandem etwas Böses getan, niemand hat mir etwas Böses getan’ creates an echo-effect, as if the thought process and its expression in words were taking place in a mirror cabinet or in the mountains.

Eventually, the text reduces itself to an iteration of ‘niemand’ that ends in the statement ‘Lauter niemand’. What could be the end to the movement of thought and thus the text, however, is turned into a possible starting point:

Aber so ist es doch nicht. Nur daß mir niemand hilft –, sonst wäre lauter niemand hübsch. Ich würde ganz gern – warum denn nicht – einen Ausflug mit einer Gesellschaft von lauter Niemand machen. (KA1, 21)

The sudden decision that ‘so ist es doch nicht’, gives cause to a new mode of reflective thought. Over the course of two sentences, the narrating voice seems to feel its way towards the possibility of changing the reading of ‘niemand’ as non-existence to the possibility of ‘Niemand’ as existence, as ‘Gesellschaft’ – somebody who helps. The disruption of the sentences by hyphens could be seen to represent a process of re-orientation, the possibility of gaining new momentum and narrative flow. The change

from the pronominal negation to the nominal expression thus not only saved Odysseus' life,<sup>59</sup> it also saves the inner dynamic of the text.

Having been introduced as life forms, the 'Niemande' are attributed the physicality of figures with 'Gliedermaßen'. At the same time, the 'ich' becomes part of a 'wir', thus sharing the questionable substance of this peculiar community. In a process of narrative alchemy – the creation of physicality and substance out of pure verbality – the narrating voice appears to have found a way of turning reflection into narrative,<sup>60</sup> thus releasing the initial impetus for movement into the 'Ausflug ins Gebirge':

Natürlich ins Gebirge, wohin denn sonst? Wie sich diese Niemande  
aneinander drängen, diese vielen quer gestreckten und eingehängten  
Arme, diese vielen Füße, durch winzige Schritte getrennt! (KA1, 21)

The beginning of the 'Ausflug' marks what might be seen as a reversal of the initial situation: isolation is turned into 'Gesellschaft', and the impulse for movement, previously contained in restless stasis, is liberated in the ascending motion of an 'Ausflug', a 'flight away', which takes the 'Niemande' 'natürlich ins Gebirge, wohin denn sonst?' This enthusiastic *Wanderlust* is accompanied by a possibility for 'Klang': along with arms and feet, the 'Niemande' have gained 'Hälse' which could turn the 'Ruf ohne Klang' into actual song:

---

<sup>59</sup> The link with Odysseus' 'Witzspiel' has been observed for example by Elisabeth Strowick. See Elisabeth Strowick, "'Lauter Niemand': Zur List des Namens bei Homer und Kafka", *MLN* 119 (2004) 564-79, p.576.

<sup>60</sup> Sandbank describes the change from reflective into narrative mode as a result of the creation of physicality as a prerequisite of narrative. Sandbank 1981, p.394.

Wir gehen so lala, der Wind fährt durch die Lücken, die wir und unsere Gliedmaßen offen lassen. Die Hälse werden im Gebirge frei! Es ist ein Wunder, daß wir nicht singen. (KA1, 21)

The end of the text invites a reading of this story as a pendant to ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’. Here, exertion is replaced with an emphatic assertion of narrative possibilities as the narrating voice ostensibly succeeds in realising what Kafka described as Schiller’s method of ‘den Affekt in Charakter umzubilden’.<sup>61</sup> In this text, language appears as a faculty that allows the creation of a form of ‘reality’ in which dynamic energies which evade rationally graspable experience can be articulated. This experiment with the ‘Eigenrealität des Geschriebenen’,<sup>62</sup> however, remains problematic. The language that so enthusiastically seems to advocate the possibility of turning ‘niemand’ into ‘Niemand’ also betrays a tendency that negates this possibility: the text is interspersed with rhetorical details which subvert the supposedly assertive tone of the narrative voice and the apparent physicality of the ‘Niemande’.

---

<sup>61</sup> In November 1911, Kafka notes in his diary: ‘Schiller irgendwo: Die Hauptsache ist (oder ähnlich) »den Affekt in Charakter umzubilden«’ (KA9, 188). The editors of the *Kritische Ausgabe* suggest that Kafka – who mentions this ‘Umbildung’ again in December 1911 (KA9, 219) – may be referring to a passage in Schiller’s ‘Über den Zusammenhang der tierischen Natur des Menschen mit seiner geistigen’ (see KA9, 327): ‘Wird der zur Fertigkeit gewordene Affekt daurender Charakter, so werden auch diese konsensuellen Züge der Maschine tiefer eingegraben, sie bleiben, wenn ich das Wort von dem Pathologen entlehnen darf, devteropathisch zurück, und werden endlich organisch.’ [sic!] See Friedrich Schiller, ‘Ueber den Zusammenhang der thierischen Natur des Menschen mit seiner geistigen’, *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*, ed. by Julius Petersen and others (Weimar: Böhlau, 1943-), XX: *Philosophische Schriften. Erster Teil*, ed. by Benno von Wiese (1962), pp.69-70. The relation between mental processes and their transformation into ‘organic’ expressions can be seen to take an extreme form in Kafka’s narratives. ‘Ausflug ins Gebirge’ can be read as an attempt at an ‘Umbildung’ of ‘Affekt’ without substance into the ‘daurender Charakter’ of the ‘Niemande’, i.e. figures that can act out a dynamic impulse. This process of ‘Umbildung’ could further describe a fictional method by which a state of mind is projected into a figure external to the protagonist. This ‘Umbildung’ of an ‘Affekt’ into *Doppelgänger*-figures will be discussed later in this thesis.

<sup>62</sup> Within the scope of his perspective on the text as an allegorical personification of writing, Lehmann views this self-referentiality of created ‘reality’ as a deliberate withdrawal from reference points outside the text. See Lehmann 1984, p.216.

At the end of the text, the ‘Niemande’ fail to sing. The narrative voice declares this a ‘Wunder’, but this statement is more likely to emphasise just how miraculous it would be if figures with an existence as fragile as that of the ‘Niemande’ could in fact create sound. The ‘Niemande’ become questionable in their ability to carry anything even remotely reminiscent of a storyline. After all, their walk is only ‘so lala’.<sup>63</sup>

Such elements of instability pervade this dubious narrative act of creation, thereby casting doubt on the possibility of creating a purely self-referential ‘reality’ as a ‘fallacious creation of facts’.<sup>64</sup> With the declaration that ‘ich würde ganz gern – warum denn nicht – einen Ausflug mit einer Gesellschaft von lauter Niemand machen’, the narrating voice appears to create physicality, but the parenthetical modulation ‘– warum denn nicht –’ could also be read as a warning against premature optimism, which is further supported by the subjunctive ‘würde’ and the modified expression ‘ganz gern’. In the second part of the text, this tendency results in a destabilisation of the ‘Niemande’: gestures of ‘aneinander drängen’ and holding their arms ‘eingehängt’ may be directed at asserting physical closeness, yet they merely emphasise the fact that the ‘Gliedermaßen’ leave ‘Lücken’.<sup>65</sup> The supposedly suggestive statement ‘Versteht sich, daß alle im Frack sind’ further accentuates this instability. Why should the ‘Niemande’ be in ‘Frack’ during an excursion into the hills? It may be argued that the text creates a world of its own – an imaginative

---

<sup>63</sup> Strowick (573) suggests that the word ‘lala’ belongs to a series of expressions (along with ‘lauter’, ‘lauthals’ and ‘singen’) that are expressive of a musicality building up throughout the text. Yet not only does this sound never occur, one may also argue that the word refers to a dynamic process experienced by the fragile ‘Niemande’. To experience walking as ‘so lala’ can then be read as an expression for nonchalant gallivanting, which nevertheless also contains the implicit qualification that walking ‘so lala’ is to lack stability. See Strowick 2004.

<sup>64</sup> Sandbank 1981, p.394.

<sup>65</sup> We will see that these gestures seem like bad copies of the kind of physical proximity conjured up in ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’.

‘reality’ in which ‘Niemande’ can walk up a hill, and where it is natural for them to be in formal evening dress while doing so. Yet as in ‘Entschlüsse’, the narrating voice does not seem to fully trust such strategies. With the unrealised ‘singen’, the text creates another ‘Ruf ohne Klang’, thus returning to the circular reflection dominating its opening.

‘Ausflug ins Gebirge’ epitomises the difficulty of giving adequate expression to forms of movement that cannot be grasped with ‘normal’ categories – that in fact seem to represent the very pull away from ‘earthbound’ normality. The story implies that any attempt at grasping such forms of movement as parts of a rationally thinkable narrative ‘world’ has to dissolve into the insubstantiality of a ‘Wunsch’ or ‘Witzspiel’.

### **‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’ – externalising restlessness**

While ‘Ausflug ins Gebirge’ casts a rather pessimistic light on the possibility of an ‘Umbildung des Affekts in Charakter’, ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’ points towards a form of narrative in which the conflicting dynamic pulls to which protagonists are subject may be realised with a more permanent validity – a ‘reality’ in its own right. This story stands out from the previously discussed texts in that it describes what seems like a conflict between two characters. In a nutshell: the protagonist encounters a peculiar figure who supposedly keeps him from joining a ‘Gesellschaft’.

The two characters in this text can be seen to represent diametrically opposed views on life, each of which is associated with a different form of movement. The protagonist declares that he wants to join the ‘Gesellschaft’ in a ‘herrschaftlichen Hause’ ‘wo ich

schon so gerne gewesen wäre [...]’ (KA1, 17). The double meaning of ‘Gesellschaft’ as both ‘gathering’ and ‘society’ implies that the protagonist’s wish goes beyond the desire to join a specific gathering. His assertion seems rather to express a wish for life as an integrated member of ‘society’. This view is associated with forms of movement which are in accordance with organized patterns of activity characteristic of this ‘integrated’ existence. Declaring that he ‘strebte’ towards ‘Gesellschaft’, he gives his actions the air of decisive and ‘progressive’ dynamism, which incidentally also coheres with the diurnal rhythm of activity and rest.

The “Bauernfänger”, on the other hand, belongs to a group of figures who perform movements that are distinctly eccentric:

[...] wie sie bei Nacht aus Seitenstraßen, die Hände vorgestreckt, wie Gastwirte uns entgegentreten, wie sie sich um die Anschlagssäule, bei der wir stehen, herumdrücken, wie zum Versteckenspielen und hinter der Säulenrundung hervor zumindest mit einem Auge spionieren, wie sie in Straßenkreuzungen, wenn wir ängstlich werden, auf einmal vor uns schweben auf der Kante unseres Trottoirs! (KA1, 18)

The ‘herumdrücken’ and ‘spionieren’ of the “Bauernfänger” are clearly not goal-directed and decisive movements. Instead, he appears to be engaged in a form of ‘Versteckenspielen’, child’s play rather than the behaviour of a grown-up with any sense of social conformity. This tendency of movement becomes downright extra-ordinary when the “Bauernfänger” ‘schweben auf der Kante unseres Trottoirs’. Both the motion of ‘schweben’ and the liminal space in which this motion is performed appear to suggest that the figure is at the border of ‘reality’.

As if to emphasise how intrinsically out of place these movements seem within social ‘reality’, the protagonist describes the other man’s movements in a series of similes. The “Bauernfänger” moves ‘wie’ an innkeeper, and ‘wie zum Versteckenspielen’, apparently evading any categories available within the world as the protagonist understands it. To aggravate this initial sense of opposition, the other man is perceived as a barrier in the path of the protagonist:

Wie standen sie einem noch gegenüber, selbst wenn man ihnen schon längst entlaufen war, wenn es also längst nichts mehr zu fangen gab! [...] Und ihre Mittel waren stets die gleichen: Sie stellten sich vor uns hin, so breit sie konnten; suchten uns abzuhalten von dort, wohin wir strebten [...]. (KA1, 18)

The protagonist introduces his strange companion not only as somebody whose behaviour is atypical, but also actively intervening to block his own ability to join society. The other man’s ‘entgentreten’, ‘fangen’ and ‘abhalten’ contributes to the impression that the protagonist feels passively exposed to a peculiar companion who ‘unversehens’ stepped into his way, dragging him ‘in den Gassen herum’. Apparently unable to take any action against this interference, the protagonist remains ‘vor dem Tor’ (KA1, 17) of the house he wishes to enter.

Outwardly, the constellation between the two characters thus seems to be that of ‘Gegenbewegung’ – both in the sense of ‘Gegensatz’ and as the kind of active opposition that Martin Walser describes as a structural principle of Kafka’s oeuvre as a whole.<sup>66</sup> The

---

<sup>66</sup> Walser describes the relation between protagonists and the strange companions of all kinds as a ‘Gegenwelt’ (54). Incidentally, he circumscribes this term by means of movement, as a world whose representatives are directed at ‘den Helden von sich selbst, von seinem Ziel abzubringen.’ In Part II of this thesis, the role of these ‘visitor’-figures in Kafka’s writings will be discussed further. See Martin Walser, *Beschreibung einer Form* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1961).

inner tension of the text, however, does not evolve from a ‘Gegenbewegung’ as an open conflict between two diametrically opposed forces. The protagonist’s description of the ‘Begleiter’ as an intrinsically incomprehensible and actively inhibiting figure rings hollow. Standing in the ‘Gasse’, where he seems unable for a long time to take any other course of action than to ‘an den Ohren meines Gegenübers vorüberzuschauen’ (KA1, 17), it emerges that the encounter with the “Bauernfänger” does not so much take the form of active interference, as challenge implicitly the protagonist’s declared ‘Entschluss’ to join society. Standing immobile in the street and joining the other man in a prolonged silence, he resembles all those other protagonists who find themselves in threshold situations – on the way home or at the window – where outward dedication to the organized and conventional structures of ‘normal’ life is challenged by an impulse for a different, non-conventional kind of behaviour.

This inner conflict becomes evident during the protagonist’s hesitant lingering in the street. Having announced the ‘Abschied’ with a stress on its ‘unbedingten Notwendigkeit’, the protagonist’s gesture of clapping his hands turns out to be a rather half-hearted attempt at taking his leave – an effort that is preceded by even ‘weniger bestimmte Versuche’. The impression that a tendency in the protagonist resists breaking the connection with the other man is further emphasised by the protagonist’s descriptions of the “Bauernfänger” as ‘mein Begleiter’ (KA1, 17), ‘mein Mann’ (KA1, 18) and ‘mein Gegenüber’ (KA1, 17) – descriptions not only evocative of a partner, but even a mirror-image. The protagonist’s ostensible relation of distance and incomprehension is further undermined by the admissions of knowing the “Bauernfänger” ‘durch und durch’ and the statement that ‘ich

verstand sie doch so gut' (KA1, 18). This link between the two figures becomes quite manifest during their stay in the road:

Und jetzt noch mit ihm stumm zu werden, als seien wir zu einem langen Aufenthalt auf diesem Fleck entschlossen. Dabei nahmen an diesem Schweigen gleich die Häuser rings herum ihren Anteil, und das Dunkel über ihnen bis zu den Sternen. Und die Schritte unsichtbarer Spaziergänger, deren Wege zu erraten man nicht Lust hatte, der Wind, der immer wieder an die gegenüberliegende Straßenseite sich drückte, ein Grammophon, das gegen die geschlossenen Fenster irgendeines Zimmers sang, - sie ließen aus diesem Schweigen sich hören, als sei es ihr Eigentum seit jeher und für immer. (KA1, 17)

In this brief passage, the protagonist dissolves the difference between 'ich' and 'er' and shifts into the familiar 'wir' as figures engaged in a shared decision. At the same time, his position in the street seems to gain a new perceptive quality. The protagonist feels surrounded by movements – 'Spaziergänger', 'Wind', 'Musik' – which nevertheless remain strangely distant. This experience bears a striking similarity to the static isolation of the man by the 'Gassenfenster' and the lonely figure who has returned from his 'Nachhauseweg' – yet the protagonist's experience not only betrays a sense of his own being in the world as isolated and static, but the impression that all movements of people and natural forces are disconnected. This universal 'Schweigen' reads like an inversion of the brief sense of a dynamic force uniting all things and beings expressed in 'Der Nachhauseweg'. Remarkably, the "Bauernfänger" does not so much appear to be the cause of this sensation but one of its results.

The protagonist admits to having felt drawn to the "Bauernfänger" ever since arriving in the 'Stadt'. Declaring that he felt 'ängstlich' (KA1, 18) during those early days, the protagonist reveals a sense of being in the world reminiscent of the complete

‘Unsicherheit meiner Stellung in dieser Welt’ expressed by the “Fahrgast”. As we can see, isolation and stasis are experiences with which the protagonist is already all too familiar and which merely resurface during the encounter. Rather than representing an actively inhibiting opposition to the protagonist’s decision to join society, the “Bauernfänger” thus appears more likely to correspond to a tendency in the protagonist that negates his apparent dedication to an integrated existence. Such correspondences between the two characters support readings of the “Bauernfänger” as a *Doppelgänger*,<sup>67</sup> an externalisation of a duality within the individual that is perceived as problematic. Concisely summed up by Karl Miller, the relation is then one in which ‘One self does what the other can’t’<sup>68</sup> – i.e. admits to an experience of being in the world as unstable.

The protagonist, it turns out, is having none of this. In a sudden motion, he turns around ‘denn Scham drehte mich plötzlich herum’. This ‘Scham’, he declares, lies in not having recognised ‘daß das ein Bauernfänger war, nichts weiter’ (KA1, 18). The sudden dissociation is strangely reminiscent of the way in which the ‘menschliche Eintracht’ supposedly ‘reiß[t]’ the man by the ‘Gassenfenster’ out of his hesitation. Having experienced a moment of intense aversion to ‘menschliche Eintracht’, the protagonist suddenly feels an emotion or affect associated with having violated cultural or social values. This violation, the protagonist claims, lies in having been tricked by a ‘Bauernfänger’.

By claiming to ‘recognise’ the “Bauernfänger” as a trickster, the protagonist assigns him a place in the ‘real’ world and thus makes him rationally graspable. The other man’s

---

<sup>67</sup> Rolleston 1984, p.195.

<sup>68</sup> Karl Miller, *Doubles. Studies in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). p.416.

behaviour is identified as the makeup of a kind of petty criminal who tries to lure innocent citizens away from the social community. The protagonist's 'Scham' about having felt attracted to the other figure is therefore reduced to the embarrassment of having been a 'Bauer', somebody who can be fooled easily. Thus 'Erkannt!' (KA1, 19) and marginalised as a 'trickster', the appearance can be overcome with a dismissive pat on the shoulder. As if to make up for the time he has lost through his own folly, the protagonist then 'eilte' up the stairs and joins society. This seemingly mundane outcome to the initial conflict, however, is offset with a description of this entrance into 'Gesellschaft' as a form of apotheosis:

Dann eilte ich die Treppe hinauf und die so grundlos treuen Gesichter der Dienerschaft oben im Vorzimmer freuten mich wie eine schöne Überraschung. Ich sah sie alle der Reihe nach an, während man mir den Mantel abnahm und die Stiefel abstaubte. Aufatmend und langgestreckt betrat ich dann den Saal. (KA1, 19)

The ascending motion 'die Treppe hinauf' is extended into walking 'aufatmend und langgestreckt'. The sense of elevation is further emphasised by the gestures with which 'man mir den Mantel abnahm und die Stiefel abstaubte'. Devised like a ritualistic transition between different spheres, the individual's motion into society gains the relevance of 'Aufnahme' as the kind of 'belonging' that Kafka's protagonists so often fail to achieve. As if to promote an inversion of the dynamics of the 'Spaziergang', movement into society, not escape from it, is associated with elevation.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Rolleston compares this 'luftige Ende' with 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang' and even 'Wunsch, Indianer zu werden'. Similar to his reading of 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang', Rolleston argues that the end of 'Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers' is expressive of the possibility to realise equilibrium between being in society and 'Selbständigkeit' (196). With this, Rolleston does not comment on the end of the text, which – in contrast to 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang' – confronts us with the consequences of a return into society for the individual. See Rolleston 1984.

Yet as if to pull the rug out from under the protagonist's supposedly firm step, the faces of the 'Dienerschaft' remain 'grundlos treu' (KA1, 19). 'Grund' being a central image in Kafka's writing for the concept of fundamental stability sought for in existence, the expression seems to suggest that the loyalty and stability to be found in society remains without substance for the protagonist. At the same time, this expression could state that the servant's loyalty is without foundation because the protagonist does not deserve it. Both readings imply that the protagonist enters society as a 'trickster' himself, as somebody who still does not feel 'at home' there.

It emerges that the protagonist's supposedly successful coup of marginalising the threat of the "Bauernfänger" to his course by unmasking him as a trickster may be a trick in itself, directed at displacing the true 'Schande' of his attraction to the man. In view of the parallels between the two figures it seems likely that this 'Scham' (KA1, 18) lies deeper than mere folly.<sup>70</sup> 'Schande', we can assume, lies in the realisation that the appearance corresponds to a tendency in the protagonist, which – if given in to – makes him experience the world as a place in which he cannot find any sense of 'menschliche Eintracht'. The ultimate violation of social values is then not to be able to imagine these values in the first place. The protagonist's dismissal of the "Bauernfänger", followed by a suspiciously hasty run up the stairs thus seems like a slightly ironic twist on the constellation between *Doppelgänger*: 'one self stays while the other runs away'.<sup>71</sup> It emerges that by staying in society, the protagonist is also doing the running away.

---

<sup>70</sup> 'Schande', after all, is one of the central themes throughout Kafka's oeuvre as a whole, and it seems likely that the status of this emotion in 'Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers' matches the importance assigned to this term in other texts, most famously the end of *Der Proceß*.

<sup>71</sup> Miller 1985, p.416.

Close analysis of the text supports the assumption that ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’ can be read as an optimistic take on the possibility of ‘den Affekt in Charakter umzubilden’ (KA9, 188).<sup>72</sup> – a kind of counterpart to ‘Ausflug ins Gebirge’. The impulse for unconstrained motion appears to have been given an independent physical form, so that the tendency gains a validity within the narrated ‘reality’ that goes beyond the fleetingness of a ‘Wunsch’ or the insubstantial quality of an impersonal elemental force. Here, an individual encounters an external force that challenges his supposed dedication to an existence in society. The conflict is expressed in terms of dynamic processes which establish a complex interlocution of external ‘plot’ and internal processes. Movement images thus turn out to play a crucial role in Kafka’s peculiar way of evoking ‘reality’ and at the same time creating the impression that the images rooted in ‘normal’ life are expressive of experiences that transcend ‘reality’.

The protagonist’s response to the “Bauernfänger” suggests that for him, being in the world is synonymous with being in society. Accordingly, any form of movement that does not cohere with social convention is dismissed as a kind of trick, an illusion or anomaly that can be rationally explained. Similar to the protagonist in ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’, he seeks to overcome his inner agitation by finding a rational explanation for the encounter with the “Bauernfänger”. Once the external disruption is ‘erkannt’, it can be dismissed, and with it the protagonist’s implicit doubts about his place in the world.

The interplay between different impulses for movement expressed by both figures, however, illustrates how severely the “Bauernfänger” challenges this apparently stable consciousness. By allowing a view on the “Bauernfänger” as a double, the text maintains

---

<sup>72</sup> Cf. p.79, footnote 61.

the complexities and ambiguities inherent to previously discussed experiences of restlessness. The appearance of the “Bauernfänger” is more likely to be the result of the protagonist’s condition than its cause so that the text could be read as an individual’s attempt to externalise his experience of dynamic pulls the nature and direction of which remain incomprehensible to him.

Within the ‘real’ world to which the protagonist feels attached, there is no place for such irrational and non-conformist tendencies. The protagonist perceives his attraction to the “Bauernfänger” as a form of ‘Schande’, which emphasises the fundamental opposition this figure represents to social values. Throughout the conversation, however, it emerges that the challenge posed by the “Bauernfänger” lies not only in the negation of social integration. Instead, he also seems to offer a form of stability quite different from the ‘Arm’ that may be found in society: ‘Unnachgiebigkeit’ and a ‘Wohnung in ihrer eigenen Brust’ (KA1, 18). The possibility that the “Bauernfänger” is a kind of messenger figure that draws the protagonist towards a sphere intrinsically different from the world of social conformity may be seen to be suggested in the peculiar gesture he performs in the street:

Und mein Begleiter fügte sich in seinem und – nach einem Lächeln – auch in meinem Namen, streckte die Mauer entlang den rechten Arm aufwärts und lehnte sein Gesicht, die Augen schließend, an ihn. (KA1, 17)

As the protagonist experiences an oppressive sense of alienation and stasis associated with being in the world, the “Bauernfänger” stretches his arm in an upward motion, as if to point towards a possible way out of the situation. Does the “Bauernfänger” point the

individual towards an imaginative sphere in which Red Indians turn into flying arrows and nightly walks lead to ‘sich zu seiner wahren Gestalt erheben’? Or is he a pure figment of imagination, a figure that has no place in ‘reality’ and thus only creates the impression of giving narrative substance to something that has to remain outside ‘reality’? Both readings would explain the ‘Lächeln’ of the “Bauernfänger”, and both readings would explain why the protagonist – whose ability to conceive of being in society in terms of stability depends on the restriction of movement to movement within the ‘social sphere’ – takes his leave. We do not know whether the individual’s flight in the other direction, up the stairs and into society, is a flight from insight or a flight from delusion.

The figure of the “Bauernfänger”, it turns out, remains out of place within the narrated ‘reality’. He does not so much appear as a character, but as a type - an impression that is primarily created by the protagonist’s reflection on ‘Bauernfänger’ in the plural. The ‘trickster’ is thus reflected on as but one of various possible realisations of figures with the same function: to challenge not only a specific individual’s, but everybody’s supposedly integrated consciousness. As in previous texts, the narrating voice extends the individual experience into a general human state by shifting into the plural ‘wir’. The challenge is thereby turned into a recurring event during which a “Bauernfänger” performs nothing but ‘alte Späße’. The ‘Schande’, it seems, is not to much the encounter itself but the fact that the individual has ‘diesmal erst nach so langem Beisammensein erkannt’ (KA1, 18) what is happening and to have taken so long to develop a coping strategy. Consequently, the protagonist’s flight into society appears ‘grundlos’ – as ‘endlich’ as the momentary refuge sought for by the man at the ‘Gassenfenster’. Rather than describe a way of resolving the

individual's state of restlessness, the text refracts into a prism of ambivalent readings, which creates an effect strangely reminiscent of the uncertainty about movement established in 'Die Bäume'. The encounter, although carefully shifting towards narrative 'plot', retains the character of merely one of many different possible realisations of the same experience: restlessness.

## 8. NARRATIVES OF RESTLESSNESS

While Kafka famously struggled with the order of texts within the collection, he appears to have been certain about the texts that should frame *Betrachtung*.<sup>73</sup> We can therefore assume that the prominence given to ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’ and ‘Unglücklichsein’ as the first and last texts in the collection was deliberate and intended to emphasise some important feature of these pieces. It has been pointed out that these texts are not only the longest within the collection,<sup>74</sup> but also the ones that come ‘closest to telling a story’.<sup>75</sup> The particular character of these two stories, I would like to argue, is due to a shift in narrative dynamics that is already hinted at in ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’. Here, the complex and ambiguous dynamics at the heart of the state of restlessness becomes a driving force of narrative ‘plot’. As we will see, Kafka applied a narrative method in these texts that marks a successful assertion of the extra-ordinary not simply as a wish, in fantasies or reflections, but as a form of ‘reality’ in its own right. In the framing stories, restlessness gives rise to a more robust challenge to the normality of ‘existence’ than anywhere else in the collection.

---

<sup>73</sup> See Kafka’s letter to Rowohlt of 18.10.1912: ‘Die Seitenzahlen in der Satzprobe sind hoffentlich nicht die endgiltigen, denn “Kinder auf der Landstraße” sollten das erste Stück sein. Es war eben mein Fehler, daß ich kein Inhaltsverzeichnis mitgeschickt habe und das Schlimme ist, daß ich diesen Fehler gar nicht gutmachen kann, da ich, abgesehen von dem Anfangsstück und dem Endstück “Unglücklich sein” die Reihenfolge nicht recht kenne, in der das Manuskript geordnet war.’ KKA/B1, p.184.

<sup>74</sup> White observes that the “framing” of a series of often remarkably brief sketches by these two more substantial items [...] is a key feature of *Betrachtung*’ (87). He nevertheless admits that length alone would not suffice to argue for a text’s greater ‘substantial’ value, adding that the two texts are also thematically linked. See: John J. White, ‘The Cyclical Aspect of Kafka’s Short Story Collections’, in *Paths and Labyrinths*, ed. by Joseph P. Stern and John J. White. (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1985), pp.80-97.

<sup>75</sup> Ryan 2002, p.74. Gerhard Kurz further adds ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’ to this group of texts that seem to be following a ‘narrativ-chronologische Handlung’ (Kurz 1994, p.51), which supports my reading of these texts as closely related.

Nevertheless, the two texts are not only linked by the fact that they are the most daring attempts at telling a story dominated by the ‘dynamics of restlessness’. They can be seen as a matching pair in that they complement each other both thematically and with respect to the possible consequences arising from the conflict at the heart of texts throughout *Betrachtung*. Taken together they provide an important insight into the collection as a conceptual whole.

As critics have repeatedly observed, the collection not only begins with a story about children, but ‘also closes with a story about a child.’<sup>76</sup> This similarity, however, also highlights the contrast between the two texts. Whereas the narrator of the first story sees himself as a child who, when visited by other children, is led to engage in a wild run through the countryside, the narrator of the last text is an adult who is visited unexpectedly by a child whom he takes to be a ghost, and their brief meeting ends not only in separation but also with melancholy on the part of the adult.

This difference is central to the overall character of the collection as an exploration of origins and consequences of restlessness. In this pair of stories the conflict between the ability to envisage conditions under which the ‘Wunsch’ might come true in the sense of being allowed to dictate the path followed by the narrating imagination, and the inability to maintain such conditions within adult ‘reality’ emerges with particular clarity.

---

<sup>76</sup> Politzer 1962, p.35.

### **‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’ – ‘Dort sind Leute! Denkt Euch, die schlafen nicht!’**

‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’ has evoked ambivalent responses in readers. On one hand, it marks a move towards storytelling, while on the other, this narrative quality is counterbalanced by the supposedly ‘disjointed’<sup>77</sup> character of the events that constitute the ‘plot’ development of this story. In the following, we will see that both effects are connected with Kafka’s peculiar use of movement images.

The ‘plot’ of this text is comprised of what could be described as a series of ‘scenes’, which could be summarised briefly as follows: a child who is also the narrator is seen, retrospectively, sitting in his parents’ garden, watching people and carriages move past. In the evening, the child, seated indoors at a table by the window, watches people on the street. When someone jumps in through the window, the protagonist joins him and other children on a wild run through the night. This run comes to a halt at bedtime, when the child, having made to go home, finally turns away towards a ‘Stadt im Süden’ (KA1, 16). This summary suggests an overall development, indicated by a change from inner to outer spaces, and from rest to mobility. If, however, one adopts Kafka’s advised strategy of ‘sehr nahe herantreten’ (KKA/B1, 372) to examine each stage of the process in detail, it becomes clear that the movement patterns that create this sense of development are also involved in its destabilisation – that once again, we are dealing with a prism of experiences.

---

<sup>77</sup> White 1985, p.87.

In the opening ‘scene’ of the text, the child is described seated on a swing in the ‘Garten meiner Eltern’, while carriages and people are moving past the garden fence. The inside of the ‘Garten’ and the outside world are introduced as what appear to be two distinct spheres of activity:

Ich hörte die Wagen an dem Gartengitter vorüberfahren, manchmal sah ich sie auch durch die schwach bewegten Lücken im Laub. Wie krachte in dem heißen Sommer das Holz in ihren Speichen und Deichseln! Arbeiter kamen von den Feldern und lachten, daß es eine Schande war.

Ich saß auf unserer kleinen Schaukel, ich ruhte mich gerade aus zwischen den Bäumen im Garten meiner Eltern.

Vor dem Gitter hörte es nicht auf. Kinder im Laufschrift waren im Augenblick vorüber; Getreidewagen mit Männern und Frauen auf den Garben und rings herum verdunkelten die Blumenbeete; gegen Abend sah ich einen Herrn mit einem Stock langsam spazieren gehn und paar Mädchen, die Arm in Arm ihm entgegenkamen, traten grüßend ins seitliche Gras. (KA1, 13)

The ‘Garten meiner Eltern’ is associated with the organised structure of conventionally ordered life in the ‘social sphere’. The cultivated ‘Blumenbeete’, fence and ‘Schaukel’ are tokens of a life lived in the protective and restrictive structure of bourgeois society, to which the child is introduced by the authority of the parents. This sphere is introduced as a place of rest, in which the child ‘ausruht’ from whichever game may have exerted him.

This outwardly restful state represents a sharp contrast to the universal sense of movement beyond the fence. ‘Wagen’ are driving past, ‘Kinder im Laufschrift’ run along the street, and even the ‘Laub’ in the hedge is moving. The garden is thus not a wholly self-contained sphere. ‘Gartengitter’ and ‘Laub’ have ‘Lücken’, thus allowing a constant transgression of visual and aural stimuli that flood the child’s sensuality with impressions of unrestricted dynamism. As the child ‘hörte’ carriages and ‘sah’ them through the leaves

in a hedge, he seems overwhelmed by these impressions: ‘Wie krachte in dem heißen Sommer das Holz in ihren Speichen und Deichseln!’ In addition to this seemingly unfamiliar sound level, the stimuli powerfully challenge the garden as a ‘social sphere’: the description of workers’ uninhibited laughter as a ‘Schande’, demonstrates how fundamentally this behaviour breaks with the sense of propriety acquired by a child growing up with the motto ‘children should be seen, not heard’.

The statement that ‘vor dem Gitter hörte es nicht auf’ can be understood to register this trespass of unconstrained dynamic impulses into the garden – but it also indicates a gradual surrender of the narrating consciousness to this impulse, which is accompanied by a shift in narrative mode. The beginning of the text asserts the stable perspective of an ‘ich’ who gives a past tense account of events in a ‘heißen Sommer’. This narrative parallel to the child’s initially stable physical position is then successively destabilised. Shifting from observation to emotional exclamations, the narrative eventually seems to lose all linear development in favour of a swarm of impressions recounted in a series of compound sentences. As in ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’, the ostensibly stable self is dissipated into a flood of stimuli which creates the impression that the individual is reduced to a kind of passive transit place of flux.

A brief moment of stabilisation – ‘Sammlung’ – occurs as the child’s gaze crosses an image that re-introduces both the natural and the conventional order of things:

Gegen Abend sah ich einen Herrn mit einem Stock langsam spazieren  
gehn und ein paar Mädchen, die Arm in Arm ihm entgegenkamen, traten  
grüßend ins seitliche Gras. (KA1, 13)

The slow movement of the man, the stable sense of time, and the clear social relations expressed in the gesture of the girls who step respectfully aside for the ‘Herrn mit einem Stock’ appears like a ‘Halt’ amongst the rapid physical movements and distinctly un-bourgeois clutter of ‘Männern und Frauen auf den Garben und rings herum’.

This moment of stability, however, remains brief. As ‘Vögel’ fly ‘wie sprühend auf’ (KA1, 13), the child seems to give in to the pull from the outside world:

Dann flogen Vögel wie sprühend auf, ich folgte ihnen mit den Blicken, sah, wie sie in einem Atemzug stiegen, bis ich nicht mehr glaubte, daß sie stiegen, sondern daß ich falle, und fest mich an den Seilen haltend aus Schwäche ein wenig zu schaukeln anfing. Bald schaukelte ich stärker, als die Luft schon kühler wehte und statt der fliegenden Vögel zitternde Sterne erschienen. (KA1, 13)

The narrating consciousness submerges fully in the sense of eruptive ascending motion of the birds’ flight. Gaze and ‘Atemzug’ follow the motion, which results in a sense of vertigo and the complete loss of stable perspective as rising and falling become indistinguishable. Eventually, this surrender to the general dynamism in the outside world results in the child’s physical motion of ‘schaukeln’, no longer different from the corresponding motion in the surroundings, of the ‘Luft’, and ‘zitternde Sterne’.

The impression that the child’s initially stable position is challenged by an experience of fleeting impressions in the world to which it eventually surrenders motivates readings of the scene as an encounter with an actively invasive opposition.<sup>78</sup> Yet as in ‘Entlarvung

---

<sup>78</sup> The nature of this supposed external force is understood in very different ways. Max Brod sees the organising power of an ‘unsichtbaren Kapellmeisterstab’ (116) at work, while Heinz Politzer transfers this dynamic onto an existential level by arguing that the text reflects the individual’s loss of an original ‘equilibrium’, a ‘sensation imparted to him by a world in which names have lost their meaning and things their defining contour’ (35). See Brod 1974; Politzer 1962.

eines Bauernfängers’, this relation is more complex and ambivalent than initially assumed. Right from the beginning, the individual reveals a readiness to respond to the agitation in the world ‘vor dem Gitter’. The initial aural stimulus of the ‘Wagen’ driving past the fence falls on open ears, a sensory alertness that can be seen as a form of movement in itself as the mind reaches out beyond the confines of the garden to the world outside. The statement that ‘manchmal sah ich sie auch’ reinforces the impression that the child actively directs his senses beyond the border of the ‘social sphere’. The statement ‘vor dem Gitter hörte es nicht auf’ thus describes movement in two directions. The ‘border’ not only allows stimuli from outside to transgress into the garden, but also represents no limit for the child’s engagement with the sense of undirected motion presented to him in the outside world.<sup>79</sup> As in ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’, this attraction becomes most obvious in his ambivalent reaction to forms of behaviour that violate social convention: the ‘Schande’ of the worker’s laughter. While demonstrating an awareness of the violation this laughing presents to conventional patterns of behaviour, the child also seems to be drawn to it. Like the protagonist in ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’, he is drawn towards the forbidden fruit of the taboo.

As in texts discussed previously, the relation between world and self is ambivalent. The sense of unlimited dynamism beyond the garden fence seems to resonate with a tendency having its origin within the self, an inner agitation that challenges the individual’s supposedly stable situation and draws him towards the unconventional and uninhibited forms of movement presented in the outside world. Like most protagonists in the texts

---

<sup>79</sup> Hans Geulen’s description of the relation as a ‘Reflex’ – although based on the assumption that the child’s motion is motivated by external stimuli – points towards this interplay of a stimulus and a readiness to respond to it. Geulen 2003, p.7.

discussed so far, the individual's sense of being in the world is characterised by conflicting modes of experience: a sense of being in a 'normal' world in which time, space and the self are stable is challenged by an intuited dimension of experience associated with undirected motion and dispersal.

This interplay of forces progressively dismantles the initial impression of the garden as a stable sphere of rest. The 'Garten' – despite its connotations of parental protection, bucolic peace and even the Garden of Eden – is not experienced as the sphere of 'Aufnahme' desired by the protagonist in 'Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers'. Instead, it is a sphere of barely contained and excluded movement. The 'schwach bewegten Lücken im Laub' (KA1, 13) betray a constrained form of motion caused by wind, and the child's 'Ausruhen' on the swings creates the impression of momentary stasis rather than rest. This sense of concealed agitation corresponds to the child's readiness to respond to the external stimuli, which creates the impression that his 'ausruhen' is not 'ruhen' but a form of 'stillhalten' similar to the protagonist's situation in 'Der plötzliche Spaziergang'.

The 'Garten' thus gains the quality of a threshold place. Not quite inside or outside, it is a place of nature subdued into cultivated form, where both the pull towards controlled growth and conformist behaviour and a pull towards unrestricted dynamism are experienced forcefully. Yet unlike the man by the 'Gassenfenster', who hesitates between 'hie und da', 'irgendwo' and 'auf und ab', the child seems to engage actively in the pull towards an experience of unconstrained motion. His sensory alertness eventually leads to an actively engaged gaze that 'folgte' the bird's flight. Like other ascending motions throughout the collection, the flying birds seem to point in a direction diametrically opposed to the 'social sphere'. Following this direction, however, is reserved for proxies

on their unseen wings. The forms of movement which can be realised within ‘reality’ – the ascending motion of the lift, climbing stairs, looking up into the sky – cannot liberate the individual from the gravitational pull of rational order. Like the protagonist in ‘Entschlüsse’, the child cannot ‘sich erheben’ beyond rationally graspable boundaries: his gaze only follows the bird’s flight ‘bis ich nicht mehr glaubte, daß sie stiegen, sondern daß ich falle’ (KA1, 13). The conflicting pulls result in a sensation of ‘fallen’ that is held off in the physical motion of ‘schaukeln’.

Ascending and descending, in constant motion yet on the spot, this motion seems to balance the conflicting dynamic pulls momentarily. This balance, however, is commented on as a form of ‘Schwäche’. This ‘weakness’ could be both associated with giving in to the impetus for movement – ‘aus Schwäche ein wenig zu schaukeln’ – and the need for ‘Halt’ – the need to ‘fest mich an den Seilen haltend aus Schwäche’. Like most of the protagonists throughout the collection, the child is unable to either contain or to release the impetus for liberated motion. ‘Schaukeln’ therefore seems most likely to be a movement of restlessness, the static agitation that is more reminiscent of a ‘Seekrankheit auf festem Lande’ than a flying arrow.<sup>80</sup>

Strikingly, the next ‘scene’ can be read as a re-enactment of the conflict articulated in the first ‘scene’. Apart from that, it can also be read as a variation on the situation described in ‘Das Gassenfenster’. The child appears to have retreated into the immediate sphere of

---

<sup>80</sup> It has been observed frequently that the image of the swings is connected to the impression that the world itself is in a state of ‘schaukeln’ in this text. Politzer links this experience to the state of existential ‘Seekrankheit’, but he judges the swinging motion to be a ‘poor, rational excuse’ for this existential condition. Politzer 1962, p.35.

parental authority, the house. Sitting by the window, however, the child finds himself in yet another threshold situation that mirrors the constellation of dynamic spheres in the previous scene.

Bei Kerzenlicht bekam ich mein Nachtmahl. Oft hatte ich beide Arme auf der Holzplatte und, schon müde, biß ich in mein Butterbrot. Die stark durchbrochenen Vorhänge bauschten sich im warmen Wind, und manchmal hielt sie einer, der draußen vorüberging, mit seinen Händen fest, wenn er mich besser verstehen und mit mir reden wollte. Meistens verlöschte die Kerze bald und in dem dunklen Kerzenrauch trieben sich noch eine Zeitlang die versammelten Mücken herum. Fragte mich einer vom Fenster aus, so sah ich ihn an, als schaue ich ins Gebirge oder in die bloße Luft, und auch ihm war an einer Antwort nicht viel gelegen.

Sprang dann einer über die Fensterbrüstung und meldete, die anderen seien schon vor dem Haus, so stand ich freilich seufzend auf. (KA1, 13-14)

The child is sitting still by the dinner table, surrounded by the paraphernalia of dinnertime in his bourgeois home: ‘Kerzenlicht’, ‘Nachtmahl’ and ‘Butterbrot’. His physical stasis is contrasted by the continuing dynamism in the outside world, where ‘Wind’ blows and people are walking past.

In this scene, dynamic stimuli transgress into the ‘social sphere’ with greater intensity. The ‘schwach bewegten Lücken im Laub’ are replaced with ‘stark durchbrochenen Vorhänge’ which ‘bauschten im Wind’, and occasionally, passers-by even address the child through this porous border. The protagonist’s response to these stimuli, however, is strangely at odds with the keen attention he betrays in the opening scene. As in ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’, being ‘already’ tired refers to the time of day and the ‘natural’ diurnal pattern of activity and rest. Yet the protagonist’s distinctly un-bourgeois gesture of having ‘beide Arme auf der Tischplatte’ implies that this tiredness is expressive of a more

fundamental exertion. Like the man by the ‘Gassenfenster’ and the night-time walker, the child seems tired of being exposed to different dynamic pulls. This results in a desire to ‘sich schwer machen’ as a way of avoiding engagement in any form of movement, ‘normal’ or otherwise. Typically, this strategy fails. Just as the protagonist in ‘Entschlüsse’ betrays by the movement of his ‘kleiner Finger’ his inability to control his inner agitation, the child’s gaze drifts beyond the ‘social sphere’ and towards the ‘Gebirge’, as if to follow ‘Niemande’ into the ‘Ferne’.

The impression that the first and second scenes are not so much depictions of momentary states but re-enactments of a general state of mind is highlighted by expressions such as ‘*oft* hatte ich beide Arme auf der Holzplatte’ and ‘*meistens* verlöschte die Kerze bald’.<sup>81</sup> The same effect is achieved in the opening ‘scene’, where the sensory experiences recounted initially appear in accordance with the spatial setting. The gaze through a hedge, for example, only ‘manchmal’ allows a view on the surroundings. Yet as the text develops, it becomes obvious that the individual’s sensations of stability and dispersal do not reflect a specific event. The child remains in his immobile state for what seems like an impossibly long time. This and his sudden ability to follow a series of events – the approach of the ‘Herrn mit einem Stock’ and the complete encounter with the ‘Mädchen’ – suggests that he becomes the medium of a narrating consciousness that draws on images from external surroundings to express a general sense of being.

---

<sup>81</sup> My emphasis.

If the child seems unwilling to respond to the pull towards unconstrained dynamism, the borders between the two dynamic spheres are suddenly broken down by ‘external’ intervention. In the casual description of someone jumping ‘über die Fensterbrüstung’, an extra-ordinary dimension makes a strong claim on the ‘reality’ of the narrated world, drawing the narrative – and the protagonist – into an imagined or dream-like sphere of experience. The ‘trick’ performed here is reminiscent of ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’ as an ‘Affekt’ is turned into a character in the text. Unlike his grown-up counterparts, however, this protagonist follows the direction pointed out by the ‘invader’, albeit with a ‘seufzen’:

»Nein, warum seufzt Du so? Was ist denn geschehn? Ist es ein besonderes, nie gut zu machendes Unglück? Werden wir uns nie davon erholen können? Ist wirklich alles verloren?«

Nichts war verloren. Wir liefen vor das Haus. »Gott sei Dank, da seid ihr endlich!« »Du kommst halt immer zu spät!« - »Wieso denn ich?« - »Gerade Du, bleib zu Hause, wenn Du nicht mitwillst.« »Keine Gnaden!« - »Was? Keine Gnaden? Wie redest Du?« (KA1, 14)

During this conversation, the child’s ‘seufzen’ is associated with an ‘Unglück’ – a state of ‘Unbehagen’ associated with restlessness in previous texts. Yet in the banter of the children, the conflict between wanting to stay ‘zu Hause’, and the sense of relief about the others’ arrival – ‘Gott sei Dank, da seid Ihr endlich’ – is swiftly resolved. ‘Nichts war verloren’, and the child submits fully to the impulse for movement out of the ‘social sphere’ into an intuited dimension of experience that negates the initial stability: just as the child’s gaze was dispersed in a multiplicity of impressions in the opening scene, he now appears to become dispersed into a multiplicity of voices – a ‘wir’.

Once he has joined in the run of the children, the child experiences liberated dynamism. Not only do the physical movements of the children lead them away from house and garden into the progressively less cultivated landscapes of ‘Gasse’, ‘Böschung’, ‘Feldweg’ (KA1, 14), ‘Wildbach’ and ‘Wald’ (KA1, 16), they also seem to escape into a dimension of experience outside any social or natural order.

Wir durchstießen den Abend mit dem Kopf. Es gab keine Tages- und keine Nachtzeit. Bald rieben sich unsere Westenknöpfe aneinander wie Zähne, bald liefen wir in gleichbleibender Entfernung, Feuer im Mund, wie Tiere in den Tropen. Wie Kürassiere in alten Kriegen, stampfend und hoch in der Luft, trieben wir einander die kurze Gasse hinunter und mit diesem Anlauf in den Beinen die Landstraße weiter hinauf.

[...]

Wir liefen enger beisammen, manche reichten einander die Hände, den Kopf konnte man nicht genug hoch haben, weil es abwärts ging. Einer schrie einen indianischen Kriegsruf heraus, wir bekamen in die Beine einen Galopp wie niemals, bei den Sprüngen hob uns in den Lüften der Wind. Nichts hätte uns aufhalten können; wir waren so im Laufe, daß wir selbst beim Überholen die Arme verschränken und ruhig uns umsehen konnten. (KA1, 14-16)

In a nearly aggressive motion, the children ‘durchstießen’ the temporal and spatial orders of the world, entering an imagined sphere in which there are no limits to movement. Without temporal or spatial boundaries, the children experience the ‘Ferne’ of the ‘Tropen’ and ‘alten Kriegen’. It seems as if their run realises what the “Kaufmann” can only do in his escapist fantasies – to disperse the self into an imagined world beyond rational control and to explore the possibilities of movement and adventure to be found there. In this world, ‘Westenknöpfe’ can rub against each other ‘wie Zähne’, and ‘one’ (whether as an individual or as a collective) can run with ‘Feuer im Mund’. The child dissipates into a ‘wir’, rapidly shifting perspectives, between being ‘hoch in der Luft’ and

‘in den Straßengraben’. This shift into an elated sense of dynamism without any desire for orientation seems to turn the world as a whole into a dimension of extra-ordinary motion reminiscent of the opening section of ‘Der Nachhauseweg’. This shift is accompanied by a dissolution of the boundaries between movement in the surroundings and those of the children. The ‘Wind’ no longer functions as a distant stimulus but ‘hob uns in den Hüften’ (KA1, 15), and ‘Wasser’, ‘Eisenbahnzug’, and even the children’s singing, ‘viel rascher als der Zug fuhr’ (KA1, 16), seem to become part of a universal sense of being-in-flux. Submerged in this extra-ordinary motion, the child experiences a paradoxical sense of both dissipation and unity.

As the initial contained ‘Schaukeln’ becomes liberated into the ‘hinunter’ and ‘hinauf’ of the run, the children fall into a ‘Galopp’ and one of them ‘schrie einen indianischen Kriegsruf heraus’ as if to escape into the existence of a horse-man. Not leaving the experience of elated dynamism to proxies in distant dreams, the children share a sensation of free ‘Lauf’ during which one can ‘die Arme verschränken und ruhig uns umsehen’ – an experience that seems close to the sense of perfect motion in perfect rest of the flying arrow.

Yet this sense of liberated motion is interspersed with moments during which the order of the ‘real’ world re-asserts itself. Exhibiting a sense of passing time, the protagonist suddenly feels ‘müde’ (KA1, 15) and wants to ‘einschlafen’ in a ditch. This pull towards the normal temporal order of daily life, however, does not result in rest. Unable to escape the conflicting pulls, the child is drawn between ‘einschlafen’ and ‘aufraffen’, which is realised in a peculiar succession of ‘sich gegen die Luft werfen’ and ‘fallen’ (KA1, 15).

The initial image of the child on the swings is picked up in this ‘Schaukelbewegung’. For the child, the conflict results in a sensation of continuous falling which causes him to lie on his back, ‘zum Weinen aufgelegt’ which suggests that the ‘Unglück’ has not been resolved.

The child has not fully escaped the natural and social order of the home. He betrays an awareness of its pull in brief statements such as ‘Wißt Ihr nicht, daß die Post schon vorüber ist?’ (KA1, 15) and ‘das Wasser unten schlug an Steine und Wurzeln, als wäre es nicht schon spät abend’ (KA1, 16) until, in the last passage of the text, temporal order re-asserts itself more permanently in the realisation that ‘Es war schon Zeit’. This sentence may sound like a parental cliché, accompanied by a clapping of the hands and a child reluctantly closing its book, but it is also expressive of the ways in which natural order and social imperatives are linked within ‘normal’ everyday life:

Die Erwachsenen wachten noch im Dorfe, die Mütter richteten die  
Betten für die Nacht. (KA1, 16)

Becoming aware of the time is also to become aware of the fact that the ‘Erwachsenen’ are ‘noch wach’, i.e. that bedtime is imminent. Following this pull, the child turns away from ‘Feldweg’ and ‘Wildbach’ and ‘begann den Weg zurückzulaufen’ (KA1, 16) towards the spatial and social order of the ‘Dorf’ which corresponds to the ‘Garten der Eltern’.

This re-assertion of natural and social order is accompanied by a renewed desire for a centred self. Gradually, the child extracts himself from the multiplicity of the ‘wir’. He ‘küßte den, der bei mir stand, reichte den drei Nächsten nur so die Hände’ until the

connection is completely broken when ‘keiner rief mich’ (KA1, 16). As he turns back towards the stability of the ‘social sphere’, the child seems to regain a sense of a stable ‘ich’. In the run of the children, restlessness is not completely resolved. Eventually, the child appears to give in to his desire for ‘Halt’.

Having supposedly chosen one of two alternatives – escape and return – however, the child reaches a ‘Kreuzung’ from where he suddenly turns back ‘auf Feldwegen wieder in den Wald’ (KA1, 16) towards a community of ‘Narren’:

Ich strebte zu der Stadt im Süden hin, von der es in unserem Dorfe heißt:  
»Dort sind Leute! Denkt Euch, die schlafen nicht!«  
»Und warum denn nicht?«  
»Weil sie nicht müde werden.«  
»Und warum denn nicht?«  
»Weil sie Narren sind. «  
»Werden denn Narren nicht müde?«  
»Wie könnten Narren müde werden!« (KA1, 16)

The kind of collective insomnia envisaged here presents a radical challenge to the ‘Erwachsenen [...] im Dorfe’. For them, as for the protagonist in ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’, being in the world is synonymous with being in accordance with both ‘natural’ and social order. The exclamation ‘denkt Euch [...]!’ illustrates how radically these figures break with rationally understood and cultivated behaviour. As in Thomas Mann’s ‘Süßer Schlaf’,<sup>82</sup> an existence that does not follow the diurnal cycle of activity and rest cannot – or can hardly – be imagined, however much it may be desired. The

---

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Mann, ‘Süßer Schlaf’, in *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden. XI: Reden und Aufsätze 3* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1990), pp.333-334.

reaction of society to these forms of movement is similar to that of the protagonist in 'Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers'. By giving the phenomenon a name – 'Bauernfänger' or 'Narr' – it is familiarised and thus marginalised. In 'Kinder auf der Landstraße', this 'trick' is described not as an individual but a collective strategy. This strategy, however, points towards a hardly concealed ambivalence in adults' attitude towards such figures. It is true, society's response to 'Narren' would be dismissive or at best bemused. Yet the term is not just pejorative. According to folk wisdom, 'Narren' speak the truth, and what is more, the truth that no one else dare speak ('Kinder und Narren sprechen die Wahrheit'). Also, 'narrisch werden' is a state generally associated not only with a loss of control, but also with exuberant joy. 'Denkt Euch!' – adults say, thus making 'Narren' the stuff of fascination and fantasy, talked about to children at bedtime. Unlike adults, however, children believe that such fantasies can become 'real'.

Standing at the 'Kreuzung', the child is exposed to the most powerful realisations of the conflicting pulls which shape the dynamics of the text. The pull towards 'society' draws the protagonist out of the childrens' run, and indeed he seems just about to make for home. Yet the desire for 'Aufnahme' in village and family is challenged by a renewed – and stronger, as it turns out – pull not only towards the geographical 'Ferne' of the South, but also towards a sphere beyond the rational grasp of the 'Erwachsenen'.

Just like the 'Schande' of the workers' laughter, the radical break with 'normal' patterns of movement presented by the 'Narren' appears to be the very source of the child's attraction to the 'Stadt im Süden'. Striving towards the 'Ferne' that protagonists in previously discussed texts can only long for, the child prepares to follow the promise for a

resolution of restlessness that could neither be found in the parental home nor in the run of the children. The community of 'Narren' represents a paradox. In a sphere where one never sleeps but also never gets 'müde', movement and rest are no longer different but the same: motion in rest.

By asserting the possibility of this paradox, the community of jesters can be seen to represent the most radical challenge to any sense of stability and progressive motion in the 'social' sphere. In the various places associated with this sphere – house, village and garden – the child, as other protagonists throughout the collection, only ever seems to experience static agitation, 'bad copies' of the kind of movement and rest envisaged in the more extra-ordinary spheres of experience. The utopian vision, however, is not realised. The text leaves the child at a threshold.

Once we are alerted to the centrality of threshold images in the collection, and indeed in Kafka's fiction as a whole, it cannot remain unnoticed that 'Kinder auf der Landstraße' revolves around a variety of situations indicating change, which is epitomised in the final image of the text. In the evening, the child finds himself at a crossroads on the 'Landstraße'. The temporal threshold between day and night corresponds to the spatial threshold between culture ('Dorf') and nature ('Wald'). The tension arising from the situation further points towards the child's developmental stage. Tellingly, he finds himself drawn between the world of the 'Erwachsenen' and that of 'Narren', who are in a way eternal children. To turn towards the village is therefore suggestive of subjection to the natural and social process of growing-up, while the turn towards eternal childhood would reject such 'normal' development.

In this text, childhood is envisaged as a condition in which restlessness may be resolved. Only children and ‘Narren’, it appears, can trespass more permanently into spheres of extra-ordinary dynamic experience where the ‘Wunsch’ may come true. This exceptional status of childhood is palpable throughout Kafka’s writing. Children-figures throughout the fiction are attracted to abnormal or purely nonsensical forms of movement, which suggests that they are particularly susceptible to a pull towards a dynamic sphere that evades social norm and rational understanding. Children love the peculiar ‘Kreuzung’, they accompany Gracchus’ arrival and they are capable of enjoying the motion of the ‘Kreisel’ that the adult bystander is unable to grasp, quite literally. Children, it appears, have a ‘deeper’ or at least different grasp on movements in the world than adult ‘reality’ could ever provide them with.

Children’s attachment to such unconstrained dynamic impulses, however, is in conflict with the pull exerted by social convention and supposedly ‘natural’ order. This conflict between pulls that frustrate each other finds particularly clear, and literal, expression in a brief scene in ‘Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande’:

Der kleine Junge bei der Dame gegenüber war gekleidet wie ein alter Weinbauer. [...] Der Regen freute ihn. Er lief aus dem Thor und schaute mit offenen Augen zum Himmel, um mehr Regen abzufangen. Er sprang oft hoch, so daß das Wasser viel spritzte und Vorübergehende ihn sehr tadelten. Da rief ihn die Dame und hielt ihn fortan mit der Hand; doch weinte er nicht. (KA5, 16-17)

In this brief scene, the rain appears like a challenge to people’s attempts at progressive motion. People stop to search for shelter, and Raban’s path is constantly disrupted by ever-present ‘Pfützen’ (KA5, 21). The child, however, takes great joy in the rain and

responds to it like to a welcome playmate. In the eyes of the present adults, however, such behaviour is not only nonsensical, but also an active violation of social convention that demands being '[ge]tadelt'. Subsequently, the child is pulled back from his innocent trespassing into the sphere of eccentric activity in a clear gesture of 'festhalten'.

The gesture shows that within adult 'reality', any form of movement that does not conform to social norms is considered disruptive. Children's attraction to non-progressive and uninhibited motion, as well as their fascination with social taboo, is not perceived as a promise for release from restlessness but as a developmental stage that has to be overcome in the process of social integration. As parents teach their children when 'es ist Zeit' to go to bed, they integrate them into an existence in accordance with social convention and rational consensus. In 'Das Unglück des Junggesellen', growing-up is further expressed in terms emphasising the organic process of 'wachsen'. Consequently, not to pass the thresholds from childhood to adulthood and from bachelorhood to married life is understood as a break with the 'natural' order of things as well as a failure to integrate into society. Repeatedly in Kafka's fictions, the threshold between childhood and adulthood as one of the criteria for 'Aufnahme' is experienced as problematic. Karl Roßmann, for example is repeatedly addressed as a 'Kind', which accentuates his problematic position between child and adult and his inability to become a full member of society.<sup>83</sup>

Childhood, as we have seen, gains an ambivalent status in Kafka's writing. It is associated with the possibility of transcending restlessness into a more authentic mode of

---

<sup>83</sup> Ryan 1987, pp.48.

being,<sup>84</sup> which makes it seem unsurprising that ‘Erziehung’ is repeatedly dealt with in terms of ‘festhalten’, as a form of containing an impulse for growth beyond the limitations of the ‘Garten’. Yet to Kafka’s adult protagonists, the direction pointed out by children’s nonsensical games is inaccessible, and the challenge such movements pose to conventional order is perceived as a disruption. Throughout Kafka’s fiction, children, like ‘Narren’ and ‘Bauernfänger’, prompt responses that express this conflict between a pull towards the eternal childhood of ‘närrisch werden’ and the pull towards order. This ambivalence is grasped concisely in Josef K.’s reaction to children who frustrate his supposedly goal-directed motion towards the court hearing:

Er störte im Hinaufgehen viele Kinder, die auf der Treppe spielten und ihn, wenn er durch ihre Reihe schritt, böse ansahen. »Wenn ich nächstens wieder hergehen sollte«, sagte er sich, »muß ich entweder Zuckerwerk mitnehmen, um sie zu gewinnen, oder den Stock, um sie zu prügeln.« (KA3, 45)

Josef K.’s ambivalent response is expressive of an experience of being drawn between attraction and repulsion, but also of the impossibility of resolving this conflict. Both ‘Zuckerwerk’ and ‘Stock’ remain essentially attempts at taming what cannot be understood.

---

<sup>84</sup> This impression is shared by many readers. James Rolleston observes that in the run of the children, the ‘Auflösung der wirklichen Grenzen’ (189) is paired with a resolution of the tension between isolation and community. This condition, Rolleston argues, is then epitomised in the community of jesters where ‘absolutes Handeln’ and the possibility of turning ‘Narrentum’, which is the abnormal, into ‘Kollektivität’ (190). Rolleston views this as the successful realisation of alternative ‘Lebensmöglichkeiten’ (190), yet without further commenting on the end of the text at a ‘Kreuzung’. See Rolleston 1984. Less closely related to the text is Emrich’s reading of children figures in Kafka’s writings as representations of the ‘einzige Welt, die “Rettung” verheißt’ (99), and Walter Sokel similarly asserts that ‘was dem rationalen Verstand als Schwindel erscheinen muß’ (502), i.e. the ‘Narrentum’ (501) is a condition in which the ‘Kampf ums Dasein’ (503) can be resolved. See Wilhelm Emrich, *Franz Kafka* (Bonn: Athenäum, 1965); Walter Sokel, *Franz Kafka: Tragik und Ironie* (Munich/Vienna: Langen-Müller, 1964).

The end of 'Kinder auf der Landstraße', although emphatically asserting the possibility of pure motion in pure rest, hints at a similar ambivalence. The text ends mid-stride, hovering over a threshold. As in 'Wunsch, Indianer zu werden', the story points towards a sphere of experience that not only lies beyond the grasp of the 'Erwachsenen im Dorfe', but also beyond the imaginative grasp of the adult narrator. The 'Stadt im Süden' can be asserted but not realised.

This end contributes to the impression that 'Kinder auf der Landstraße' does not describe a specific childhood memory but a memory *of* childhood, a wish for or sentiment of an experience of being in the world where restlessness can be resolved in an act of dynamic trespassing. By reflecting on this desired state in terms of childhood, the story asserts that the pull towards the extra-ordinary emerges within human nature. The text therefore touches on the possibility of attaching a social and psychological dimension to the experience of restlessness by viewing it as the consequence of repression, a form of the 'Wiederkehr eines verdrängten eigenen Teils'.<sup>85</sup> It needs to be maintained, however, that children and 'Narren' (and 'Indianer', for that matter) primarily appear as images presenting themselves in the narrator's imagination, representations of an envisaged experience rather than references to an 'actual' 'Ferne' or 'actual' childhood.

The end of the text is unusual within the collection in that the narrator seems to envisage conditions under which the wish may come true with greater optimism than his successors. As James Rolleston observes, the 'Richtung der schaukelnden Welt heißt immer noch Aufsteigen, Ferne, Energie'<sup>86</sup> at this point. It must not be ignored, however,

---

<sup>85</sup> Kurz 1994, p.55-56.

<sup>86</sup> Rolleston 1984, p.189.

that this experience is still the experience of a possibility, a wish. Although the extraordinary makes a powerful claim on reality in this text, it cannot be articulated. Like ‘Narren’ and flying arrows, eternal children have to remain outside the narrative.

### **‘Unglücklichsein’ – ‘Die eigentliche Angst ist die Angst vor der Ursache der Erscheinung’**

What remains a vague hint of uncertainty in the opening text of the collection is articulated with painful clarity in ‘Unglücklichsein’: within adult ‘reality’, restlessness does not give rise to wild runs through the night, but to an experience of fundamental unhappiness.

The text begins with the protagonist’s declaration that ‘es schon unerträglich geworden war’ (KA1, 31). He feels driven by an otherwise undefined impulse for eruptive motion – ‘es’ – that has become ‘unerträglich’ and thus impossible to contain. The personal pronoun ‘es’ as a description of a force with uncertain origin or direction holds a prominent position both in ‘Unglücklichsein’ and ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’ where ‘vor dem Gitter hörte es nicht auf’. A further link is established by the fact that in both texts, this ‘es’ is associated with a form of discomfort, reminiscent of the ‘Unbehagen’ and ‘elende[r] Zustand’ suffered by protagonists throughout the collection. In ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’, the question whether ‘es’ is ‘ein besonderes, nie wiedergutzumachendes Unglück’ prompts the declaration that ‘nichts war verloren’ (KA1, 14). As we know, other protagonists are not so lucky. It is, after all, the same force that will take hold of Georg Bendemann and dispose of him in the river: ‘Aus dem Tor sprang er, über die Fahrbahn

zum Wasser trieb es ihn' (KA1, 52). This end demonstrates clearly that the assertion of a driving force that evades the limitations of the 'social sphere' does not always open a path towards a utopian vision of a community of 'Narren'.<sup>87</sup> The protagonist in 'Unglücklichsein', although not quite driven into a river, nevertheless does not share the optimistic outlook asserted at the end of 'Kinder auf der Landstraße'.

The opening scene of the text is characterised by a nearly explosive sense of contained motion:

Als es schon unerträglich geworden war – einmal gegen Abend im November – und ich über den schmalen Teppich meines Zimmers wie in einer Rennbahn einherlief, durch den Anblick der erleuchteten Gasse erschreckt, wieder wendete, und in der Tiefe des Zimmers, im Grund des Spiegels doch wieder ein neues Ziel bekam, und aufschrie, um nur den Schrei zu hören, dem nichts antwortet und dem auch nichts die Kraft des Schreiens nimmt, der also aufsteigt, ohne Gegengewicht, und nicht aufhören kann, selbst wenn er verstummt, da öffnete sich aus der Wand heraus die Tür, so eilig, weil doch Eile nötig war und selbst die Wagenpferde unten auf dem Pflaster wie wildgewordene Pferde in der Schlacht, die Gurgeln preisgegeben, sich erhoben. (KA1, 31)

Unable to 'alles hinzunehmen' as suggested in 'Entschlüsse', the protagonist in this text finds 'es' impossible to bear and starts running through his room as if to release his inner agitation in a physical movement. Yet the confines of his 'normal' sphere of existence – 'Zimmer', 'Gasse' and his own 'Spiegelbild' – fail to provide a sufficient 'Ziel' to release his inner agitation so that the protagonist finds himself racing through his room as if on a 'Rennbahn'. The racecourse once again becomes an image not for progressive motion on a

---

<sup>87</sup> Kafka's use of the personal pronoun 'es' has obviously prompted critics to draw links with Freud, and Kafka's statement that he had 'Gedanken an Freud natürlich' (KA10, 101) during the writing process seems to make a strong case for this connection. See for example Kurz 1984, p.33. Yet one should be wary of such translations of experiences described in a text into the language of an external discourse. The text presents the reader with the subjective experience of a driving force that the protagonist feels to 'chase' him into the river and for which the text does not provide any further explanation.

‘Laufbahn’, but for a circular motion without any possibility of rest – an expression of static agitation.

Eventually, the protagonist’s impulse for dissipation and eruptive motion results in a desperate ‘Schrei’. In contrast to the horizontal dimension open to the protagonist’s physical movements, the ascending motion of ‘aufschreien’ rises ‘ohne Gegengewicht’. Not even ending as it ‘verstummt’, this ‘Schrei’ seems to transgress into the extra-ordinary sphere related to the notion of ‘sich erheben’. This motion is mirrored in the environment, in an image reminiscent of ‘Das Gassenfenster’: as if about to trespass into a different sphere of dynamic experience, the ‘Wagenpferde’ in the street ‘sich erhoben’, suddenly reminiscent of ‘wilde Pferde in der Schlacht’ that appear to belong to the world of the children’s run or the plains of the Red Indian.

Within this ‘kosmische Reaktion’,<sup>88</sup> a ‘Kind’ ‘fuhr’ into the protagonist’s room. Although this sudden entrance occurs without any further ado, the ‘Kind’ is introduced as a figure that not only trespasses between ‘Korridor’ and ‘Zimmer’, but also between completely different spheres of ‘reality’: to the protagonist, there seems to be but a small difference between ‘Kind’ and ‘Gespenst’. The movements performed by the child-ghost further emphasise the impression that the figure inhabits a liminal space between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary. Similar to the swinging and swaying motions of the “Bauernfänger”, it stands ‘auf den Fußspitzen, auf einem unmerklich schaukelnden Fußbodenbalken’ (KA1, 31), indeed like a ‘Gespenst’ that can hardly be seen to have a stable ‘Halt’ on the ‘Fußboden’. As the protagonist seems unable to escape into an extra-ordinary sphere of

---

<sup>88</sup> Rolleston 1984, p.190.

experience, the abnormal seems to assert itself within ‘reality’. Immediately, the protagonist stops in his run:

Ich sah ein wenig hin, dann sagte ich »Guten Tag« und nahm meinen Rock vom Ofenschirm, weil ich nicht so halb nackt dastehen wollte. Ein Weilchen lang hielt ich den Mund offen, damit mich die Aufregung durch den Mund verlasse. Ich hatte schlechten Speichel in mir, im Gesicht zitterten mir die Augenwimpern, kurz, es fehlte mir nichts, als gerade dieser allerdings erwartete Besuch. (KA1, 31-32)

Opening his mouth, the protagonist feels that the ‘Aufregung mich durch den Mund verlasse’. The sensation of being liberated from a force that has been passively suffered is further emphasised in the expression that ‘im Gesicht zitterten mir die Augenwimpern’. The sudden relief is connected to the arrival of the child-ghost when the protagonist declares that the appearance ‘fehlte’ and that ‘ich bin ja so froh, daß Sie endlich hier sind’ (KA1, 33). This declaration, along with the protagonist’s statement that ‘Ihre Natur ist meine’ (KA1, 34) suggests that the child-ghost is another example of the principle of turning ‘Affekt’ into ‘Charakter’, i.e. an external figure that corresponds to a tendency in the individual – a *Doppelgänger*. Here, the encounter between the protagonist and a child does not result in a wild run, but in a conversation that appears like a re-enactment of the encounter with a ‘Bauernfänger’.

As in ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’, the externalisation of the abnormal seems to enable the protagonist to re-gain a sense of stability, which once again results in a highly ambivalent response to the ‘visitor’. Acknowledging the apparition as a long awaited ‘Freude’, the protagonist nevertheless exhibits a tendency to marginalise his link with the apparition to a form of acquaintance. Without commenting on the extra-ordinariness of a

child-ghost stepping out of the wall of his room, the protagonist engages the apparition in a conversation during which he seems primarily concerned with matters of propriety. Greeting his ‘Gast’ with a formal ‘Guten Tag’, he fusses about putting on his coat in order not to be ‘halb nackt’ (KA1, 31) before an apparent stranger and worries about what ‘die Leute’ (KA1, 32) may think if he was to lock the door. Similar to the ‘victim’ of the “Bauernfänger”, the protagonist declares that people in the house ‘sind natürlich meine Bekannten’, thus establishing himself as a supposedly integrated member of the ‘menschliche Eintracht’. By treating the ghost as a guest, while at the same time keeping the distance of the formal address ‘Sie’, the protagonist reduces him to an acquaintance. Yet his formulaic statements – ‘Sie sind mein Gast’, ‘Ich heiße Soundso, wohne im dritten Stock’ (KA1, 32) – remain unconvincing. They hardly conceal the impression that the protagonist’s ostensible amnesia – his sudden unawareness of the ‘Aufregung’ he experienced only moments ago – is a coping strategy, a way of suppressing any insight into the kind of ‘Natur’ he shares with the ‘Gespenst’.

The visitor, however, sees through this strategy. When asking the protagonist to ‘beruhigen Sie sich überhaupt’ (KA1, 32), the ghost points towards a form of ‘beruhigen’ that differs from the protagonist’s attempt at resolving his agitation. Rather more confrontational than the “Bauernfänger”, the ghost-child declares the protagonist’s behaviour a form of ‘Komödie’ and demanding that he should stop ‘mir etwas vorzulügen’ (KA1, 33). In the figure of the ‘Gespenst’, the abnormal asserts itself as a particularly vigorous challenge to the protagonist’s desire for ‘Halt’.

The tone of the conversation becomes increasingly irritable. Seemingly dissatisfied with the child-ghost’s lack of cooperation in his strategy, the protagonist eventually declares

that ‘Ein fremder Mensch wäre entgegenkommender als Sie’, which is countered by the child-ghost with a challenge to the possibility of ‘menschlicher Eintracht’: ‘So nah, als Ihnen ein fremder Mensch entgegenkommen kann, bin ich Ihnen schon von Natur aus’ (KA1, 34). As the protagonist remains insistent that this ‘Natur’ cannot be anything other than ‘freundlich’, i.e. socially integrated, he appears unwilling or unable to see the apparition as anything other than a slightly unruly guest, which eventually gains a comical quality:

So? Auch das wagen Sie mir zu sagen? Sie sind ein wenig zu kühn. Am Ende sind Sie doch in meinem Zimmer. Sie reiben Ihre Finger wie verrückt an meiner Wand. Mein Zimmer, meine Wand! (KA1, 34)

The protagonist attempts to reject any insight into the extra-ordinariness of his visitor, which contrasts sharply with his desperate assertions of the stability of ‘reality’ and his own self: ‘mein Zimmer, meine Wand!’ Eventually, however, he appears to capitulate before the conflicting pulls between ordinary and extra-ordinary experience: ‘Nichts weiß ich’ (KA1, 34). As swiftly and quietly as it came, the child-ghost disappears, and the protagonist is alone again.

Instead of feeling restful after this encounter, the protagonist makes for the door as if to embark on a ‘plötzlicher Spaziergang’. Yet this attempt at releasing restlessness into a form of physical movement is frustrated by the interference of a ‘Mieter’ who engages him in a conversation about the ‘Gespenst’. It seems that in this text, the abnormal asserts

itself as a more stubborn and lasting challenge to the protagonist's attempts at finding relief from his agitation.

Initially, the 'Mieter' appears to be one of the protagonist's 'Bekannten' 'aus dem gleichen Stockwerk'. The assumption that the 'Mieter' is a representative of social convention and integration is supported by his address to the protagonist. Calling him a 'Lump' (KA1, 34), the 'Mieter' appears to rebuke the protagonist for his untimely departure from the house. Yet rather than exerting a pull towards social integration, the 'Mieter' turns out to be more likely another external representation of an impulse that challenges the borders of the 'normal', graspable world. This time, however, the challenge is more subtle: it is a challenge to the protagonist's movement of thought. Over the course of the conversation, the 'Mieter', who ostensibly shares the protagonist's desire to grasp the 'Erscheinung' with rational means, gradually draws the protagonist into a thought process that is anything but stabilising.

Throughout the conversation the protagonist shows his desire to 'make sense' of the 'Erscheinung' – a strategy that served useful for getting rid of 'Bauernfänger'. By declaring it to be a 'Gespenst', the protagonist categorises it as a form of spectral fantasy, thus applying a similar strategy of familiarisation and marginalisation applied by 'Erwachsenen' throughout the collection. Yet as the 'Mieter' draws him into a discourse about the 'Erscheinung', the protagonist's movement of thought betrays conflicting impulses. A tendency to find rational 'closure' of the issue is gradually destabilised by a tendency to perform mental processes that overshoot the mark set by rational understanding and thus trespass into a different sphere of insight. Declaring that he does not believe in ghosts, for example, only leads the protagonist to the conclusion that

‘Nichtglauben’ (KA1, 35) does not help. The ‘Mieter’, by suggesting that such spectral apparitions need not be feared, further stimulates this direction of thought:

»Die eigentliche Angst ist die Angst vor der Ursache der Erscheinung. Und diese Angst bleibt. Die habe ich geradezu großartig in mir.« Ich fing vor lauter Nervosität an, alle meine Taschen zu durchsuchen. (KA1, 35)

The radical challenge of the ‘Gespenst’ to the protagonist’s sense of stability, it turns out, is not its ‘Form’ but its ‘Ursache’. The protagonist’s thoughts thus challenge his ostensibly stable sense of being in the world and the concept of a stable self – instead, he feels drawn towards insight into the links between the ‘Natur’ of the apparition and his own restlessness. As his thoughts perform these unrestricted movements, they are mirrored in the protagonist’s physical gestures. His nervous fidgeting betrays a distinct lack of ‘Ruhe’. The conflict between the protagonist’s desire to marginalise the apparition and the tendency in his thoughts that challenges this sense of ‘closure’ eventually culminates in a highly ambivalent statement:

Diese Gespenster scheinen über ihre Existenz mehr im Zweifel zu sein als wir, was übrigens bei ihrer Hinfälligkeit kein Wunder ist. (KA1, 35)

On a surface level, this statement asserts that the ‘Gespenster’ are so spectral and inconsequential that they have to remain uncertain about their own existence – an uncertainty that is supposedly mirrored in their own ‘Hinfälligkeit’, their lack of ‘Halt’ in the world. The sentence, however, also invites another reading. Declaring that ghosts are in even greater doubt about their existence than we are seems to suggest that ‘wir’, like

ghosts, are in doubt about our existence. Shifting into the general form 'wir', the protagonist expresses a fundamental uncertainty about stability in the world that is reminiscent of 'Die Bäume'. Ironically, he has previously demonstrated his own 'Hinfälligkeit' as he 'verfing mich in ein Sesselbein' (KA1, 34).

The protagonist's movement of thought, drawn between the desire to establish stability and a tendency negating this possibility, thus supports the impression that 'Gespenst' and 'Mieter' – like the "Bauernfänger" – are *Doppelgänger*, externalisations of a part of the protagonist's 'Natur'. In a typically ambivalent response, the protagonist seems both repulsed by this tendency and at the same time drawn to it: 'Wenn Sie mir dort oben mein Gespenst wegnehmen, dann ist es zwischen uns aus, für immer'. As if he had fulfilled his duty of pointing the protagonist towards a form of insight that goes beyond the restrictions of rational thought, the 'Mieter' then disappears in the direction associated with the extraordinary throughout the collection: upwards, 'so hoch, daß er sich, um mich zu sehen, unter einer Wölbung des Treppenhauses vorbeugen mußte' (KA1, 35).

Once the 'Mieter' has disappeared, the protagonist finds himself 'verlassen' – not only by the 'menschliche Eintracht' but also 'von allen guten Geistern'. Unable to follow the 'Gespenst' or the 'Mieter' into a sphere of experience that could transcend his inner agitation, unable to conjure up another *Doppelgänger*, yet also unable to 'sich erheben' in a 'Plötzlicher Spaziergang', the protagonist can be seen to have exhausted himself in the conflict of dynamic impulses – he remains in a state of quintessential 'Unglücklichsein'. As the dynamic potential of restlessness has exerted itself, the protagonist goes to bed and the text ends.

### **‘Ich saß auf unserer kleinen Schaukel’ – dynamics of restlessness**

The position of ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’ and ‘Unglücklichsein’ within the collection is paradigmatic. As we have seen, these texts articulate the condition of restlessness, its origins and possible consequences with an intensity and clarity unmatched by any other text in the collection. If taken as a pair, these two pieces can be seen to represent the two assertions that dominate all stories in *Betrachtung*. Within human existence, these texts suggest, there emerges the ability to wish for the impossible and to envisage conditions under which this wish for pure motion may come true. In some of these texts, the impulse for uncontained motion asserts itself with sufficient validity to dominate the individuals’ subjective ‘reality’ and dictate the flow of narration. This assertion, however, is confronted by an equally strong negation of this ability. Within adult ‘reality’, it is impossible to maintain such conditions. The end presented to us in ‘Unglücklichsein’ attests to the incompatibility and mutual frustration of these pulls.

The dominant position of the two framing texts further accentuates the impression that they point towards a narrative mode that Kafka may have been reaching out for in these early texts. Here, representations of restlessness as dubious manifestations – dreams, fantasies, vague and fleeting impulses – eventually shift towards a form of narrative suggestive of ‘plot’.

Yet apart from pointing us towards the narrative quality Kafka seems to have been feeling his way towards, the framing texts further intimate and to a degree formalise the complex dynamic patterns palpable throughout the collection, thus providing us with valuable insights into the ‘choreography’ of *Betrachtung*. The opening image of the child on the

swings functions as a metonymy for the constant change of rising and falling, relative movement and relative stasis dominating the narrative flow of 'Kinder auf der Landstraße'. In a way, the story ends at the highest point of a 'swinging motion'. Children dare each other to jump off swings at this point, knowing that letting go means to experience a momentary sensation of suspended gravity. To children, this is about as close as one can get to flying. Yet this moment is filled both with anticipation and dread, as the decision to let go has to be made against the desire to be safe and earthbound. The end of 'Kinder auf der Landstraße' leaves this moment undecided, balancing both the possibility of flight and of submitting to gravity. The relation with 'Unglücklichsein' suggests that in adult 'reality', letting go is no longer an option. The story picks up the dynamics where 'Kinder auf der Landstraße' left it, at a moment of intense agitation, when the self and the world appear about to rise themselves out of their earthbound state. Yet the rising is left to the 'Mieter', and the text ends with a physical and emotional downward motion. Filled with melancholy, the protagonist goes to bed.

Like the movement on swings, the dynamics emerging from these texts is ambivalent. Just as the highest point already contains the moment of falling, the final gesture of going to bed is merely 'endlich'. Knowing that the protagonist will rise again the next morning, we get an impression of life as a process subject to a dynamic principle that remains essentially beyond rational control.

The initial image of the swings, so subtly present in the very first 'scene' of the opening story, can also be seen as a metaphor for the inner dynamics of the collection as a whole. None of these texts resolves restlessness. The flow of the narratives is dictated by the conflict of pulls that constantly frustrate each other. Moments of relative stability always

also contain elements of instability and vice versa. The ‘Garten’, we may say, always also contains the swings, just as the wild run of the children already contains the desire for ‘einschlafen’. Oscillating between movement and stasis, ascent and fall, stability and instability, the dynamics of restlessness is thus captured in the image of a ‘Schaukelbewegung’ that gives the collection its dynamic coherence.<sup>89</sup> The overall impression emerging from this ‘choreography’, however, is that of a *Betrachtung*, an explorative and essentially aimless motion. The end of ‘Unglücklichsein’ is not suggestive of closure. The tired gesture of going to bed is more likely an expression of a dynamic impulse that has merely exerted itself in the continuous re-enactment of a conflict that may have become ‘unerträglich’, but nevertheless also remains irresolvable. Just as the ‘scenes’ in ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’ create the impression of a series of imaginings that feel their way towards a vision of pure motion, the dynamics of the collection remains essentially contemplative – still not quite narrative motion, but something with the air of a reflective drama with no end. The most fundamental challenge posed by the experience of restlessness is thus directed at both the protagonist and the narrator, whose assertions of the possibility of the ‘wish’ always end with the admission of the fact that the flying arrow remains outside the imaginative grasp.

What emerges from our inquiry into Kafka’s earliest dynamic endeavours is that Kafka’s use of movement images is not expressive of a merely keen sense of detail or an erratic juvenile style. While the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ emerging from these texts may be

---

<sup>89</sup> The central role of the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ not only for ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’ but for the collection as a whole is touched on in James Rolleston’s essay on *Betrachtung*, where the motion is associated with categories of ‘Möglichkeit’ and ‘Unmöglichkeit’. See Rolleston 1984.

frustrating to follow, the very fact that the ‘choreography’ of the collection so firmly frustrates our expectations towards narrative dynamics and story cycles contributes to the peculiar inner coherence of *Betrachtung*. What is more, in the process of continuously destabilising itself, the narrative motion also points towards a remarkable form of storytelling in which images of movement are used to explore questions of individual existence, the stability of the self, as well as problems of social integration. Having seen how productively Kafka uses the dynamic patterns connected to the condition of restlessness to touch on such concerns, we can now begin to ask questions about the way in which this endeavour was to continue.

## PART II: EXPLORATIONS OF ORDER AND RESTLESSNESS – MOVEMENT IN SHORT PROSE

### 1915-1917

A perspective on *Betrachtung* as a series of re-enactments of the conflicts arising from experiences of restlessness prompts the question whether Kafka's preoccupation with movement images at the outset of his career as a writer continues into his later fictions. The objective of this part of the thesis is to follow a selection of paths that could be taken from this point of departure.

In the period between 1915 and 1917, Kafka turned once more to shorter narratives after an exhausting struggle with *Der Proceß*. For the first time since *Betrachtung*, Kafka's creative activity was directed at 'kurze und kürzeste Prosaformen'.<sup>1</sup> The texts analysed in this part of the thesis – 'Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle', 'Die Sorge des Hausvaters', the 'Gracchus'-fragments and 'Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer' – range in length and themes, which makes them a useful set of fictions for comparison with *Betrachtung*. Whilst the limits of the present thesis mean that it is possible to engage in a close examination only of a selection of texts, we will see in the following that even this 'glimpse' onto the 'choreography' of Kafka's later writings provides us with a useful perspective on changes and continuities in Kafka's use of movement images in early and later works. We will see that as Kafka's imaginative range expands, images of movement become a powerful tool for exploring psychological mechanisms, the relation between individual and collective 'order' as well as the most fundamental conceptions of life and death.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pasley 1995, p.102.

## 1. ROUTINE AND CHILDPLAY: THE DISRUPTION OF PERSONAL 'ORDNUNG' IN 'BLUMFELD, EIN ÄLTERER JUNGGESELLE'

Throughout the texts in *Betrachtung*, we could observe a shift in Kafka's narrative method. While most of the pieces have the character of fleeting impressions, some of these stories point towards a form of narrative in which the conflicting dynamic impulses at the heart of restlessness become driving forces of something approaching 'plot'. A central feature of these texts is a process that has been described as a form of 'Umbildung des Affekts in Charakter'. In 'Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers', 'Unglücklichsein' and 'Kinder auf der Landstraße', a sphere of unrestricted and intrinsically unconventional dynamism asserts itself in visitor figures. Their appearance within the 'reality' of protagonists' lives poses a robust challenge to any attempt at reducing the idea of movement in the world to movement within the conventional order of things. The dynamics of these texts is dominated by the consequences of such intrusions, whereby the tension of the narratives mainly evolves from the complex relationship between external events and the way in which they resonate with tendencies at work in the protagonists themselves.

The narrative 'Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle', written in 1915, can be read as a variation on this visitor theme. In this text, we can observe similar dynamic patterns to those found in the *Betrachtung*-stories, yet at the same time, the text also shows how Kafka's imaginative range expands over time. 'Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle' is probably one of Kafka's most comical stories – a peculiar account of a man's encounter with two little celluloid balls that jump up and down in his room without any apparent

reason or design whether malevolent or benevolent. The carefully constructed relation between Blumfeld's way of life and the movements of the balls, however, demonstrates how Kafka employs movement images in far more subtle and complex ways than before as a means of exploring the unsettling effect of restlessness in relation to the mechanisms of repression.

The title of the story links 'Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle' with other bachelor stories in Kafka's writing. This impression is further supported by the striking similarity of the opening scene and situations described in 'Der Nachhauseweg', 'Der Kaufmann' and 'Unglücklichsein'. Blumfeld is on his way home from work, climbing up the stairs to his flat, when he is overcome by 'Nachdenklichkeit' – that state of mental agitation so typical of protagonists throughout *Betrachtung*, once again felt with particular intensity in a threshold situation between the public and private spheres.

Blumfeld ein älterer Junggeselle stieg eines Abends zu seiner Wohnung hinauf, was eine mühselige Arbeit war, denn er wohnte im sechsten Stock. Während des Hinaufsteigens dachte er, wie öfters in der letzten Zeit daran, daß dieses vollständig einsame Leben recht lästig sei, daß er jetzt diese sechs Stockwerke förmlich im Geheimen hinaufsteigen müsse um oben in seinem leeren Zimmer anzukommen, dort wieder förmlich im Geheimen den Schlafrock anzuziehen, die Pfeife anzustecken, in der französischen Zeitschrift, die er schon seit Jahren abonniert hatte, ein wenig zu lesen, dazu an einem von ihm selbst bereiteten Kirschenschnaps zu nippen und schließlich nach einer halben Stunde zu Bett zu gehn, nicht, ohne vorher das Bettzeug völlig umordnen zu müssen, das die jeder Belehrung unzugängliche Bedienerin immer nach ihrer Laune hinwarf. (KA5, 180)

As Blumfeld climbs the stairs to his flat, he reflects on 'dieses vollständig einsame Leben'. Throughout this reflection, it emerges that the main characteristic of his life is a

nearly pathological sense of order. Blumfeld follows a carefully maintained routine of donning his dressing gown, smoking, reading the newspaper and having a nightcap. He is further intensely concerned about any sign of dirt or disorder in his room:

Unreinlichkeit in seinem Zimmer aber verträgt wieder Blumfeld nicht, die Reinheit seines Zimmers ist ihm etwas Unentbehrliches, mehrmals in der Woche hat er mit der in diesem Punkte leider nicht sehr peinlichen Bedienerin Streit. (KA5, 181)

For Blumfeld, the female housekeeper is anything but a provider of domestic order. Instead, her very presence is perceived as a disruption to the meticulous order with which Blumfeld seeks to surround himself. This inability to bear the presence of another person in his room points towards the core motivation for Blumfeld's existence as an 'älterer Junggeselle'. There is no sign here of any longing for marriage or 'menschliche Eintracht' in general: instead, Blumfeld seems reluctant to engage in even the most non-committal relationships – a reluctance that is repeatedly linked to his need for 'Reinheit'. This link is made most explicit in Blumfeld's reflections on dog ownership which have been found to be representative of his relationship towards living beings in general.<sup>2</sup> The thought of having a dog in his room is repulsive to Blumfeld because dogs bring 'Schmutz' (KA5, 191) and potentially 'Krankheit' (KA5, 181) that would threaten his sense of 'Reinheit'. The desire for 'Ordnung' is a common characteristic amongst Kafka's protagonists. In the figure of Blumfeld, this concept is realised as an inflated concern for 'Reinheit' that goes beyond commonsense hygiene. Instead, his fear of 'Schmutz' seems to be directed against

---

<sup>2</sup> Lienhard Bergel, 'Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor', in *The Kafka Problem*, ed. by Angel Flores (New York: Octagon Books, 1963), pp.172-8.

anything that is organic. Physical needs and weaknesses such as the dog's potential diseases are reminders of the unpredictable and uncontrollable aspects of physical existence – not only of other living beings but primarily of Blumfeld's own organic being:

Und selbst wenn der Hund gesund bleibt, so wird er doch später einmal alt, man hat sich nicht entschließen können das treue Tier rechtzeitig wegzugeben und es kommt dann die Zeit, wo einen das eigene Alter aus den tränenden Hundeaugen anschaut. (KA5, 181)

Engaging with other living things – be it a woman or a dog – is to invite reminders of the organic nature of existence into his room. Sexuality and mortality, however, like emotional bonds,<sup>3</sup> are incompatible with the sterile order Blumfeld strives for.

Yet as he climbs the stairs to his flat, Blumfeld admits to perceiving his existence as 'vollständig einsam', which prompts a desire for a 'Begleiter, irgendein Zuschauer für diese Tätigkeiten' (KA5, 180). Blumfeld comments on this state of isolation as being 'recht lästig'. Unlike the protagonists throughout *Betrachtung*, who conceive of their loneliness in terms of extreme isolation, this bachelor dismisses such feelings as a slight discomfort. This understatement, however, fails to conceal the fact that the urge to disrupt the sterile order of his life has become a regular occurrence. Blumfeld's suggestion that this return to thoughts about his bachelor life is motivated by a desire to think things through, an expression of his 'gründliche Natur', has the suspicious undertone of self-deceit:

---

<sup>3</sup> Bergel 1963, p.173.

Etwas derartiges will Blumfeld, da er es aber, wie er einsieht ohne allzugroße Nachteile nicht haben kann, so verzichtet er darauf, kommt aber seiner gründlichen Natur entsprechend von Zeit zu Zeit, z.B. an diesem Abend, wieder auf die gleichen Gedanken zurück. (KA5, 182)

Blumfeld's 'Natur', it turns out, is drawn between the desire for 'Ordnung' without any invasion by uncontrollable forces and a desire to break out of such contained structures. The strange interrelation between conflicting tendencies emerges within the very activities that form part of Blumfeld's routines. When reading a 'französische Zeitschrift', Blumfeld reveals an interest in events occurring beyond the limited boundaries of his existence 'im Geheimen'.<sup>4</sup> Yet at the same time, this interest remains half-hearted, signalling primarily a conformist desire for the 'Bildung' that no middle-class German could do without. It appears that if there are any outward signs of the desire for escape in Blumfeld's existence, we also have to acknowledge that such wishes are carefully contained in conventional straitjackets.

In view of this interrelation, Blumfeld's very name can be seen as a not-very-subtle hint at the suppressed impulses for uncontained motion at work in Blumfeld's 'Natur'. Quite in contrast to his life, which is spent in enclosed spaces, following routines of private and

---

<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning that Kafka omitted a passage from the main body of the text that deals with Blumfeld's interest in the magazine with greater detail. In this passage, Blumfeld looks at a picture in the French magazine, showing the Russian Czar and the French president during a state visit. The passage has prompted critics to interpret Blumfeld's interest as an expression of 'disavowed fantasies of fame, power, and recognition.' See Carolin Duttlinger, *Kafka and Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 216. Lienhard Bergel, who would have read the passage as part of the main text in Max Brod's edition, equally draws the conclusion that Blumfeld likes to 'edify himself by looking at pictures of great events beyond his circle of experience'. See Bergel 1963, p. 173. Such readings would place the passage in a line with the wish for fame and 'Ferne' expressed in 'Die Abweisung', but it has to be noted that Blumfeld's desires seem to be directed at conventional status, more reminiscent of a desire for social acknowledgement as expressed in the wish to enter the 'herrschaftliches Haus' in 'Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers' than the kind of inflated wish for near-divinity articulated in 'Die Abweisung'. The proximity of conventional status and escape in the objects of Blumfeld's interest is in line with the ironic effect of the text.

professional nature, Blumfeld's name clearly points to an alignment with the natural world.

Already in this brief opening, we can identify such a variety of hints at the conflicting pulls at work in Blumfeld's existence that any understanding of this protagonist as a content bourgeois figure loses its foundation.<sup>5</sup> As in 'Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers' and 'Unglücklichsein', the emergence of extra-ordinary forces is prepared by agitation already at work in the protagonist's mind, which is then reflected back by his visitors:

Das ist ja Zauberei, zwei kleine weiße blaugestreifte Celluloidbälle springen auf dem Parkett nebeneinander auf und ab; schlägt der eine auf den Boden, ist der andere in der Höhe und unermüdlich führen sie ihr Spiel aus. (KA5, 183)

In this text, the extra-ordinary asserts itself in the form of 'Celluloidbälle' which would be perfectly ordinary if it were not for their 'unermüdlich' and 'ganz selbständig' (KA5, 183) dynamism. Here, inexplicable movement becomes the key criterion for determining the boundary between the ordinary and the abnormal. The comical effect of the encounter is largely due to the fact that Blumfeld is not visited by ghosts or 'Bauernfänger', but by animated objects, to which he nevertheless responds in a way remarkably reminiscent of protagonists' responses to visitors that could be categorised as 'persons'.

Like the protagonists in other visitor stories, Blumfeld approaches the appearance with the categories of natural and rational law. Comparing them to a 'bekanntem elektrischen Experiment' he once saw being performed at school, he assumes that his visiting balls too

---

<sup>5</sup> Kurt Fickert argues that Blumfeld is an exception amongst Kafka's protagonists in that he is content with his regimented existence. See Kurt Fickert, 'The Doppelgänger motif in Kafka's "Blumfeld"', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 6 (1977), 419-423.

must be following some scientifically graspable principle. As he realises that ‘diese aber sind verhältnismäßig große Bälle’ and that ‘es wird kein elektrisches Experiment angestellt’ (KA5, 183), he begins to examine the balls more closely:

Blumfeld bückt sich zu ihnen hinab, um sie genauer anzusehn. Es sind ohne Zweifel gewöhnliche Bälle, sie enthalten wahrscheinlich in ihrem Innern noch einige kleinere Bälle und diese erzeugen das klappernde Geräusch. Blumfeld greift in die Luft, um festzustellen, ob sie nicht etwa an irgendwelchen Fäden hängen, nein, sie bewegen sich ganz selbständig. (KA5, 183)

Close visual examination leads Blumfeld to the conclusion that the balls are ‘ohne Zweifel gewöhnliche Bälle’ and allows him to formulate the hypothesis that ‘wahrscheinlich’, the noise they make is caused by their being filled with other, smaller balls. Circling his hands around them, Blumfeld then falsifies the assumption that the balls may be dangling from strings. The fact that the balls frustrate any attempts at grasping them by means of scientific categorisation drives Blumfeld into nearly comical exaltation later in the text. As if to will the balls into submission to his logical approach, he exclaims:

Auch das Ungewöhnliche muß Grenzen haben. Ganze Bälle springen auch sonst, wenn auch nicht ununterbrochen, Bruchstücke von Bällen dagegen springen niemals, und werden also auch hier nicht springen. (KA5, 187)

The conclusion Blumfeld draws from his examination, however, is peculiar. His declaration that they are ‘ohne Zweifel gewöhnliche Bälle’ completely contradicts his observations, which suggest that the balls are anything but ‘gewöhnlich’. This sudden

change in Blumfeld's strategy is remarkable. Overtly pursuing a linear problem-solving strategy, he suddenly resorts to marginalising the appearance as 'gewöhnlich'. As in the opening scene, Blumfeld uses understatement in describing such extra-ordinary events. The statement that the balls make a 'mehr unangenehmen Eindruck' (KA5, 183) is as much of an understatement as the description of the balls as a form of 'Spaß' (KA5, 184). Blumfeld's response to the balls is reminiscent of the various distancing strategies applied by protagonists in the visitor stories in *Betrachtung*. Giving the abnormal a name and thus integrating it into 'normal' patterns of thought allows protagonists to dissociate themselves from invasive 'Bauernfänger' and ghosts, whose radical challenge to the conventional order of things can thus be dismissed as 'Späße'. These rhetorical strategies – the apparent pursuit of a linear line of argument, assertive statements, familiarisation and understatement – demonstrate how language can be applied as a way of controlling an abnormal experience.

Yet rather than providing a way of gaining control over the experience, Blumfeld's rapid shifts between different distancing strategies merely serve to emphasise the fact that the balls and their movements evade any form of control. The language used to assert 'normality' thus contributes to its destabilisation. Exclaiming that the balls are a form of 'Zauberei' (KA5, 182), Blumfeld ostensibly reduces them to a 'trick' – which would suggest that falling for their extra-ordinariness would be to be fooled like a 'Bauer' – but paired with his descriptions of the balls as 'komisch' and 'ungewöhnlich', this expression betrays an underlying awareness of the balls' radical break with convention.

Like the protagonists in other visitor stories, Blumfeld's response to the balls demonstrates that he is unwilling or unable to approach the abnormal with anything other

than the categories of convention and reason.<sup>6</sup> One of the ironies of the text thus lies in the stark contrast between Blumfeld's ostensibly determined search for a 'Gesetz' (KA5, 185) that governs the balls' movements on one hand and his blindness to hints at the extraordinary nature of the 'Gegenbewegung' on the other:

Jeder für sich, Blumfeld wie die Bälle, sie sind zwar aneinander gebunden, aber sie stören einander nicht. Nur als Blumfeld sich einmal rascher umwendet und ein Ball die Gegenbewegung nicht rasch genug machen kann, stößt Blumfeld mit dem Knie an ihn. (KA5, 192)

Particularly in the relation between protagonist and "Bauernfänger", 'Gegenbewegung' has been described as a form of movement that both challenges the individual's ostensible belief in the progressive motion of life and at the same time corresponds to a covert tendency in him. This ambivalent character of 'Gegenbewegung' is grasped in the alternating movements of the balls: the movements of the two objects are somehow interdependent but, rather than opposing each other, form a harmonious whole. Remarkably, the same complementary relation as that of the 'niedrigen gegenseitig abgestimmten Sprünge' (KA5, 184) can be observed in the relation between Blumfeld's movements and those of the balls, which creates a sense of uncertainty about their being 'jeder für sich' or 'aneinander gebunden': the confusion of the border between

---

<sup>6</sup> In his analysis of routine as a central characteristic not only of Blumfeld's existence but as a central mechanism in the world that is 'attacked' with the 'weapons' of a world of non-routine, Lienhard Bergel observes the different pulls at work in the text, yet without going into detail about the ways in which this world is asserted within 'reality'. Bergel 1963, p.173-175.

‘Gleichheit’ and ‘Unterschied’ that has been found to be a central characteristic of *Doppelgängertum*.<sup>7</sup>

This connection between the balls’ and Blumfeld’s movements draws attention to the peculiar way in which these visitors correspond to Blumfeld’s way of life. Blumfeld’s existence, as we have seen, is sterile in more than one way. His nearly pathological desire for ‘Ordnung’ and ‘Reinlichkeit’ leads him to live a life that is dictated by routines, avoiding any exposure to the disorder inherent to organic existence. It seems like a wonderfully ironic touch that this regimented, sexless life should be disrupted by an encounter with featureless and useless – sterile – celluloid balls. The movements of these balls are erratic and at the same time regular, both restless and static as they are hopping along on the spot, thereby both reflecting and mocking Blumfeld’s monotonous existence, while also representing the irregular and ‘nonsensical’ dynamic impulses that arise in him long before the emergence of the balls. In this text, Kafka constructs a strikingly appropriate visitor figure that reflects back on the specific ways in which restlessness manifests itself in the protagonist’s life and the strategies he applies to suppress it.

The consequences of this intrusion are both comical and unsettling. During the encounter, Blumfeld’s movements and thoughts are directed at maintaining ‘Reinlichkeit’ and ‘Ordnung’, yet at the same time, he performs physical movements (some of which are involuntary) that do not conform with his ostensible desire to maintain ‘Ordnung’.

---

<sup>7</sup> Here emerges with particular clarity the relationship between dynamic forces as forms of ‘Gegenbewegung’ in which the ‘Grundkategorien Gleichheit und Unterschied durcheinanderzugeraten beginnen und derart über ihre Zuständigkeitsbereiche hinauswandern, daß erstere nicht mehr nur das Verhältnis des Subjekts zu sich und zweitere nicht mehr nur das Verhältnis zu Anderem bezeichnet.’ See Christof Forderer, *Ich-Eklipsen. Doppelgänger in der Literatur seit 1800* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), p.16.

Latently present in his mental agitation during the opening scene, the impulse for irrational motion now breaks forth with greater intensity:

Blumfeld entkleidet sich ruhig, ordnet die Kleider im Kasten, er pflegt immer genau nachzusehn, ob die Bedienerin alles in Ordnung zurückgelassen hat. Ein- oder zweimal schaut er über die Schulter weg nach den Bällen, die unverfolgt jetzt sogar ihn zu verfolgen scheinen, sie sind ihm nachgerückt und springen nun knapp hinter ihm. Blumfeld zieht den Schlafrock an und will zu der gegenüberliegenden Wand, um eine seiner Pfeifen zu holen, die dort im Gestell hängen. Unwillkürlich schlägt er, ehe er sich umdreht, mit einem Fuß nach hinten aus, die Bälle aber verstehen es auszuweichen und werden nicht getroffen. Als er nun um die Pfeife geht, schließen sich ihm die Bälle gleich an, er schlurft mit den Pantoffeln, macht unregelmäßige Schritte, aber doch folgt jedem Auftreten fast ohne Pause ein Aufschlag der Bälle, sie halten mit ihm Schritt. Blumfeld dreht sich unerwartet um, um zu sehn, wie die Bälle das zustandebringen. (KA5, 184)

On the surface, Blumfeld is following his routine patterns of behaviour. He gets changed and fills his pipe as he always does. This routine, however, is disrupted by ‘unwillkürlich’ and ‘unregelmäßig’ movements. Blumfeld’s declaration that these movements are directed at finding out ‘wie die Bälle das zustandebringen’ is at odds with the intensely unscientific and disorganised form these movements take. As in the opening ‘scene’, Blumfeld’s reasoning seems primarily directed at rationalising tendencies in his own behaviour that betray a readiness to be drawn towards the impulse for eccentric and nonsensical movements represented by the balls. At other times, Blumfeld is sitting ‘still’, a sudden ‘Erstarrung’ (KA5, 185) keeping him from following his routines.

Blumfeld’s behaviour, as we can see here, takes the form of a ‘Schaukelbewegung’, drawn between the desire for order and the eruption of previously suppressed disorderly impulses. This conflict is equally present in Blumfeld’s thoughts. Thinking in conventional terms of hierarchical relations and power constellations, he repeatedly admits

that the balls are ‘untergeordnete Begleiter’ (KA5, 185), ‘Lebensgefährten’ and ‘etwas mit ihm in Verbindung stehendes’. These mental processes are strikingly reminiscent of the ambivalent dynamics of the conversation between the protagonist in ‘Unglücklichsein’ and his visitor: ostensibly directed at asserting stability and gaining ‘klare Auskunft’ about the encounter, the protagonist’s thoughts constantly shoot beyond the mark, drawn towards experiences that challenge the stability of the borders between the self and the abnormal. Repeatedly, this mental trespassing leads to the insight that the challenge to his stable sense of being in the world and his concept of a unified self is not a singular occurrence but a central if repressed experience of being:

Bisher hat Blumfeld immer in allen Ausnahmefällen, wo seine Kraft nicht hinreichte um die Lage zu beherrschen, das Aushilfsmittel gewählt, so zu tun als bemerke er nichts. Es hat oft geholfen und meistens die Lage ein wenig verbessert. (KA5, 185)

In this passage, Blumfeld describes the encounter as an ‘Ausnahmefall’, i.e. an extraordinary event. Yet at the same time, he admits to this event occurring ‘oft’. Declaring that the ‘Gleichtakt der Sprünge und seiner eigenen Schritte [...] schmerzt ihn fast’ (KA5, 185) is thus another understatement, directed at belittling the intensity of the ‘Schmerz’<sup>8</sup> associated with states of restlessness throughout *Betrachtung*, an indeed Kafka’s entire oeuvre.

Like the protagonists in ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’, ‘Das Gassenfenster’ and ‘Unglücklichsein’, Blumfeld feels exhausted by his exposure to conflicting dynamic

---

<sup>8</sup> The experience of ‘Schmerz’ is shared by protagonists in ‘Zum Nachdenken für Herrenreiter’, ‘Der Kaufmann’ and ‘Entschlüsse’.

impulses. Unable to resolve the conflict by either suppressing the impulse or by following the direction pointed out by the balls, he eventually finds himself lacking in ‘Entschlußkraft’, which is strikingly reminiscent to the state of ‘nicht wollen’ experienced by the man by the window:

Vorläufig aber müssen die Bälle nur Blumfeld fürchten und er hat jetzt keine Lust sie zu zerstören, vielleicht fehlt es ihm auch nur an Entschlußkraft dazu. Er kommt abend müde aus der Arbeit und nun, wo er Ruhe so nötig hat, wird ihm diese Überraschung bereitet. Er fühlt erst jetzt wie müde er eigentlich ist. Zerstören wird er ja die Bälle gewiß und zwar in allernächster Zeit, aber vorläufig nicht und wahrscheinlich erst am nächsten Tag. (KA5, 186)

Once again, being tired is associated with more than the desire to follow the diurnal pattern of activity and rest. Neither able to make the decision to get rid of the balls nor to acknowledge fully the challenge they pose to his rational grasp on the world, he expresses a desire for ‘Ruhe’, which resembles the impulse ‘sich schwer zu machen’ by means of which one of the protagonists in *Betrachtung* attempts to remove himself from the interplay of the competing forms of dynamism at work in and around him. In contrast to the protagonists in ‘Die Vorüberlaufenden’ and ‘Unglücklichsein’, however, sleep provides no refuge from restlessness. Blumfeld, like Gregor Samsa, sleeps ‘unruhig’. He is dogged by an echo of the drumming sounds made by the balls, which is gradually amplified into a ‘große[s] starke[s] Klopfen’ that no longer appears to him to come from his room but from ‘ganz anderswo’ (KA5, 189). The little ‘Trommler’ (KA5, 188) under Blumfeld’s bed are thereby connected to the great ‘Trommler’ that Blumfeld seeks to avoid: in this powerful and enigmatic drumming, the heartbeat of life and the image of

death as a drummer<sup>9</sup> stand side by side as reminders of the uncontrollable forces at work in all beings.

Characteristically, Blumfeld interprets this noise as a ‘Täuschung’. When rising in the morning, he states ‘wie verwirrt meine Gedanken sind’ (KA5, 191), thus once again understating the fundamental uncertainty he experiences by treating it as a mere ‘confusion’ that might be dissolved by the restoration of order. This understatement, however, is at odds with the fact that Blumfeld wakes up with a ‘Seufzer der Erlösung’ (KA5, 190). The ‘Erlösung’ remains short-lived as Blumfeld finds himself once more in a state of static agitation. Standing ‘unbeweglich’ in his room, he struggles with ‘Überreiztheit’ (KA5, 190). Rather than soothing his restlessness, sleep merely seems to have intensified Blumfeld’s condition so that he eventually resorts to a rather desperate – and comical – attempt at ridding himself at least of the balls: after putting cotton wool in his ears, he jumps first into a ‘Kasten’ and then out again ‘mit einem großen Sprung wie er ihn schon seit Jahren nicht ausgeführt hat’ (KA5, 192-193), locking the balls away and out of sight. Yet as the narrating voice in ‘Ausflug ins Gebirge’, this protagonist cannot be saved by Odysseus’ tricks.

Having banned the balls from his side, Blumfeld hopes to return to the ‘Ordnung’ of his ‘normal’ existence. Yet once again, his distancing strategy of ‘aus den Augen aus dem Sinn’ only provides momentary relief. Almost immediately, his thoughts betray a

---

<sup>9</sup> The image of death as a musician who calls men out of life with pipes and drums is readily available in the tradition of the *danse macabre*. I therefore do not consider it unlikely that the notion of the ‘Trommler’ in this text can be read as a reference to the drummer death. Another link could be made to the kind of drumming that Gustav Aschenbach hears in his dionysian dream, where ‘Paukenschläge’ (127) accompany the violent intrusion of irrational forces into the protagonist’s controlled life. See Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992).

tendency that negates his attempt at distancing himself from the supposed cause of restlessness:

Es ist merkwürdig wie wenig Sorge ihm die Bälle machen, seitdem er sie von sich getrennt hat. Solange sie hinter ihm her waren, konnte man sie für etwas zu ihm Gehöriges halten, für etwas, das bei der Beurteilung seiner Person irgendwie mit herangezogen werden mußte, jetzt dagegen waren sie nur ein Spielzeug zuhause im Kasten. Und es fällt hiebei Blumfeld ein, daß er die Bälle vielleicht am besten dadurch unschädlich machen könnte, daß er sie ihrer eigentlichen Bestimmung zuführt. (KA5, 194)

The thought that the balls are something that ‘bei der Beurteilung seiner Person irgendwie mit herangezogen werden mußte’ betrays an unacknowledged insight into the fact that the challenge posed to his ‘Beurteilung’ of himself as an integrated, controlled individual cannot be resolved by locking the balls into a ‘Kasten’. Accordingly, the statement that the balls now cause him ‘wenig Sorge’ demonstrates that Blumfeld still in fact experiences a degree of restlessness, however much it is suppressed.

Blumfeld’s description of the balls as ‘Kinderbälle’ (KA5, 188) picks up the link between children and the extra-ordinary already established in Kafka’s earliest writings. As so many of Kafka’s protagonists, Blumfeld seems to make this link in order to dismiss the balls as mere toys, yet as we have seen before, such distancing strategies tend to fail. Blumfeld’s choice of words, instead of creating a distance between his existence and the ‘Bestimmung’ of the balls, points us towards an earlier remark in which Blumfeld implicitly admits to a link between himself and the visitors:

Schade daß Blumfeld nicht ein kleines Kind ist, zwei solche Bälle wären für ihn eine freudige Überraschung gewesen, während jetzt das Ganze einen mehr unangenehmen Eindruck auf ihn macht. (KA5, 183)

By acknowledging that if he were a child, he could take pleasure in the balls, Blumfeld admits to understanding impulses that become liberated in ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’: children can trespass into spheres of dynamic experience that remain inaccessible to adults. As in the texts examined above, links between the extra-ordinary and children create an ambivalent sense of adulthood as a state in which the acceptance of movement in the world has been limited to movement within the confines of convention and reason. Within this consciousness, experiences that do not cohere with ‘normal’ patterns cannot be experienced in any other way than as a disruptive anomaly that causes restlessness.<sup>10</sup> Blumfeld’s regression into child-like behaviour – as when he jumps in and out of the chest that will serve to imprison the balls – thus can be read as a momentary liberation from the confines of ‘Ordnung’, allowing him a brief glimpse of a sphere of extra-ordinary dynamic experience. Similarly, Blumfeld’s decision to rid himself of the balls by passing them on to children may be ostensibly directed at marginalising the balls as toys, but at the same time, his return to the house also betrays a tendency of attraction to children. This tendency, as it turns out, is at odds with his usual attempts at avoiding the housekeeper’s son:

Während aber Blumfeld sonst wenn ihm der Junge in den Weg kommt, einen eiligern Schritt einschlägt, um sich dieses Schauspiel möglichst zu ersparen, möchte er heute bei ihm fast stehn bleiben wollen. (KA5, 193)

---

<sup>10</sup> Here emerges with particular clarity the possible function of the child as a *Doppelgänger* as discussed in the analysis of ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’.

As Blumfeld returns to the house, it becomes obvious that the balls are not the only representations of the abnormal in Blumfeld's life. The little boy and his mother, as well as the 'zwei kleinen Mädchen des Hausmeisters' (KA5, 194) are represented like variations on the visitor theme. The girls 'hüpfen von einem Fuß auf den andern' (KA5, 195), thus mirroring the movements of the balls, and the little boy and his mother seem to lack any 'Verstand' (KA5, 196), which relates them to the world of children and 'Narren'. As he deals with these figures, Blumfeld reveals a readiness to join in their eccentric behaviour: 'Blumfeld lacht sowohl über sie als auch über den Jungen' (KA5, 195) in a good-natured neglect of social convention that recalls the uninhibited laughter of the workers in 'Kinder auf der Landstraße'. Such behaviour, however, is short-lived. During the conversation with the children, daily routine and conformity suddenly re-assert themselves:

Aus dem Zimmer des Hausmeisters schlägt eine Uhr und mahnt  
Blumfeld zur Eile. (KA5, 197)

Thus 'gemahnt', Blumfeld passes his keys to the little girls and leaves the house in a suspiciously hasty movement reminiscent of the run up the stairs that distances the man in the street from the "Bauernfänger". Even having locked up the balls in a 'Kasten', declared them to be 'Kinderbälle' and given them to the children in the secret hope that they may be destroyed in their games, Blumfeld's dissociation from the extra-ordinary figures that have invaded his domestic (and domesticated) sphere can only be realised by means of a sudden flight.

‘Während des Weges in die Wäschefabrik’, his restlessness eventually eases as ‘die Gedanken an die Arbeit allmählich über alles andere die Oberhand [bekommen]’ (KA5, 197). As he walks to the factory, Blumfeld’s thoughts return to conventional patterns of reflection. The course taken by these thoughts, however, demonstrates that not only Blumfeld’s private life, but also his professional existence is dominated by the conflict between opposing dynamic tendencies. Blumfeld’s sense of ‘Reinlichkeit’ and routine in the private sphere finds its equivalent in his insistence on professional hierarchy and duty in the company. Yet just as routine and isolation do not provide sufficient protection from the eruption of irrational dynamic forces, Blumfeld’s ‘Verdienste’ (KA5, 198) in the company do not provide any lasting relief from restlessness: at work, another pair of ‘Kinder’ awaits him – the ‘Praktikanten’. The balls are clearly no ‘Ausnahmefälle’, as Blumfeld would have it, but merely the most incontestable manifestation of the extraordinary in an existence that is populated with pairs of visitors.<sup>11</sup> Blumfeld is constantly confronted with external representations of tendencies in himself that he seeks to suppress, and which nevertheless powerfully lay claim on the ‘reality’ of his life. Sometimes ‘fest umschlungen’ (KA5, 205), the ‘Praktikanten’ represent yet another pair of figures that dance on tiptoe like the ‘Gespenst’, play ‘Nachhüpfen’ (KA5, 206) with the employees, run and fall like children – all the time insistent on ‘ihre wirklichen oder scheinbaren Rechte’ (KA5, 208).

It appears that restlessness is a common if unacknowledged experience for Blumfeld. Generally, he seems able to qualify and thus marginalise such experiences as ‘lästig’

---

<sup>11</sup> It has frequently been noticed that such pairs of figures not only appear in ‘Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle’, but throughout Kafka’s writings, such as the ‘Assistenten’ in *Das Schloß*.

sensations which he can contain ‘meistens’ like a slightly unpleasant cold that comes and goes. In the figure of the balls, however, the extra-ordinary asserts itself more stubbornly, bringing to the surface the futility – and even the ironic counter-productivity – of Blumfeld’s attempts at shaking off an experience that turns out to be deeply rooted within his being: dismissing his wish for a dog on grounds of ‘Reinlichkeit’ somehow seems to motivate the appearance of the balls, and the desire to investigate the ‘Gesetz’ dominating these visitors draws Blumfeld into behaviour that is suspiciously reminiscent of children’s games of tag or hide and seek. Similarly, Blumfeld’s desire to dissociate himself from the balls merely draws him towards children, which brings him even closer to trespassing into spheres of ‘nonsensical’ behaviour. This mechanism further extends to Blumfeld’s professional life: his ‘hypertrophied sense of duty’<sup>12</sup> in the ‘Wäschefabrik’ turns his department into a ‘Tollhaus’ (KA5, 201), and his desire to optimise his own efficiency brings him the two ‘Praktikanten’. The encounter with the balls thus merely brings to the surface a sense of dramatic irony underlying all of Blumfeld’s distancing strategies: any strategy applied by Blumfeld in order to assert his sense of control and order contributes to the destabilisation of this momentary stability.

As his defences gradually break down and Blumfeld is increasingly drawn towards the abnormal, it turns out that his insistence on routine is in itself a form of distancing strategy:

»Wenn ich einmal«, das ist das Ergebnis seines Nachdenkens, »nicht rauche und nicht Schnaps trinke, schlafe ich schlecht.« (KA5, 191)

---

<sup>12</sup> Bergel 1963, p. 173.

What seems like a rational explanation for a bad night's sleep actually touches on the radical challenge posed to his supposedly integrated world-view: daily routines do not contain the dynamism inherent in life within the safe confines of stable, regular routine or progress. Instead, they seem like rigid and repetitive structures, directed at containing any impulse for extra-ordinary forms of movement. Once the individual weakens his grasp on these routines, such impulses break forth powerfully, thus negating supposedly stable patterns of convention and social integration as bad copies of other forms of movement and rest.

Within the 'reality' of protagonists' lives, however, the kind of movement and rest pointed towards in the irregular behaviour of visitors remains inaccessible. Protagonists are unable to trespass into a sphere where such 'irregularity' ceased to function as such, transcending restlessness into more authentic forms of existence. When acknowledging that he could perceive the encounter as a 'schöne Überraschung' if he were a child, Blumfeld implicitly asserts his ability to conceive of the possibility of such states, yet at the same time, he negates the possibility of reaching them within the confines of his adult existence.

Like the texts throughout *Betrachtung*, 'Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle' does not resolve the experience of restlessness. The narrative dynamic evolves from a continuous re-enactment of the conflict, as if to demonstrate that all areas of Blumfeld's life are dominated by a fundamental state of restlessness. The 'plot' of the narrative thus seems to be developed out of a repeated articulation of an experience of being or a state of mind.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> White grasps the impression of circularity in his description of the text as a 'perpetual experiment' (163), and Roy Pascal even goes so far as to say that the story is stripped of all 'traditional artifices that have made story-telling possible in order to be able to present to the reader the naked truth of a mental situation' (104).

In his reflections on the balls, Blumfeld wonders what their ‘Aufgabe’ (KA5, 187) or ‘Dienst’ (KA5, 185) might be. As with all visitor figures, their nature and direction remains fundamentally uncertain, yet when observing that the balls do not actively interfere with his life, and that they ‘beschränken sich offenbar nur auf das Notwendige’ (KA5, 187), Blumfeld identifies a central feature of all these encounters. Parallels between the forms of movement performed by ‘Bauernfänger’, ghosts, balls, ‘Praktikanten’ and children suggest that the ‘Notwendige’ of their existence ‘merely’ lies in the assertion of a sphere of dynamic experience that lies beyond the boundaries maintained by rational consensus. As these visitor figures assert themselves with greater validity within the ‘reality’ of protagonists’ lives than dreams or fantasies, they cannot be ignored or dismissed. Yet at the same time, the direction they seem to point out holds no promise for the protagonists who are rooted within conventional ‘reality’. During these encounters, protagonists merely find themselves drawn between a tendency directed at stability and a (previously suppressed) tendency pushing against the boundaries of rationally graspable experience towards a sphere of pure movement in perfect rest that nevertheless has to remain beyond the reach of the protagonist. Unable to contain or resolve these pulls, Blumfeld, like so many other protagonists, remains in a state of restlessness, which is reflected in the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ shaping the text. To Kafka’s protagonists, such visitors are no smiling ‘Psychagog’-figures who ‘voranschwebe[n] ins Verheißungsvoll-Ungeheure’,<sup>14</sup> but ‘Unruhestifter’.

---

See John J. White, ‘Endings and non-endings in Kafka’s fiction’, in *On Kafka. Semi-Centenary Perspectives*, ed. by Franz Kuna (London: Paul Elek 1976), pp. 146-166; Pascal 1982.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, p.140.

In the relation between Blumfeld and the balls, Kafka conjures up a both comical and melancholic image for exploring the psychology of repression in the name of order, a failed attempt at protecting the self against unpredictable and uncontrollable forces by withdrawing into regimented routine and isolation. The bachelor, as we know, is a central – one may even say *the* central – figure in Kafka’s oeuvre,<sup>15</sup> and perennially, he is seen as a representation of the artist figure. In ‘Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle’, Kafka describes this figure with a considerable degree of (self-) irony, as if to cast a critical glance at the idea of an existence outside the chain of generations. Rather than representing a figure that evades the conventions of society, Blumfeld remains a petty bourgeois, and his withdrawal into isolation does not point towards the kind of exceptional existence Kafka once seems to envisage when stating that ‘Der begrenzte Kreis ist rein’ (KA10, 192). Blumfeld’s story suggests that the limited circle is not pure, but sterile.

---

<sup>15</sup> By far the majority of Kafka’s protagonists are bachelors, and even the ‘Nebenfiguren’ are, as Gerhard Kurz notes, a ‘Gesellschaft von Unverheirateten’ (115). One of the very rare exceptions from this rule is the “Hausvater”, who will form the focus of the next analysis. See Gerhard Kurz, ‘Figuren’, in *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden. Band 2: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, ed. by Hartmut Binder (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1979), pp.108-130. p.115.

## 2. ‘... UND DARAN HAT ES SICH ZERRIEBEN’ – A CHALLENGE TO THE ORDER OF LIFE

### *DANS LE VRAI* IN ‘DIE SORGE DES HAUSVATERS’

Amongst Kafka’s protagonists, there are so many bachelor figures that exceptions to this rule are remarkable in themselves. Most prominently in ‘Die Sorge des Hausvaters’, written in 1917, Kafka conjures up a figure who is not, so to say, lacking in social skills. While most of the protagonists we have discussed so far are either unable or unwilling to become full members of society (at least by the standards of bourgeois convention), the “Hausvater” appears like the embodiment of social integration. Parallels in the ways in which Kafka uses movement images in ‘Die Sorge des Hausvaters’ and ‘Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle’ – some more obvious and some less so – invite a reading of these texts as counterparts. We will thereby see how Kafka uses movement images in both texts to explore the consequences of intrusions to different forms of ‘order’.

It is quite obvious that both texts are variations on the visitor theme. While these figures manifest themselves in a multitude of forms throughout Kafka’s writings,<sup>16</sup> Odradek is

---

<sup>16</sup> At times, these figures represent an obvious challenge to the ‘normal’ order of things in that their appearance does not seem to cohere with anything to be expected within ‘reality’. ‘Gespenster’ not only step out of corridors, they also crawl out of hedges (KA6, 135), an egg appears seemingly out of nowhere to reveal a strange bird, animal-like hybrid figures like the Kreuzung who is ‘halb Kätzchen, halb Lamm’ (KA6, 92) appear in the protagonists’ home, and repeatedly, animals take on anthropomorphic characteristics and inhabit human spaces. While these figures markedly evade any conventional order, other visitor figures seem to be more closely connected to ‘reality’, such as the “Bauernfänger” and children, but also the various bachelor-figures encountered by protagonists. There have been various attempts at categorising these figures according to their appearance – as ‘foreigners’, bachelors and animals – or as figures that fulfil a structural function within the text, as suggested by Martin Walser, who differentiates between ‘Begleiter’ (40) and ‘Feinde’ (61). See Walser 1961. Within the scope of this thesis, it is not possible to represent a full account of these figures – yet the analyses provided here show how a systematic account of the movements performed by these figures can contribute to the debate about the question whether they are isolated occurrences, represent different categories of visitors or whether they share the same function within the texts.

probably the ‘sonderbarste Bastard’,<sup>17</sup> a figure that appears like a condensation of the characteristics associated with other ‘Unruhestifter’.

In ‘Die Sorge des Hausvaters’, the narrator – the father of a household – reflects on the famously elusive figure Odradek, not quite a thing, not quite a being, a ‘Gebilde’ that causes the head of the household ‘Sorge’. Critics have long found that attempts at answering the question ‘Was ist Odradek?’ generally read like exercises in putting the rabbit into the hat and then pulling it out again.<sup>18</sup> A more fruitful approach involves a perspective shifting away from Odradek and towards the figure giving the account.<sup>19</sup> While the text does not provide much clarity about Odradek, it reveals much about the relation between the “Hausvater” and his visitor as he sees him. This relation, I shall argue, can be grasped by applying the concept of ‘Gegenbewegung’.

A first reading suggests that the relation between the “Hausvater” and Odradek can be described as a form of opposition or at least as a contrast of diametrically opposed forms of dynamic experience.

The description of the narrator as a ‘Hausvater’ defines this figure in relation to a spatial and social unit and an order in time. As the *pater familias*, he is not only a member of the family but its ‘head’ – the provider and protector for the chain of generations to be formed by ‘Kinder und Kindeskinde’ (KA1, 223). The figure is further defined as the father of

---

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin 1996, p.244.

<sup>18</sup> Günther Saße for example talks about the ‘Pluralismus der mehr oder minder gleich gültigen Interpretationen, deren Unterschiede wesentlich in den außerästhetischen Bezugssystemen gründen, die an den Text herangetragen werden’ (268-9). Such interpretations, he argues, then limit the focus on those aspects of Odradek that are ‘mit dem Bezugssystem kompatibel’ (264). See Günther Saße, ‘Die Sorge des Lesers’, *Poetica*, 10 (1978), 262-284.

<sup>19</sup> To suggest such a shift has by now become a commonplace of analyses of the text. See for example Heinz Hillmann, ‘Das Sorgenkind Odradek’, *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 86 (1967), 197-210.

the 'Haus', which makes him responsible for a stable spatial territory, with its connotations of 'Heimat' and the 'Aufnahme' that eludes so many of Kafka's characters. In contrast to the lonely man by the 'Gassenfenster' and the 'Junggeselle', the "Hausvater" thus appears as a model of the stable, self-justified and progressive sense of being in the world that Flaubert reportedly expressed in the notion of a life lived *dans le vrai*.

The impression of stability evoked in the title-figure is radically opposed by the little 'Unruhestifter' who 'unweigerlich' (KA1, 223) turns up in his territory. While the name 'Hausvater' firmly roots the narrator in the world of social and 'natural' order, Odradek slips away from the grasp of the name-giving game. It seems uncertain whether his name has roots in 'normal' language structures at all, and thus it remains unclear whether it has a 'Sinn' (KA1, 222).<sup>20</sup> This association with instability is increased by the fact that Odradek has no 'Haus' – his 'Wohnsitz' is reportedly 'unbestimmt' (KA1, 223). Odradek's strangely rootless name and his nomadic lifestyle are complemented by his appearance, which is impossible to categorise and even challenges any attempt at grasping him as a unified figure. Odradek' seems to consist of 'abgerissene, alte, aneinander geknotete, aber auch ineinander verfitzte Zwirnstücke von verschiedenster Art und Farbe' (KA1, 222), thus creating the impression of an incoherent patchwork existence that

---

<sup>20</sup> In numerous studies, critics have pointed out possible roots for the word. These readings, however, not only seem to prove the point that there is no certainty about the word, they also distract from the fact that the "Hausvater" is primarily concerned with the way in which Odradek's name evades any desire for certainty. In more recent criticism, this tendency is still followed, yet generally with the preamble that it remains impossible to find a sense in the word. Erich-Haefeli's analysis makes particularly obvious that the word seems to invite readings that range from an oxymoronic expression of a 'Kreis'-'Eck' to the profane link between the little 'Unruhestifter' and a motorcycle brand. See Verena Ehrich-Haefeli, 'Bewegungsenergien in Psyche und Text: Zu Kafkas "Odradek"', *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 109 (1990), 238-52.

represents the diametrical opposite of the unity of house and family and the sense of progressive continuity through the chain of generations. The instability of Odradek's appearance is matched by the unpredictability of movement that we have seen to be a recurrent characterisation of Kafka's visitor figures:

Er hält sich abwechselnd auf dem Dachboden, im Treppenhaus, auf den Gängen, im Flur auf. Manchmal ist er monatelang nicht zu sehen: da ist er wohl in andere Häuser übersiedelt; doch kehrt er dann unweigerlich wieder in unser Haus zurück. (KA1, 223)

Erratic and unpredictable, Odradek is 'außerordentlich beweglich'. His movements do not seem to be directed towards any particular goal, nor do they appear to follow a pattern other than that he appears to favour transitional or liminal spaces. He does not occupy the living rooms in the house where the structured activities of normal life are pursued. The predominant feature of dynamism is reinforced by locating him in places of passage including the 'Dachkammer' where unused things are stored before they leave the house (and we know that the 'Dachkammer' also tends to accommodate other incomprehensible figures such as court employees and undead hunters). The impression that Odradek's 'kollern' is a perpetual motion evading natural or conventional patterns prompts the "Hausvater" to wonder whether Odradek is subject to the most basic principle of movement governing 'ordinary' existence, the passage from life to death: 'Kann er denn sterben?' (KA1, 223).

Confronted with this eccentric figure, the “Hausvater” – like most of Kafka’s protagonists who find themselves in the role of host to the abnormal – embarks on an exercise of ‘making sense’. Like Blumfeld with the balls, he tries to integrate Odradek into the sphere of rationally graspable experience. This strategy is realised as a form of linear and goal-directed – mental – motion, a sequence of different ‘Analyseverfahren’.<sup>21</sup>

Odradek, it turns out, is not completely without reference points in ‘reality’. He has a name, which invites an etymological investigation, just as his appearance, behaviour and function provide starting points for comparisons with ordinary things such as a ‘Zwirnspule’.

The rhetoric employed by the “Hausvater” seems to be directed at emphasising his ability to observe such reference points and develop a linear argument. He uses assertive language, justifying his thoughts by declaring that ‘natürlich würde sich niemand mit solchen Studien beschäftigen, wenn es nicht wirklich ein Wesen gäbe, das Odradek heißt’ (KA1, 222). During his enquiry, he uses expressions which imply careful reasoning. He weighs opinions of ‘die einen’ and ‘andere[n]’ (KA1, 222), which supports the impression that he is unwilling to jump to conclusions. When arguing that ‘man wäre versucht zu glauben’ (KA1, 222) and that an observation ‘läßt wohl mit Recht darauf schließen’ (KA1, 222), he gives the impression that he is arguing carefully.

Attempting to describe adequately a phenomenon and assign semantic categories to it is a way of controlling the experience by means of language. Hansjörg Bay rightly observes that the link between the leading position of the “Hausvater” in the spatial ‘territory’

---

<sup>21</sup> This link between the linear problem-solving strategy followed by the “Hausvater” and the strategies applied in scientific research has been observed previously. See for example Tobias Wilke, ‘Tückische Objekte: Dinglichkeit und Repräsentation bei Kafka’, *Colloquia Germanica*, 37 (2004), 51-72.

represented by the house and his ‘Herrschaftsanspruch einer bestimmten Art des Denkens und Sprechens’ suggests that the father of the household functions as the ‘Garant einer zugleich gesellschaftlichen und symbolischen Ordnung’.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to the protagonist in ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’, however, the strategy of ‘dem Kind einen Namen geben’ does not provide the “Hausvater” with a sense of control and stability. This particular ‘child’ already has a name – but one which leaves the narrator none the wiser.

Odradek frustrates all attempts at achieving scientific exactness. None of the discussed etymological roots provides ‘einen Sinn des Wortes’ (KA1, 222). Odradek appears neither to be a human being nor an object – a hybrid state which is represented in the alternating references to the being as ‘er’ (KA1, 223) and ‘es’ (KA1, 222). He appears neither broken nor ‘zweckmäßig’ (KA1, 223), neither alive nor dead. The linear movement of the narrator’s thought is constantly frustrated, and the attempt at establishing a rhetoric of stability is undermined by language that concedes its absence.<sup>23</sup> The “Hausvater” repeatedly resorts to the use of similes. Odradek appears ‘wie eine Zwirrspule’, ‘wie auf zwei Beinen’ (KA1, 222), ‘etwa so, wie das Rascheln’, ‘wie das Holz, das er zu sein scheint’ (KA1, 223). The repeated use of ‘scheinen‘ and ‘offenbar‘ (KA1, 223) is reminiscent of the way in which a fundamental sense of uncertainty about movement and being in the world is expressed in ‘Die Bäume’. Similar to the trees in the snow, Odradek appears like a peculiar ‘Vexierbild’ that may allow a limited perspective on its parts, but which cannot be focussed on as a whole.

---

<sup>22</sup> Hansjörg Bay, ‘Kafkas Tinnitus’, in *Odradeks Lachen. Fremdheit bei Kafka*, ed. by Hansjörg Bay and Christof Hamann (Freiburg: Rombach, 2006), pp.41-68, p.46.

<sup>23</sup> For similar observations on conflicting tendencies at work in the line of thought of the “Hausvater” see Erich-Haefeli 1990, pp.246-7.

The account of the “Hausvater” demonstrates particularly well how an individual’s experience of a ‘Gegenbewegung’ can be realised on different levels of movement. The inner dynamics of the text is once again shaped by a ‘Schaukelbewegung’, emerging from the interplay of conflicting dynamic tendencies: while the “Hausvater” attempts to follow a linear and stable form of motion in his mental operations – directed at grasping Odradek both physically and semantically – the visitor challenges this tendency through his physical and semantic extra-ordinariness. The realisation of the conflict between ‘Annäherung’ and ‘Entziehen’<sup>24</sup> on different levels of the text becomes evident in the use of images that grasp both physical and mental movements:

Näheres läßt sich übrigens nicht darüber sagen, da Odradek außerordentlich beweglich und nicht zu fangen ist. (KA1, 223)

The account of the narrator thus suggests that Odradek is impossible to get ‘näher’ to or to ‘fangen’. Yet just as in other visitor texts, the ‘Gegenbewegung’ between “Hausvater” and Odradek is more complex than the ‘Gegensatz’ between grasping and withdrawing. The account of the “Hausvater” is interspersed with ‘Gegenstrebungen’, thus gaining the ambivalent character of both a ‘Verfolgungsjagd’<sup>25</sup> and a distancing strategy.

A distancing strategy used throughout the visitor texts discussed so far is that of marginalisation. Taking Odradek’s ‘Winzigkeit’ (KA1, 223) as a way of integrating him into familiar patterns, the “Hausvater” deals with him like with any small person

---

<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Hansjörg Bay comments on the link between physical and mental motion when he observes that ‘in seiner außerordentlichen Beweglichkeit entzieht sich Odradek nicht nur dem realen Zugriff des Hausvaters, sondern auch all dessen Versuchen, ihn in sein Verständnis der Welt einzuordnen’. See Bay 2006, p.44.

<sup>25</sup> Erich-Haefeli 1990, p. 248.

inhabiting his house: a 'Kind'. The series of questions directed at Odradek – 'Wie heißt du denn?', 'Und wo wohnst du?' – thus conjures up the image of an adult going down on his knees and questioning a strange child before – possibly – returning it to the next police station. The reasoning behind this behaviour, however, is ambivalent:

Natürlich stellt man an ihn keine schwierigen Fragen, sondern behandelt ihn – schon seine Winzigkeit verführt dazu – wie ein Kind. (KA1, 223)

In his explanation, the "Hausvater" suggests a logical line of argument: as Odradek is so small, it is appropriate to talk to him like a child, and as he is like a child, there is no hope of extracting any answers to complex questions from him. This line of argument, however, can also be read in a very different direction: if one reduces Odradek to the status of a child, it is possible to patronize him, which makes it possible to dismiss the challenge he poses to logical reasoning as irrelevant. The 'Verführung' (of which the "Hausvater" is aware) lies in the attempt to reduce Odradek to one of his characteristics which makes it possible to assign him a label. Primarily, however, this technique seems directed at bypassing any desire to ask Odradek questions that might reveal more about his existence than the narrator could stomach. Rather than going down on his knees, the narrator tries to raise himself above the phenomenon. Once again, the 'Gegenbewegung' of 'annähern' and 'entfernen' turns out to reflect a conflict of tendencies within the narrator.

As in texts discussed previously, the narrator's response to the visitor illustrates the impossibility of grasping the extra-ordinary with the categories of rationally graspable experience, but also the individual's inability or unwillingness to approach the figure with

anything other than these categories. Logical ambiguities and slips of the tongue in the account of the “Hausvater” imply that his rigid insistence on linear problem-solving strategies is a form of distancing strategy that is destabilised by an underlying awareness of the fundamental challenge this phenomenon poses to the conventional order of things. This covert tendency surfaces for example in the statement that ‘das Ganze ist zwar sinnlos, aber in seiner Art abgeschlossen’ (KA1, 223). Unable to settle on any statement that could justify a claim to logical conclusion and exactness, the “Hausvater” declares that the phenomenon Odradek is ‘sinnlos’. This attempt at dismissing the phenomenon as senseless and thus irrelevant, however, is immediately destabilised by the impression that Odradek is ‘in seiner Art abgeschlossen’, i.e. a ‘Ganzes’ that is so extra-ordinary that it cannot be grasped by the “Hausvater”: he is ‘außerordentlich’ (KA1, 223). This ‘Schaukelbewegung’ between marginalisation and a tendency that pushes against the boundaries of conventional ‘Sinn’ becomes particularly clear at the end of the text:

Er schadet ja offenbar niemandem; aber die Vorstellung, daß er mich  
auch noch überleben sollte, ist mir eine fast schmerzliche. (KA1, 223)

Like most of the other visitor figures, Odradek does not exhibit any aggressive behaviour. His ‘Schaden’ to the “Hausvater” – or anybody else – is not ‘offenbar’. The verdict of the “Hausvater”, however, contributes to its own destabilisation. If the only harm done by the little living, talking, ‘kollern[de]’ thread-wood figure lies in his peculiar habits and his unusual voice – why can’t the “Hausvater” simply frown and then let the children have it as a companion in their equally senseless games? Like other protagonists who find

themselves confronted with the abnormal, the “Hausvater” is unable to view the phenomenon as a ‘schöne Überraschung’. Admitting that the figure causes him a ‘fast schmerzliche’ sensation, the “Hausvater” reveals that he is anything but objective and distanced – albeit in a belittling understated expression. In the light of this understatement, the title appears like an ironic comment on the protagonist’s attempts at dismissing the experience as a tangential occurrence in his otherwise stable existence: it identifies ‘Sorge’ as the driving force behind the account. Blumfeld, too, uses this technique of understatement as a way of dismissing a form of ‘Schmerz’ – a term repeatedly used in prominent position throughout *Betrachtung* and generally associated with an experience of restlessness. As in ‘Unglücklichsein’, the title thus points towards a state that the individual does not admit to, but which nevertheless surfaces in the ‘Gegenbewegungen’ he performs.

Odradek, like other visitor figures, is thus primarily an ‘Unruhestifter’ – a figure that radically opposes organised patterns of activity without actively intervening in the course of the household.<sup>26</sup> The ‘Sorge’ of the “Hausvater” relates to the fact that as the head of the household, he feels responsible for creating and maintaining the ‘normal’ order of things. The life of such a person is always filled with ‘Sorgen’ of a greater or lesser kind. By challenging the “Hausvater’s” rational grasp on the world, however, Odradek challenges what he stands for, including the order and stability of generations to come. In contrast to the protagonists discussed so far, the ‘Sorge’ of the “Hausvater” extends not

---

<sup>26</sup> The fundamentally non-aggressive character of these figures makes it hard to see them as ‘Eindringling[e] per se’ as suggested for example by Bay 2006, p.44.

only to his own uncertainty about stability and the possibility of a unified self, but also about the stability of the family throughout successive generations and hence the underlying order of the entire world they are to inhabit.<sup>27</sup>

His distancing strategies, however, are not merely directed at marginalising the challenge to stability and order posed by Odradek's eccentric and un-conventional behaviour. The greatest challenge, as in other visitor texts, lies in the fact that this extra-ordinary behaviour resonates with a tendency in the "Hausvater" himself. This tendency is revealed – as so often in Kafka's writing – in a slip of the tongue:

Vergeblich frage ich mich, was mit ihm geschehen wird. Kann er denn sterben? Alles, was stirbt, hat vorher eine Art Ziel, eine Art Tätigkeit gehabt und daran hat es sich zerrieben; das trifft bei Odradek nicht zu. (KA1, 223)

At the end of the text, the "Hausvater" addresses the most extreme sense in which Odradek challenges a conventional understanding of life as a stable and goal-directed process. Odradek does not even seem to follow the most fundamental pattern governing the individual's existence. The idea that this representation of the abnormal may survive

---

<sup>27</sup> This relation between the "Hausvater" as an individual and the social and spatial unit he represents can be read in different ways. While Erich-Haefeli and Bay view the image of the house in psychoanalytical terms, i.e. as the wish to be 'Herr im eigenen Haus' that is the soul, White understands the concept of the "Hausvater" as a sign for a supposed shift from individual issues to the theme of the individual's 'Verantwortung' within a bigger organism. See White 1985. Gerhard Neumann argues that this reading can be supported by Kafka's increased use of the image for the self during the time when he wrote in the 'Alchimistengäßchen'. See Gerhard Neumann, 'Die Erzählungen: Die Arbeit im Alchimistengäßchen', in *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden. Band 2: Das Werk und seine Wirkung*, ed. by Hartmut Binder (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1979), pp.313-350, p. 342. Uncertainty about the possibility of being 'Herr im eigenen Haus' is expressed in Kafka's reflections on the 'Mensch' who 'trägt ein Zimmer in sich' that challenges the outwardly calm appearance of the supposedly unified self: 'Wenn einer schnell geht und man hinhorcht, etwa in der Nacht wenn alles ringsherum still ist, so hört man z.B. das Scheppern eines nicht genug befestigten Wandspiegels [...]' (KA6, 44). The link between the house as an ambivalent image for both the unified and the dispersed self as well as for a greater unit providing a place of 'Aufnahme' for the individual corresponds to my discussion of 'Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer'.

him and all of his ‘Kinder und Kindeskind’ causes the protagonist ‘Sorge’. Not only Odradek’s physical movements, but also his existential dynamics seem to evade the grasp of a supposedly rational consciousness.

This consciousness, however, turns out not to be quite so stable. The “Hausvater’s” account of existence betrays a tendency that destabilises his ostensible assertion of the continuous chain of generations and the apparent sense of life as a progressive motion towards a ‘Ziel’. His description of life as a journey on which the individual has ‘eine Art Ziel’ and ‘eine Art Tätigkeit’ creates the impression that direction and mode of this journey are to some extent vague and arbitrary. This sense of instability is further emphasised in the expression ‘zerrieben’, which is at odds with the sense of stability and unity supposedly represented by the “Hausvater”. The narrator thus expresses an experience of existence within the confines of conventional order not only as arbitrary and thus essentially without direction, but also as a process that ‘zerreißt’ the individual in a process of lifelong disintegration.<sup>28</sup> In the light of this slip of the tongue, the comment gains a highly ambivalent quality. His declaration that ‘das trifft bei Odradek nicht zu’ may reveal a longing for the kind of unending dynamics represented by Odradek, whose extra-ordinariness seems to point beyond the senselessly laborious ‘Tätigkeit’ and the literally crushing confinement of conventional existence.

As in other visitor stories, the extra-ordinary which asserts itself so powerfully in a process of turning ‘Affekt’ into ‘Charakter’ turns out to resonate with a tendency in the protagonist. The ‘Unruhestifter’ does not actively disrupt the values represented by the

---

<sup>28</sup> In his inaugural lecture at the University of Birmingham, Ronald Speirs already pointed towards the dynamic process of disintegration at the heart of this dead metaphor.

father of the household, but challenges them by bringing to the surface a tendency in the individual that subverts these values. This complex relation between the external ‘Unruhestifter’ and the individual’s inner state of restlessness creates a peculiar double-effect: in the figure of Odradek, the individual’s sense of unity is fundamentally challenged, both on the level of the unity of the household he represents and on the level of the ‘seelischer Haushalt’. Essentially, the ‘Sorge des Hausvaters’ remains once more an individual’s experience of being in the world as uncertain and unstable.

Strikingly, the dynamic pattern in which this instability expresses itself is once more that of a ‘Schaukelbewegung’. The “Hausvater” may not perform any physical movements, but his thought process mirrors the dynamic experiences he reflects on with striking dynamic quality. His linear problem solving strategies are constantly frustrated by the impossibility of integrating Odradek into his habitual thought patterns. The dynamic of the text thus emerges from the conflict between elements of assertion and frustration, which results in a ‘Schaukelbewegung’ that is shaped purely by a form of intellectual restlessness – ‘Sorge’.

If taken as a pair, ‘Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle’ and ‘Die Sorge des Hausvaters’ demonstrate how skillfully Kafka deploys the conflict between different manifestations of movement as a way of exploring the problem of ‘order’. Although leading very different lives, Blumfeld and the “Hausvater” nevertheless both appear as representatives of ‘order’. Blumfeld withdraws into the sterile order of an isolated existence, while the existence of the “Hausvater” seems expressive of the socially integrated life lived *dans le vrai*. Yet as the analyses have shown, both forms of ‘order’ seem to fulfil the same purpose: to control and contain irrational and ultimately uncontrollable dynamic impulses.

With the balls and Odradek, Kafka creates disruptive forces that are strikingly appropriate to the forms of ‘order’ presented by the protagonist. While Blumfeld encounters mocking mirror-images of his monotonous and sterile existence, the “Hausvater” is confronted with a figure that seems like a manifestation of his suppressed fears that life may be disconnected and essentially senseless, a figure that lacks the supposedly stable social connections of the “Hausvater”, his links with the chain of generations and his understanding of life as a progressive process – and, through this very lack, mocks the futility of the “Hausvater’s” attempts at asserting a kind of life *dans le vrai*. In the relation between the protagonists and these mirror-images of their restless states, the texts address the question whether it is possible to contain the dynamic principle at work in human existence within stable structures. In both texts, this possibility is radically challenged. In ‘Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle’, the encounter with the balls shows that Blumfeld’s attempts at maintaining the ‘order’ of his life merely draw attention to erupting irrational tendencies in him. The very strategies he applies to assert stability lead to the destabilisation of ‘order’. Similarly, the form of order that the “Hausvater” stands for with his very name crumbles under Odradek’s whispering laughter. The ‘Haus’ which initially serves to lend the life of the narrator-protagonist the appearance of purposiveness, stability and protection proves to be more a containing (and even imprisoning) shell – and one that is not even safe from invasion by the kind of challenge embodied in a visitor like Odradek. Indeed a profound irony appears to be at work here. The propensity for ‘Sorge’ that prompts men to create structures of protection, continuity, and stability in the world ultimately causes a more deep-seated and unmasterable ‘Sorge’ to emerge – namely that the entire exercise is not simply exhausting and self-destructive, but utterly pointless. The

dynamic forces at work in the world defy containment, whether physically, emotionally, or mentally. The ultimately pointless flux of existence that echoes in the drumming of the balls as much as in Odradek's laughter 'wie das Rascheln in gefallenen Blättern' (KA1, 223), mocks all attempts to contain, channel and direct life into a purposive shape.

The difference between Blumfeld and the "Hausvater" remains significant. The Hausvater is not a lonely city dweller, nor a bachelor, nor the man by the window. What this text asserts is that not only the figures who inhabit threshold places in society – children, bachelors, travellers, city dwellers, sons – but the very pillar of community trembles in the face of what Odradek presents. In the thoughts of the "Hausvater", the consequences of the intrusion are potentially disastrous, affecting not only himself but generations to come, his 'Kinder und Kindeskind'. Such thoughts suggest that the invasion of the 'social' sphere by irrational dynamic forces has gone much further than it ever does in *Betrachtung*, touching not only on the possibility of individual stability, but of society as a whole.

Odradek pushes against the borders of 'normality' with greater force than visitor figures discussed previously. He may 'kollern' around in the domestic sphere, seemingly harmless in his child-like appearance and distinctly un-aggressive behaviour, yet this trespasser poses a radical challenge to the most fundamental structures of existence: he creates the experience that the supposed borders between life and death are as incapable of making sense of life and affording protection to the living as the walls of a well-ordered household. The 'Sorge des Hausvaters' seems more than justified when we take into

account the far more disturbing and less easily marginalised form this frustration takes in the ‘Gracchus’-fragments.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Malcolm Pasley points out that both Odradek and Gracchus have an ‘unbestimmten Wohnsitz’ between the living and the dead. Whether Odradek can be seen as a ‘befremdende[s] “private[s]” Phantasiespiel’ for Kafka’s unfinished variations of the ‘Gracchus’-story, however, remains debatable. See Malcolm Pasley, ‘Drei literarische Mystifikationen Kafkas’, in *Kafka-Symposion*, ed. by Jürgen Born and others (Munich: dtv, 1969), pp.17-29, p.24.

### 3. THE 'GRACCHUS'-FRAGMENTS: INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE AND THE ORDER OF LIFE AND DEATH

During the winter of 1916 and April 1917, Kafka wrote four fragments revolving around the hunter Gracchus who – after a life in the German 'Schwarzwald' (KA6, 42) – falls into a ravine while following his quarry, dies, and is put onto the boat to the underworld. The boat, however, never reaches the 'Jenseits', and as the narrative begins, it has been travelling the 'irdischen Gewässer' (KA6, 43) for several hundred years. In this text, we encounter the most radical disruption to an individual's sense of 'order': as Gracchus fails to die, he is himself turned into an 'Unruhestifter'.

While all four fragments concern the central figure Gracchus, they are each narrated from different perspectives and present the reader with different constellations of figures. The first and most extensive fragment describes the hunter's arrival in Riva and his conversation with the burgomaster in a town-house. In the second fragment – much shorter and narrated in the first person – the hunter reflects on his situation. The third fragment is also a first person narrative, but told from the perspective of a passer-by who observes the arrival of the boat. The fourth attempt at this thematic complex is realised in the form of a conversation between the hunter and a visitor on his boat. These changes in the narrative angle suggest that Kafka was exploring ways of 'looking at' the hunter's fate. Kafka's return to the dialogic constellation in the last fragment suggests that the conversation between two figures provided the most promising way of expressing the ambivalences and complexities at the heart of the experience Kafka was concerned with – although it too was left uncompleted.

All four fragments revolve around a central experience: the frustration of Gracchus' expectations about the succession of life and death as the most basic pattern governing existence. In his account of the life he lived as a 'Jäger' in the 'Schwarzwald', Gracchus creates the impression of a well-lived life in accordance with conventional order:

Ich lauerte auf, schoß, traf, zog das Fell ab [...]. Meine Arbeit wurde  
gesegnet. Der große Jäger vom Schwarzwald hieß ich. (KA6, 43)

As with the "Hausvater's", the protagonist's description expresses his world-view. The "Hausvater" understands his life to be in accordance with stable social and spatial structures, the chain of generations and the unity of the household. Gracchus' sense of 'Ordnung' is that of the generic 'Jäger', whose professional life is defined by the progress towards a goal – following, shooting and bringing home his quarry. Similar to the 'Wettrennen', the successful completion of this movement is not only associated with shooting the game that will earn him his living, but also with the social recognition gained through fulfilling his duty. Being a 'Jäger' thus makes Gracchus perceive his life as both progressive and rooted within a social and spatial 'Heimat'. Within this world-view, death is not understood as a disruption but as an integral part of a successful existence. Like the changes of day and night or the development of a child into adulthood, dying is understood as another threshold to be passed in order to integrate one's existence into a form of 'allgemeinen Harmonie'.<sup>30</sup> Gracchus' reflections on his death in the second fragment make this sense of 'Ordnung' particularly clear:

---

<sup>30</sup> Rainer Nägele, 'Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Paradies. Versuch einer Interpretation zu Kafkas "Der Jäger Gracchus"', *German Quarterly*, 47 (1974), 60-72, p.62.

Hier liege ich seit damals, als ich, noch lebender Jäger Gracchus, zuhause im Schwarzwald eine Gemse verfolgte und abstürzte. Alles ging der Ordnung nach. Ich verfolgte, stürzte ab, verblutete in einer Schlucht, war tot und diese Barke sollte mich ins Jenseits tragen. Ich erinnere mich noch wie fröhlich ich mich hier auf der Pritsche ausstreckte zum erstenmal, niemals hatten die Berge solchen Gesang von mir gehört, wie diese vier damals noch dämmerigen Wände. Ich hatte gern gelebt und war gern gestorben, glücklich warf ich, ehe ich den Bord betrat, das Lumpenpack der Büchse, der Tasche, des Jagdrocks von mir hinunter, das ich immer stolz getragen hatte und in das Totenhemd schlüpfte ich wie ein Mädchen ins Hochzeitskleid. (KA6, 45)

The analogy drawn between ‘Totenhemd’ and ‘Hochzeitskleid’ is particularly suggestive of a world-view that considers life and death as parts of a natural ‘Ordnung’.<sup>31</sup> Gracchus ‘hatte gern gelebt und war gern gestorben’ because within the framework by which he lives, all of these stages are expected to be integral parts of a ‘Laufbahn’ towards the ‘Jenseits’. Having fulfilled his duty as a ‘Jäger’, Gracchus expects the boat to perform an equally progressive movement towards his next goal. The most powerful image for this understanding of life as a journey towards transcendence in the afterlife is the ‘Treppe’:

»Ich bin«, antwortete der Jäger, »immer auf der großen Treppe die hinaufführt.« (KA6, 43)

In this image, the sense of social belonging associated with the motion of ascending stairs in ‘Entlarvung eines Bauernfängers’ is taken to the level of transcendental elevation. Yet just as the protagonist in the earlier text has to acknowledge the falseness of his supposed elevation (reflected in the ‘grundlos’ loyalty in the servants’ faces), the hunter’s hope for

---

<sup>31</sup> As we have seen in previous discussions, ‘Ordnung’ is central to the way in which Kafka’s protagonists expect their lives to be. Josef K. is probably the main advocate of ‘Ordnung’ (KA3, 26) as a criterion for a rationally understood and conformist existence. Gracchus’ reference to ‘Ordnung’ suggests that the concept is linked to a form of ‘Weltordnung’.

transcendence is frustrated.<sup>32</sup> The light at the end of the stairs is not the warm glow of ‘Aufnahme’: rather it resembles an alluring but endlessly frustrating will-o’-the-wisp.

After his death, the hunter does not pass the threshold into the ‘Jenseits’. Instead, he finds himself in a kind of ‘limbo’:<sup>33</sup>

Auf dieser unendlichen Freitreppe treibe ich mich herum, bald oben bald unten, bald rechts bald links, immer in Bewegung. (KA6, 43)

Gracchus’ habitual sense of purposive movement and ‘Ordnung’ is replaced with the disorderly experience of being ‘bald oben bald unten, bald rechts bald links’ and the static agitation of someone who is always in motion without ever reaching his goal.

The most radical challenge to the conventional order of things lies in the hunter’s inability to pass the threshold he has always thought existed between the living and the dead. Gracchus does not merely represent the slight developmental aberration of an ‘altes Kind’ or an ‘älterer Junggeselle’: he is only ‘vielleicht ein Toter’ (KA6, 41), stating that he is both dead (‘»Sind sie tot?« »Ja«’ KA6, 42) and alive (‘»Aber Sie leben doch auch?« [...]. »Gewissermaßen«’, KA6, 42-43). This sense of being stranded in the borderland between the living and the dead is expressed as an experience of having been transferred to the wrong element:

---

<sup>32</sup> His position on the stairs thus gains a similar quality of eternal hesitation to that of the man from the country.

<sup>33</sup> Donald Haase, ‘Kafka’s “Der Jäger Gracchus”: Fragment or Figment of the Imagination’, *Modern Austrian Literature*, 11 (1978), 319-332 (p.322).

So reise ich, der nur in seinen Bergen leben wollte, nach meinem Tode  
durch alle Länder der Erde. (KA6, 43)

Accustomed to life in the 'Berge', Gracchus is now confined to a marine existence, which he associates with being in the wrong element in more than one sense. The 'dead' Gracchus is travelling through the 'Länder dieser Erde', which is the world of the living. Instead of providing a sense of 'Ordnung', however, the spatial and temporal terms associated with this sphere merely emphasise the substantial disorder and restlessness of his journey. Gracchus' boat is 'ohne Steuer' (KA6, 44), travelling seemingly endlessly 'seit Jahrhunderten' (KA6, 45). The hunter's journey thus takes on quasi-mythical dimensions outside the 'normal' restrictions of time and space. This near-mythical restlessness<sup>34</sup> is coupled with extreme stasis:

Ich liege während ich dieses schreibe auf einer Holzpritsche, habe – es  
ist kein Vergnügen mich zu betrachten – ein schmutziges Totenhemd an,  
Haar und Bart, grau und schwarz geht unentwirrbar durcheinander,  
meine Beine sind mit einem großen Frauentuch bedeckt. (KA6, 45)

The hunter is lying passively and statically on a 'Holzpritsche' and his appearance is unkempt. In his hair and beard 'grau und schwarz geht unentwirrbar durcheinander'. Signs of youth – black hair – and signs of old age – grey hair – have become entangled, as if to mirror the hunter's existential 'Verwirrung'. Being 'wirr' is expressive of a state of being

---

<sup>34</sup> Hartmut Binder points out that the hunter's fate bears resemblance with that of the Flying Dutchman. Binder uses this link to establish connections with Kafka's biography rather than commenting on the centrality of the theme of the eternal journey to the text itself. See Hartmut Binder, *Kafka: Der Schaffensprozeß* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), pp.249-250.

both physically lost and of having lost any sense of a unified self – reminiscent of the notion of ‘Zerstreuung’ in ‘Zerstreutes Hinausschaun’.

In the ‘Gracchus’-fragments, the abnormal does not assert itself as a passing dream or fantasy, nor as an intrusive ‘Unruhestifter’. Like Gregor Samsa, Gracchus is confronted with the most problematic experience of being in the world: his own ‘Sein’ seems to oppose his ‘Bewusstsein’. His understanding of ‘Ordnung’ is fundamentally frustrated. Instead of passing from the sphere of the living to that of the dead, he is caught in a spatial and existential borderland, where his sense of progressive motion towards a goal is replaced with the experience of an eternal journey without end. Gracchus perceives this loss of the ‘Ordnung’ he lived by as intensely problematic, repeatedly and emphatically exclaiming his despair about not being able to find a cause or solution for this experience:

Hier bin ich, tot, tot, tot. Weiß nicht, warum ich hier bin. (KA6, 100)

In Gracchus’ destiny, Kafka extends the imaginative range of restlessness yet further than before. Here, the disruption of ‘Ordnung’ does not lie in the disruption of routines or a frustration of the concept of life *dans le vrai* as expressed by the “Hausvater”. With Gracchus’ experience, the possibility of an integrated consciousness breaks down on an existential level: fulfilling the duty that defines his life does not lead the hunter up some form of metaphysical staircase into transcendence. It leads rather to a fundamental ‘Verwirrung’, a form of existence that is both eternally inert and yet eternally in motion.

The four fragments revolve around the problem of ‘making sense’ of this experience. Their inner dynamics, I would like to argue, is shaped once again by a form of ‘Schaukelbewegung’ emerging from the hunter’s responses to his state and the responses of other figures who are confronted with him.

The first fragment deals with an encounter between Gracchus and the burgomaster of Riva – the small town visited by the hunter. The constellation between these characters invites a reading of the text as a variation on the visitor theme. Narrated in the third person, the fragment seems to place equal emphasis on both protagonists, who are described with a matching sense of detail. As in other visitor stories, the two protagonists initially appear like oppositional characters.

In the figure of the ‘Bürgermeister’, the concept of the “Hausvater” as the guarantor of order is projected onto the level of a town. He is not only the member of a social and spatial community, but its ‘Meister’, a leading figure responsible for maintaining the conventional order of things: walking down the street, his gaze is ‘aufmerksam’ (KA6, 41), carefully identifying any sign of disorder:

[...] alles bekümmerte ihn, der Anblick von Unrat in einem Winkel ließ ihn das Gesicht verzerren, auf den Stufen des Denkmals lagen Obstschalen, er schob sie im Vorübergehen mit seinem Stock hinunter.  
(KA6, 41)

In the hunter, the burgomaster’s sense of ‘Ordnung’ is radically challenged both superficially and in a more profound way. The external appearance illustrates their superficial opposition: the burgomaster’s orderly appearance, complete with ‘Cylinderhut

mit Trauerband' (KA6, 41) represents a sharp contrast to the disorderly state of the hunter. Evading any attempt at integrating his appearance into familiar patterns of thoughts, Gracchus further presents a challenge to the burgomaster's world-view that recalls Odradek's challenge to the "Hausvater":

Er lag bewegungslos, scheinbar atemlos, mit geschlossenen Augen da, trotzdem deutete nur die Umgebung an, daß es vielleicht ein Toter war.  
(KA6, 41)

Confronted with a phenomenon that can only be grasped in expressions of uncertainty, such as 'scheinbar' and 'vielleicht', the burgomaster applies similar strategies of 'making sense' as other protagonists. Like the "Hausvater", he appears concerned about 'Ordnung' in the social and spatial community he represents. As he directs a series of questions to the hunter, he gives his visit the air of an investigation into the question of whether the hunter should be allowed to stay:

» [...] Glauben Sie aber Herr Bürgermeister daß ich in Riva bleiben soll?« »Das kann ich noch nicht sagen« (KA6, 42)

At the end of the fragment, the burgomaster returns to this question as he asks Gracchus whether he plans to stay in Riva. The question 'gedenken Sie bei uns in Riva zu bleiben' (KA6, 44), however, is ambivalent. It can be read like polite small talk, but also like a question asked during an investigation into a stranger's possible motivations. The burgomaster's behaviour is thus shaped by an ambivalent dynamics of approaching the phenomenon with the ostensible desire to 'make sense' – 'Annäherung' – while

simultaneously preserving his distance. Like the protagonist in 'Unglücklichsein', he uses the formal address 'Sie' as if to establish a polite yet distant relation to the visitor. The burgomaster's questions suggest that he perceives the hunter's arrival as a form of invasion, or at least as a transgression of the boundaries between the 'normal' world and the hunter's extra-ordinary borderland.

The burgomaster's ostensibly calm and controlled response to this encounter, however, is subverted by gestures which suggest that he is deeply 'beunruhigt'. As the hunter gives an account of his fate, the burgomaster interrupts him 'mit abwehrend erhobener Hand' (KA6, 43). This spontaneous gesture suggests that the burgomaster does not rationally decide about the position he should take towards the hunter; it betrays an inner awareness of the fundamental challenge posed to his sense of 'order'. As in other visitor stories, this challenge lies not so much in the confrontation itself as in the peculiar relation between visitor and host.<sup>35</sup> Subverting the burgomaster's distancing strategies, the hunter addresses him with the familiar 'du', which increases the sense of intimacy created by the fact that the burgomaster is distinctly unsurprised at the hunter's apparently miraculous resurrection. Such links draw attention to the fact that the supposed opposition between the conventional order of things in Riva and Gracchus' extra-ordinariness is as superficial as the burgomaster's hat: his outwardly calm appearance does not conceal the restlessness he experiences while walking over the town square: 'alles bekümmerte ihn' (KA6, 41).

This universal expression makes it seem unlikely that the burgomaster's 'Sorge' is merely

---

<sup>35</sup> Such underlying links have been observed before, and Donald Haase's interpretation even goes so far as to understand the burgomaster as a product of the hunter's imagination. Ronald Speirs comments more closely on the way in which the text initially seems to establish the two figures as contrasting characters before gradually introducing connections between the hunter and the burgomaster as representatives of the same form of 'order'. See Haase 1978; Ronald Speirs, 'Where there's a Will there's no Way: A Reading of Kafka's "Der Jäger Gracchus"', *Oxford German Studies* 14 (1983), 92-110.

a slight annoyance at ‘Unrat’ and ‘Obstschalen’. A closer look at the sphere represented by the burgomaster suggests that litter in the street is an external sign of a more fundamental state of disorder and stasis in Riva.

The fragment opens with an account of the situation in Riva preceding the hunter’s arrival. The scene is populated by eight people engaged in everyday activities. Yet as the narrator’s gaze moves from one person or group of persons to the next, his account seems more like the description of a still life than a scene of daily activity. Standing, lying and sitting, the citizens of Riva have a strangely static air about them, which is complemented by an apparent collective disinterest.<sup>36</sup> The fact that ‘auf dem Quai kümmerte sich niemand um die Ankömmlinge’ (KA6, 40), seems distinctly unusual for a small town in which any arriving stranger – especially one as curious as Gracchus – should be expected to cause at least a modest stir.

Just as in other visitor stories, the visitor’s extra-ordinariness seems to resonate with a tendency in his hosts: the physical and mental stasis of the townspeople is strangely similar to the hunter’s existential stasis.<sup>37</sup> Rather than representing an opposition, the hunter’s state thus seems to hold up a magnifying mirror to the burgomaster’s experience of disorder and stasis not only in ‘his’ town but also in his being. The strangely puppet-like quality of the people of Riva further supports reflections on the external ‘reality’ of the town as ‘props’ which reflect the inner state of the protagonist. This parallel is further supported by the fact that along with the hunter, an exaggerated number of children turn

---

<sup>36</sup> Rainer Nägele similarly observes that the apparent ‘idyllische Ruhe’ in Riva ‘entpuppt sich als dumpfe Bewußtlosigkeit’. See Nägele 1974, p.63.

<sup>37</sup> Haase similarly observes links between the townspeople and the hunter’s mentally inert state. See Haase 1978, p.327.

up in the corridor of the town house like an eruptive liberation of repressed energies of disorder.<sup>38</sup> This view corresponds to readings of the “Hausvater” as both the pater familias, i.e. the protector of a greater organism and an individual trying to maintain a sense of stability in his own ‘seelischer Haushalt’ as he experiences his self as an unacknowledged multiplicity of competing tendencies. The burgomaster’s protective gesture is thus in line with other protagonists’ attempts at protecting themselves against the sense that the abnormal may be an experience central to their own being in the world. The burgomaster’s seemingly rational reflection on whether he can let the hunter stay in Riva seems like a rather fruitless and thus comical assertion of his own sense of control.

Yet Gracchus is not an Odradek. Vehemently asserting his own sense of ‘Ordnung’, he appears as a figure who shares the burgomaster’s world-view, which results in an interesting double-dynamics: the encounter with the hunter confronts the burgomaster with a figure whose extra-ordinary state opposes his sense of ‘Ordnung’ – yet at the same time, the encounter is essentially a meeting of individuals who share the same experience, i.e. the frustration of their expectation of order. This peculiar relation proves to be a productive starting point for an imaginative realisation of the complex dynamics of restlessness. The conversation between the two figures is shaped by a ‘Schaukelbewegung’ emerging from movements of challenge and withdrawal.

Overtly, both figures engage in the shared endeavour of ‘making sense’ of the hunter’s fate. Just as the burgomaster’s questions seem to be directed at making sense of the

---

<sup>38</sup> See my discussion of children figures in Kafka’s writings in Part I of this thesis.

hunter's experience, the hunter appears more than willing to follow this investigative course by providing a series of speculations about the possible reasons for his fate:

Mein Todeskahn verfehlte die Fahrt, eine falsche Drehung des Steuers, ein Augenblick der Unaufmerksamkeit des Führers, eine Ablenkung durch meine wunderschöne Heimat, ich weiß nicht was es war, nur das weiß ich, daß ich auf der Erde blieb und daß mein Kahn seither die irdischen Gewässer befährt. (KA6, 43)

The hunter's reflection revolves around a central assumption, namely that his post-mortem experience results from a form of 'mistake'. Gracchus' speculations about the possibility of a 'falsche Drehung des Steuers', an 'Unaufmerksamkeit des Führers' or an 'Ablenkung' are directed at grasping the experience with familiar categories, i.e. as a question of cause and effect. This attempt at identifying a 'kritische[r] Moment'<sup>39</sup> during which an otherwise perfectly ordered and controlled movement turns into a state of disorder, so that 'fahren' becomes 'sich verfahren', is a strategy applied by protagonists throughout Kafka's writings. Understanding abnormal experiences as the result of a form of 'Störung' (KA3, 10), 'Krankheit' or 'Unglück'<sup>40</sup> allows the individual to read the experience in sequential terms, as the disruption of 'Ordnung' by an event that lies outside the control or responsibility of the individual – which also contains the hope for a remedy that will restore order. The hunter's exclamation that 'ich weiß nicht was es war' asserts this helpless and passive state.

---

<sup>39</sup> Nägele 1974, p.60.

<sup>40</sup> This strategy becomes particularly obvious in *Die Verwandlung*. Descriptions of Gregor's state as a 'Krankheit' (KA1, 104), 'Unhöflichkeit' (KA1, 103), 'Hindernis' (KA1, 108) and an 'Unglück' (105), share the common characteristic of being directed towards making out a turning point in the individual's existence as well as identifying a cause for the experience. These descriptions further correspond to descriptions of restlessness as a form of 'krank [zu] sein' (KA1, 21) in *Betrachtung*.

Yet just as the burgomaster's physical gesture of lifting his hand to interrupt the hunter's account betrays a deeper knowledge of the intimate relevance this account has for his own existence, Gracchus' rhetorical gesture of throwing up his hands in the air and declaring complete and innocent ignorance brings a line of thought to a sudden halt. 'Not knowing' seems suspiciously alike to 'nicht wollen': the rejection of any form of mental motion that is so typical for individuals in Kafka's stories who find themselves drawn between conflicting dynamic tendencies.

Rather than concealing the direction pointed out by the line of thought, this sudden disruption draws attention to the statement that causes Gracchus' intervention. The suggestion that the wrong turn of the boat may be due to an 'Ablenkung durch meine wunderschöne Heimat' (KA6, 43) is phrased ambiguously, which points towards the question whether Gracchus is the passive passenger on a boat steered by a force other than himself, or whether the 'Steuermann' who made the mistake is in fact Gracchus himself. The 'Ablenkung' of the boat could thus be seen as the reflection of a tendency in Gracchus, the distraction a form of 'Erdenschwere' that binds him to the 'Heimat'. As with the balls who visit Blumfeld, the seemingly opaque force behind the irrational may lie within the individual. A similar tendency can be observed in the projection of the hunter's experience into the stair-image:

»Ich bin«, antwortete der Jäger, »immer auf der großen Treppe die hinaufführt. Auf dieser unendlichen weiten Freitreppe treibe ich mich herum, bald oben, bald unten, bald rechts bald links, immer in Bewegung. Nehme ich aber den größten Aufschwung und leuchtet mir schon oben das Tor, erwache ich auf meinem alten in irgendeinem irdischen Gewässer öde steckenden Kahn. Der Grundfehler meines einstmaligen Sterbens umgrinst mich in meiner Kajüte [...].« (KA6, 43)

Here, the hunter describes an existential ‘Schaukelbewegung’. His idea of a goal-directed motion towards transcendence and ‘Aufnahme’ that can be successfully completed with an energetic ‘Aufschwung’ is constantly frustrated in the moment of waking up yet again on the ship that is stuck in the ‘irdischen Gewässer’. This repeated experience of rising and falling is strikingly reminiscent of the constant fall of the child in ‘Kinder auf der Landstraße’, the repeated motion of ‘sich gegen die Luft werfen’ and ‘fallen’ (KA1, 15) as gravity defies the wish to ‘schweben’.<sup>41</sup> The parallel supports the assumption that this early ‘Schaukelbewegung’ grasps a dynamic experience that also lies at the heart of the alleged ‘Grundfehler’ of the hunter’s unsuccessful death. The comparison, however, alerts us to an important difference between the two ‘Schaukelbewegungen’. While the child’s rising has been read as an attempt at lifting himself up out of the conventional order of the ‘social sphere’ in order to reach a dimension of extra-ordinary dynamic experience, the hunter’s attempt at rising remains within his overall understanding of ‘Ordnung’. His rising motion breaks down exactly at the point when he prepares himself for the ‘größten Aufschwung’. The inability to reach the ‘goal’ by means of progressive and wilful motion and his awakening on the ship seem to suggest that Gracchus’ physical ‘Erdenschwere’ – the ‘Ablenkung durch meine wunderschöne Heimat’ – is somehow related to a kind of conceptual ‘Erdenschwere’: his inability to imagine any form of transcendence that is not reached by means of goal-directed wilful movement may be the ‘Grundfehler’ of his death.

---

<sup>41</sup> This experience is common to many of Kafka’s protagonists. One may think here of the trapeze artist in ‘Erstes Leid’, whose demand for a second trapeze can be read as an expression of the wish to be free from the ‘Stange’ (KA1, 251) in his hands, and be it only for the fraction of a second that it takes to fly from one trapeze to the other.

The impression that Gracchus' experience is somehow related to his understanding of being in the world is further supported by a reflection on his existence as that of the generic 'Jäger':

Aufgestellt war ich als Jäger im Schwarzwald, wo es damals noch Wölfe gab. Ich lauerte auf, schoß ab, traf, zog das Fell ab, ist das eine Schuld? Meine Arbeit wurde gesegnet. Der große Jäger vom Schwarzwald hieß ich. Ist das eine Schuld? (KA6, 43)

By giving an account of his existence, the hunter emphasises that his life has been lived in accordance with the categories he believes to constitute a successful existence. His account is reliable in so far as there is no 'Schuld' in this existence – as long as it is judged by the criteria of conventional order.<sup>42</sup> Yet Gracchus' insistent repetition of the rhetorical question 'ist das eine Schuld?' may suggest that the question is more real than rhetorical. His exaggerated assertion of innocence and ignorance appears like a weak attempt at concealing a direction pointed out by his line of thought, namely that his current state is somehow – as a matter of 'guilt' – connected to his insistence on 'Ordnung'.

This impression is further supported by the conspicuously formulaic tone of the hunter's account. Instead of creating the impression of energetic dynamism, the pattern of hunting and shooting, pursuit and kill, seems repetitive and thus essentially aimless. The hunter's line of thought thus points towards a reading of his fate that radically challenges his assertion of innocence and negates his ostensibly progressive existence as a form of stasis.

---

<sup>42</sup> Analyses of the hunter as a reliable commentator on his own state generally come to this conclusion because they adopt similar criteria for 'Schuld' as the hunter. See for example Erwin Steinberg, 'The Three Fragments of Kafka's "The Hunter Gracchus"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 15 (1978), 307-317. By contrast, Haase and Speirs analyse the ambivalences and contradictions in the hunter's account more carefully, thereby coming to the conclusion that his assertions of innocence are unreliable. See Haase 1978; Speirs 1983.

His current state not only mirrors the sense of static indifference in Riva. It also reflects the 'Grundfehler' of his own sense of 'Ordnung'. Gracchus' experience challenges his world-view in a way so strikingly appropriate to the particular form of his 'Ordnung' that it can be seen as a case of dramatic irony.<sup>43</sup> A consciousness that reduces being in the world to the particular 'Ordnung' of the goal-directed movement at the heart of the hunt, and an understanding of life as a similarly goal-directed movement between clearly defined stages finally has to experience a state of eternal travel and the confinement to a borderland in which the 'hunt' for a goal is turned into an eternal 'Schwebezustand'. Gracchus' inability to shed this erroneous understanding of being as a form of goal-directed 'Aufschwung' merely emphasises how inescapably he seems to be rooted in his world-view: unable to let go of the 'Heimat', he remains 'erdenschwer' without any possibility for transcendence. Following the mechanism of dramatic irony, the hunter's understanding of death in terms of progress seems to be in the way of a death that may provide a way out of the 'Schaukelbewegung'.<sup>44</sup> The hunter's sense of 'Ordnung' arises from and results in irresolvable mental and physical 'Erdenschwere'. The 'Schaukelbewegung' of the hunter's account betrays an underlying restlessness generated by the clash of an ostensibly intact world-view with tendencies which subvert his insistence on the idea of successful life.

---

<sup>43</sup> Ronald Speirs observes a similar effect in his analysis of the hunter's fate as a punishment 'for the sin of the will'. The eternal frustration of the hunter's desire to reach the 'Beyond', Speirs argues, is 'a poetically just instance of the operations of the will being turned against the will itself'. See Speirs 1983, p.97.

<sup>44</sup> Kafka once expresses a similar concept in the idea that 'unsere Rettung ist der Tod, aber nicht dieser' (KA6, 217).

Making a culprit of the 'Bootsmann', the hunter demonstrates that he is either unable or unwilling to accept the consequences for his sense of order implied by the 'Gegenbewegung' of his ship.

The hunter and the burgomaster are accomplices in the 'Schaukelbewegung' of challenge and withdrawal. Their conversation is shaped by the interplay between investigative tendencies directed at 'making sense' and deferral strategies that bring mental movement to a halt or divert it whenever it reaches the boundaries of rational and familiar experience. Ironically, this strategy of deferral leads the hunter to begin his account several times, only to make yet another slip of the tongue that destabilises the myth of innocence he is bent on establishing.

Parallels in the strategies applied by the burgomaster and Gracchus throughout their conversation suggest that they mirror each other's self-delusion and the restlessness resulting from it. In the figure of the hunter, the burgomaster is presented with a more extreme version of his own restlessness. The encounter suggests that any attempt at limiting movement to movement in accordance with conventional patterns is frustrated not only by experiences of restlessness in this world – but also an existential restlessness without any possibility for transcendence.

The fragment ends at the point at which Gracchus' attempt at establishing a complete story with a beginning, an end and even a villain seems to be at the point of completion. Nothing could challenge his assertive tone more than this abrupt collapse into silence. It would be idle to speculate whether this end is to be seen as a rejection of the hunter's assertion or as the author's failure to bring the text to a closing point.

The way in which images of movement are used in this fragment suggests a striking coherence in Kafka's imaginative grasp on experiences of being in the world as dynamic processes. Gradually, he widens the range of imaginative possibilities emerging from the dynamic patterns that already shape his early writings. Throughout *Betrachtung*, individuals perceive being in the world as restlessness: a conflict between an impulse for unrestricted motion beyond the boundaries of conventional order challenges the possibility of establishing a sense of progress and stability within the world. The analyses in this section have shown how productively Kafka employs the same dynamic patterns to explore the mechanisms of repression and how he expands his imaginative range even further by opening the question whether death puts an end to restlessness or whether the individual clings so profoundly to a false sense of movement that there is no hope of escaping the conflict by side-stepping into a wished-for sphere of transcendence.<sup>45</sup>

After experimenting with different perspectives on the hunter's fate in the third and fourth fragments, Kafka eventually returns to the form of the dialogue. Discarding all external details about the two protagonists, this fragment reduces the encounter to the dynamics of a conversation during which the ambivalences and complexities at the heart of the two protagonists' experiences emerge with particular clarity.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the fragment seems to explore a still wider range of strategies directed at resolving restlessness.

---

<sup>45</sup> The tendency pointed out here could be fruitfully tested against texts like *Die Verwandlung* and *Der Proceß*. Here, an understanding of life as progressive movement within the conventional order maintained by rational consensus is challenged by a powerful assertion of the extra-ordinary within the individual's existence. While these texts end with the protagonists' death, the 'Gracchus'-fragments seem to open the question whether 'this death' is sufficient to end restlessness.

<sup>46</sup> It is not advisable, however, to over-interpret this focus on the omission of all detail as the fragment may be understood as a continuation of the narrative sketches in previous fragments.

A major difference between this fragment and the first approach to the theme lies in the reversal of the constellation between Gracchus and his interlocutor. Here, Gracchus is the host to a visitor on his boat who thus – unknowingly – transgresses into the borderland inhabited by the hunter. In the first fragment, the encounter parallels the hunter's fate: the burgomaster's sense of order ironically leads to an encounter with the extra-ordinary. In the fourth fragment, the emphasis lies on the existence of attraction and repulsion as competing tendencies in the visitor:

Sonst aber, wie gesagt: ich wußte nichts von Dir, Geschäfte halber bin ich hier im Hafen, sah die Barke, das Laufbrett lag bereit, ich ging hinüber – aber nun wüßte ich gerne etwas im Zusammenhang über Dich.  
(KA6, 99)

The visitor declares that he was following 'Geschäfte', going about 'normal' business within the social sphere. Giving his existence the air of progressive activity, however, merely emphasises the peculiar vagueness of his motivations for entering the boat. The fact that the ready 'Laufbrett' was invitation enough for him to board suggests that the visitor's spur-of-the-moment action is motivated by an unadmitted attraction to the extra-ordinary: curiosity, one might say, and a desire to 'make sense' of an unusual occurrence. The sudden break in the visitor's line of thought – signalled by a hyphen – and his sudden change from self-reflection to a question about the hunter, however, seem like a weak attempt at diverting thoughts about his strangely irrational behaviour. Hastily, he re-asserts a course of linear reasoning: 'aber nun wüßte ich gerne etwas im Zusammenhang über Dich.' This strategy of avoiding self-scrutiny by turning attention to the other is applied by both protagonists, which contributes to the ironic effect of the conversation: they are

turning towards a mirror of their own self-delusion.<sup>47</sup> As in the first fragment, any challenge of the other is a challenge of the self. The use of the familiar form ‘Dich’ once more highlights implicit acknowledgement of familiarity between the two figures.

The visitor’s attempt at establishing himself as a representative of conventional order and ‘normality’ further extends to his description of the ‘social sphere’:

Die Welt geht ihren Gang, und Du machst Deine Fahrt, aber niemals bis heute habe ich gemerkt, daß ihr Euch gekreuzt hättet. (KA6, 99)

The apparent opposition between ‘Gang’ and ‘Fahrt’ creates the impression that hunter and world move in completely different elements and therefore cannot cross each other’s path. This supposed lack of contact gives cause to the visitor’s repeated declarations of ignorance about the hunter’s fate. This supposed separation of spheres, however, turns out to be a form of distancing strategy:

Nun hat man aber in dem kurzen Menschenleben – das Leben ist nämlich kurz, Gracchus, suche Dir das begreiflich zu machen – in diesem kurzen Leben hat man also alle Hände voll zu tun, um sich und seine Familie hochzubringen. So interessant nun der Jäger Gracchus ist – das ist Überzeugung nicht Kriecherei – man hat keine Zeit an ihn zu denken sich nach ihm zu erkundigen oder sich gar Sorgen über ihn zu machen. Vielleicht auf dem Sterbebett, wie Dein Hamburger, das weiß ich nicht. Dort hat vielleicht der fleißige Mann zum erstenmal Zeit sich auszustrecken und durch die müßiggängerischen Gedanken streicht dann einmal der grüne Jäger Gracchus. (KA6, 98)

---

<sup>47</sup> The interplay of conflicting tendencies in both protagonists throughout the conversation makes a reading of either figure as a kind of messenger very unlikely. Neither does Gracchus appear as a ‘Gottesgespenst’ (407) as presented by Kurt Weinberg, nor does the visitor appear like a representation of the hunter’s ‘introspective side’ that might lead him to a state of awareness about his state, as argued by Haase. See Kurt Weinberg, *Kafkas Dichtungen* (Bern: Francke, 1963); Haase 1978, p.328.

The visitor's explanation for the lack of 'Kenntnis' about the hunter's fate in the world can be read as a comment on the second fragment. In the first person account, the hunter declares that nobody in the world 'weiß von mir', while suggesting that this ignorance is both necessary and wilful. Knowledge of the hunter's fate is a 'Krankheit und muß im Bett geheilt werden' (KA6, 44). The hunter thus implies that the conventional order of things depends on an act of repressing knowledge about the existence of the abnormal. If people were to know of him, he contemplates, all doors would remain locked and 'alle lägen in den Betten, die Decken über den Kopf geschlagen' (KA6, 44). The visitor's account, rather than supporting the concept of 'genuine ignorance', is suggestive of a similar state of wilful repression. In order to follow the dynamic patterns constitutive of a successful existence in the social sphere – tellingly described in the ascending motion of 'sich und seine Familie hochzubringen' – knowledge of the hunter must be suppressed, however 'interessant' it would be. 'Interesse', just as the curiosity that causes the visitor to board the ship, subverts any assertion of indifference to the hunter's existence by implying that the individual feels drawn towards the abnormal. The statement that 'man hat keine Zeit an ihn zu denken sich nach ihm zu erkundigen oder sich gar Sorgen über ihn zu machen' thus betrays an underlying restlessness. This 'Sorge', however, is not resolved but suppressed in the name of order and progress. As soon as the pull from the social sphere decreases – which here, as so often in Kafka's writing, is associated with lying in bed – the hunter 'streicht' into the individual's thoughts as an embodiment of restlessness. The visitor's account may be directed at establishing an opposition between the spheres of the world and the hunter: yet in keeping with the general sense of dramatic irony at the

heart of the fragments, this attempt at establishing order merely contributes to its destabilisation. The two spheres are a lot closer than the visitor wishes to acknowledge.

Strikingly, the hunter challenges the visitor's alleged ignorance by dismissing it as a form of 'Selbsttäuschung' (KA6, 97). Self-delusion, he emphatically announces, is a threat to insight:

Es gibt hier nur zwei Möglichkeiten. Entweder verschweigst Du, was Du von mir weißt und hast irgendeine bestimmte Absicht dabei. Für diesen Fall sage ich Dir ganz frei: Du bist auf einem Abweg. Oder aber: Du glaubst Dich tatsächlich nicht an mich erinnern zu können, weil Du meine Geschichte mit einer andern verwechselst. (KA6, 99)

The hunter's statement is surprising in that it exhibits an apparent insight into the visitor's condition that could equally apply to himself, for the 'Abweg' of the hunter's fall into the ravine can be seen as a physical realisation of his existential disorientation caused by self-delusion, just as self-delusion keeps him on the 'Abweg' of his boat's journey. Ignorance, he asserts – in an intensification of the irony – is no excuse for being on an 'Abweg':

»Du kennst Dich im Schiffswesen nicht aus?«  
»Nein, erst seit heute kümmere ich mich darum, seitdem ich von Dir weiß, seitdem ich Dein Schiff betreten habe.«  
»Keine Entschuldigung. Ich bin ja auch aus dem Binnenland. War kein Seefahrer, wollte es nicht werden, Berg und Wald waren meine Freude und jetzt – [...]« (KA6, 96)

Seen in connection with Kafka's imagery of water and boats, the term 'Schiffswesen' is suggestive of more than the physical means of Gracchus' journey. Kafka repeatedly uses movement over water as an image for movement in life. 'Schiffswesen' thus not only

touches on Gracchus' existence, but on the general question of successful movement. Ignorance about the nature of movement and the futility of following an idea of achievement does not negate this futility.

In these statements, the hunter seems to take on the role of an authority on the 'Schiffswesen'. His apparent insight into the mechanisms of self-delusion, however, remains an empty gesture. The hunter's challenge to the visitor's position repeatedly initiates a line of thought that – if pursued to its end – would have to result in a conclusion that would reveal his own self-delusion. In a rhetorical gesture that mirrors the visitor's avoidance tactics, the hunter abruptly breaks off all such lines of thought, which results in fragmentary sentences such as 'ich bin –' (KA6, 99) and 'und jetzt –' (KA6, 96). As in the first fragment, the conversation between the hunter and his visitor is thus shaped by a dynamics of challenge and withdrawal. Hunter and visitor challenge each other's self-delusion, but they also continue to act as accomplices in mutual withdrawal strategies by interrupting each other:

»Mit den Patronen aber verhält es sich folgendermaßen: Die Barke hat doch ursprünglich niemandem gehört.«

»Gracchus, eine Bitte. Sage mir zuerst kurz aber zusammenhängend, wie es eigentlich mit Dir steht.« (KA6, 98)

What seems like an attempt at gaining insight 'im Zusammenhang' turns out to be a deferral strategy. It remains unclear whether the visitor is trying to avoid having to listen to information that may provide insight into the hunter's and his own state, whether the disruption is due to a tendency in the visitor that negates the hunter's desire for stability,

or whether the strategy is directed at pre-empting the breakdown of the hunter's attempt at establishing a coherent 'myth', something in which the visitor is only too ready to collude.

A closer look at the sudden breaks and turns in the protagonists' conversation draws attention to the strategies they apply as reactions to the challenges posed to their supposedly integrated world-view. Despite his own warnings against ignorance as a form of self-delusion, the hunter repeatedly refers to the limitations to his knowledge when breaking off his line of thought. Such 'ignorance' seems strangely at odds with the hunter's otherwise boastful remarks on his own knowledge – yet at times, the hunter's thoughts point in a direction that makes it possible to read ignorance as a form of knowledge.

Throughout the conversation, the hunter assigns authority to figures other than himself. Declaring that he does not understand the 'Gedankengang der Patrone' (KA6, 97), and that the visitor should approach the 'Geschichtsschreiber' (KA6, 99) if he wants to know about the 'Zusammenhang' of Gracchus' fate, the hunter applies a strategy more subtle than his previous attempts at blaming others. Just as death is expected to be part of a greater 'Ordnung', the hunter implies that his journey may be part of a form of 'Ordnung' that merely remains outside his grasp. His own experience of disorder and restless stasis may thus be contained within a greater whole.

While the hunter's reference to 'Geschichtsschreiber' and 'Patrone' places this greater whole within familiar structures of history and hierarchical relations, he also touches on the possibility of structures that lie beyond the human grasp. Throughout his account, Gracchus describes his journey in terms that give it the air of mythical relevance. The

hunter has been travelling the ‘irdischen Gewässer’ for 1500 years, and his existence is known to all human beings,<sup>48</sup> and Gracchus even goes so far as to describe himself as the ‘Schutzgeist der Matrosen’, a kind of saviour figure.

The hunter’s suggestions of a form of order that might assign sense and a function to his present state, however, remain unconvincing. His account of the ‘Patrone’ is swiftly disrupted and equally swiftly dismissed, and the suggestion that he may be the ‘Schutzgeist der Matrosen’ is unconvincing. Feeling at home only in the mountains, Gracchus is an unlikely candidate for the role of the saint of sailors:

War kein Seefahrer, wollte es nicht werden, Berg und Tal waren meine  
Freunde und jetzt – ältester Seefahrer, Jäger Gracchus Schutzgeist der  
Matrosen, Jäger Gracchus angebetet mit gerungenen Händen vom  
Schiffsjungen, der sich im Mastkorb ängstigt in der Sturmnacht. Lache  
nicht. (KA6, 96)

Disrupting a far more disconcerting line of thought, the hunter’s description of himself as a saviour figure is uttered in a melodramatic tone that is completely at odds with his general mode of speech, more likely to provoke laughter about this outbreak of acting skill than genuine admiration – which Gracchus seems to sense himself. The brief possibility of establishing a coherent myth is dismissed.

Similarly unconvincing remains the hunter’s attempt at establishing his fate as a commonplace of human knowledge. As the visitor challenges him to provide some

---

<sup>48</sup> Wilhelm Emrich takes the hunter’s statement at face value when he argues that ‘die Geschichte dieses Jägers Gracchus is also die Geschichte alles dessen, was war und ist’ (15). Emrich’s positive reading of the hunter’s story as a representation of the ‘Sinn des Seienden’ (31), however, cannot be supported by the text as the hunter’s attempts at integrating his experience into a larger concept remain unconvincing. See Emrich 1965.

information ‘im Zusammenhang’, the hunter brushes his request off with the dismissive remark that ‘everybody knows’:

Die alten, alten Geschichten. Alle Bücher sind voll davon, in allen Schulen malen es die Lehrer an die Tafel, die Mutter träumt davon, während das Kind an der Brust trinkt – und Du Mann sitzt hier und fragst mich nach dem Zusammenhang. (KA6, 99)

Unable to establish a coherent whole that could contain his experience, the hunter retreats to dismissive commonplace remarks and - once again – a shift of perspective onto the visitor’s ignorance.

The hunter, it turns out, applies a variety of strategies directed at ‘making sense’ of his experience. The overall effect of these attempts, however, merely seems like an affirmation of the hunter’s state: movements that are directed at establishing stability and order lead to an experience of dispersal. Ironically, the hunter once again voices the truth behind his own failure: ‘Ich brauche verschiedene Erklärungen’ (KA6, 97), he states, and thus implicitly admits that these ‘Erklärungen’ are arbitrary in themselves: they are attempts at clutching at straws. Rather than increasing his knowledge, the centuries of travel have merely increased the hunter’s desire for stable structures that could resolve his restlessness:

Ich bin Mensch wie Du aber um die paar Jahrhunderte ungeduldiger, um die ich älter bin. (KA6, 97)

The hunter thereby implicitly acknowledges an insight into the central paradox of his ‘failed’ death. Gracchus’ belief in progressive motion towards a goal – his ‘Ungeduld’ –

leads to his death, and his inability to shed his world-view, i.e. his mental immobility, confines him to his present state without any hope for resolution of his restlessness.<sup>49</sup>

At the end of the text, the hunter returns to a well-known coping strategy: he finds a scapegoat, rather literally:

Bis zum fünfundzwanzigsten Jahr habe ich dort gejagt. Hätte mich nicht die Gemse verlockt – so, nun weißt Du es – hätte ich ein langes schönes Jägerleben gehabt, aber die Gemse lockte mich, ich stürzte ab und schlug mich auf Steinen tot. Frag nicht weiter. (KA6, 100)

Even more clearly than in the first fragment, the hunter's attempt at shifting the blame for his present state merely emphasises the central self-delusion of his existence: the 'Verlockung' lies in his own impulse for goal-directed movement. Yet the most interesting aspect of this account lies in the fact that it betrays a tendency in the hunter which negates his ostensible understanding of life and death as parts of a universal 'Ordnung'. The hunter's statement resonates with the comment of the "Hausvater" on being in the world as a process of 'zerreiben': the "Hausvater" betrays a tendency that experiences the stable course of life *dans le vrai* and the natural process of making room within the chain of generations as a process of gradually grinding oneself to dust. In the hunter's statement, a similar rejection of the supposedly natural order of life and death is grasped in the violent image of falling and 'zerschlagen'. Fulfilling one's duty in life does not lead to a sense of unity and completion, but – literally – to self-dispersal. In the second fragment, the hunter 'verblutete' (KA6, 45), which creates an even stronger image of dissolution.

---

<sup>49</sup> Haase comments on the hunter's 'blindness' as a 'failure to undergo self-examination'. Haase 1978, p.323.

As usual, this thought is immediately brought to a halt: ‘Frag nicht weiter’, the hunter says and once again seems to distract from his previous line of thought by the theatrical gesture of emphatically asserting his ignorance: ‘Hier bin ich, tot, tot, tot. Weiß nicht warum ich hier bin’ – only to embark on a new attempt at recounting his death in a way which asserts that ‘alles war in Ordnung’ (KA6, 100).

Strikingly, the first, second and fourth fragments end at the moment when the hunter’s account reaches the ‘kritischer Moment’ at which he believes the ‘Ordnung’ to have been disrupted. This breakdown of the text can be read in different ways: either Gracchus does not know what happened – which would confirm his statement that ‘ich weiß nicht warum ich hier bin’ – or the story breaks down because the hunter is unable to accept a conclusion to his line of thought that challenges his integrated world-view. In the light of the previous discussion, the latter seems more likely. Identifying a critical moment would mean reaching some form of closure – to establish a coherent ‘myth’. All of the hunter’s strategies are directed at integrating his fate into some form of myth that would allow him to maintain his sense of ‘Ordnung’: either the hunter’s fate makes sense within some kind of order that he cannot grasp, or he has fallen out of the ‘Ordnung’ of the world through no fault of his own. Even an understanding of his fate as an exclusion from the order of the world would mean that this order could remain intact.<sup>50</sup>

The multiplicity of strategies directed at establishing such order, however, betrays a tendency in Gracchus that negates any sense of stability and closure: his attempt at

---

<sup>50</sup> This strategy is also applied by Gregor Samsa, whose ‘Meinung darüber, daß er verschwinden müsse, war womöglich noch entschiedener als die seiner Schwester’ (KA1, 152). Agreeing to his exclusion from the world of conventional order appears like the only way of maintaining its stability.

creating stability merely results in a 'Zerstreuung' of 'verschiedene Erklärungen'. Unable either to establish a sense of 'Ordnung' or to move beyond the boundaries of rationally graspable 'sense', the text ends in a form of 'Schwebezustand' of incompleteness that mirrors the hunter's state.

The four texts revolving around the hunter 'Gracchus'-theme remain fragmentary. This characteristic has given cause to readings of the texts as failed attempts at telling a story. Most notably, Malcolm Pasley reads Odradek, this figure comprising of 'abgerissene, alte, aneinander geknotete, aber auch ineinander verfitzte Zwiirnstücke' (KA1, 222) as a comment on the 'Gracchus'-fragments.<sup>51</sup> Reading the fragments from this perspective, however, would be to take a teleological standpoint, which leads to the conclusion that the fragments are an 'aborted story',<sup>52</sup> failed attempts at creating a coherent text.

The previous analyses, however, lead to the conclusion that it is more fruitful to see the four fragments as imaginative explorations of the possibilities and varieties emerging from a central thematic complex that revolves around an experience of movement, stasis, stability and instability.

---

<sup>51</sup> Pasley not only refers to the fragmentary character of the texts, but also extends this judgment to their supposedly 'heterogenen gedanklichen Inhalt'. See Pasley 1969, p.23. Similarly, Binder can find no 'organisch durchlaufende Sinnebene' in these texts, which leads him to conclude that the 'Gracchus'-fragments are impossible to interpret 'zusammenhängend'. See Binder 1983, p.258., but the analysis undertaken here hopefully shows that the texts present the reader with a striking coherence of theme and form.

<sup>52</sup> Steinberg 1978, p.307.

I do not want to push the analogy so far as to say that Gracchus is ‘in seiner Art abgeschlossen’,<sup>53</sup> as this would be to assume that Kafka’s fragmentary writing is, in a way, conceptual. I nevertheless advocate a view on these texts as illustrations of a peculiar imaginative coherence of theme and form:<sup>54</sup> the texts revolve around the impossibility of reaching ‘closure’ by means of conventional, rational, progressive motion – and a story with a beginning and an end is, after all, conventional.

An analysis of dynamic patterns in the ‘Gracchus’-fragments support the central idea of this study: that Kafka’s writings revolve around a central experience of being in the world that is grasped imaginatively in movement images. In these fragments, we can also observe a further expansion of Kafka’s imaginative range. In the relationship between hunter and burgomaster, restlessness about being in society is extended onto the level of more fundamental conceptions of life and death. In what seems like a parallel gesture of expansion, the coping strategies applied by Gracchus equally point towards ‘greater’ conceptions of stability and completeness that go beyond the idea of a stable individual self. The hunter’s admittedly unconvincing remarks about a potentially mythical dimension to his existence introduce the possibility that the individual’s experience of dispersal and instability may ‘make sense’ within an overarching structure.

The dynamic patterns at the heart of the hunter’s fate – fall and eternal journey – have given rise to readings of the fragments within the context of another ‘grand narrative’: the

---

<sup>53</sup> Haase treats the ‘Gracchus’-story as a ‘completed composition’, albeit based on a reading of the text as presented in the Schocken edition, which could not provide him with the insight into the variations of the texts as they are accessible to readers of the *Kritische Ausgabe*.

<sup>54</sup> This coherence may provide some insight into Erwin Steinberg’s question why ‘fragments of a short story (are) treated so respectfully despite their being only fragments’. Steinberg 1978, p.310.

Fall of Man. Hans Ternes, for example, considers the ‘Gracchus’-fragments a kind of antetype to the ‘Aphorismen’:

From the standpoint of time, one would expect the theoretical statements to precede the narrative illustration. Kafka, however, must have been aware of the ideas expressed in his “Reflections” long before he actually wrote them down, so that the slightly later appearance of the aphorisms is not at all inconsistent with our interpretation.<sup>55</sup>

Rainer Nägele similarly emphasizes the question of original sin as the core both of the ‘Gracchus’-fragments and the aphorisms, stating that:

Immer wieder versucht Kafka hier, dem biblischen Mythos vom Sündenfall auf den Grund zu kommen.<sup>56</sup>

Such statements suggest a teleological approach to Kafka’s later writings. In the light of the previous analysis, however, I consider it reasonable to turn Nägele’s assumption around by posing the question whether Kafka’s reflections on an undead hunter as well as his reflections on original sin may be ways of grasping a more general experience: the question of the possibility of stability that had troubled him since at least 1910.

---

<sup>55</sup> Hans Ternes, ‘Kafka’s *Hunter Gracchus*: An Interpretation’, in: *Probleme der Komparatistik und Interpretation. Festschrift für André von Gronicka* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978), pp. 216-223, p.222.

<sup>56</sup> Nägele 1974, p.67. Gerhard Kurz analyses the text similarly within the context of this ‘grand narrative’, arguing that the link with the Fall of man ‘gilt mehr oder weniger für alle Geschichten Kafkas’. See Gerhard Kurz, *Traum-Schrecken: Kafkas literarische Existenzanalyse* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980).

#### 4. UNITY OR CONSTRUCTION – THE PROBLEM OF INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL ORDER IN 'BEIM BAU DER CHINESISCHEN MAUER'

Having followed Gracchus' eternal journey over earthly waters, we can appreciate how productively Kafka expands the range of conjectures to be drawn from the central experience of restlessness. Maintaining a remarkable level of imaginative coherence, Kafka uses images of stability and instability, movement and stasis to grasp an intrinsically problematic experience of being in the world. At the same time, he projects the experience of restlessness onto different levels of being, thus exploring the variety of imaginative possibilities emerging from the complex inner dynamics of this conflict. Images of movement, as we have seen, provide a powerful tool for exploring questions concerning individual and social existence as well as the grand narratives of life and death. At the heart of these explorations remains the experience of a challenge to the regular and repeated dynamic patterns constitutive of life in accordance with social convention and natural order by eruptive, irrational and intrinsically unconventional dynamic forces. This disruption can take the form of physical impulses, peculiar visitor figures such as the "Bauernfänger", or a series of downright extra-ordinary events, such as the encounter with ghosts, animated objects or the hunter's experience of his 'failed' death.

A central characteristic of experiences of restlessness discussed throughout this thesis is the complex and ambiguous relation between external events and inner processes. As observed movement in the world gives rise to reflection – *Betrachtung* – the movement of thought produced by the protagonists always has a dynamic quality in itself. Particularly throughout the visitor stories there emerges a view of restlessness as an intellectual

problem. Like most of Kafka's protagonists, the individuals in these texts appear as representatives of a consciousness that is – or appears to be – firmly rooted within a framework of socially determined patterns of thought. Particularly in the figures of Blumfeld, the “Hausvater” and Gracchus, external markers of the individual's supposedly integrated existence – individual routine and professional hierarchies, the social order of the ‘Haus’ and the social integration associated with fulfilling one's duty – are also expressive of protagonists' habitual patterns of thought. Unable to conceive of the extraordinary experience to which they are subject in any other way than as disruptions, these protagonists generally apply mental defence- or coping strategies directed at ‘making sense’ of the experience, i.e. to integrate it into familiar categories. These conventional strategies of thought, however, fail to impose stability. Detailed analyses of the rhetorical structures expressive of mental movements throughout these texts reveal elements of instability that emerge within protagonists' supposedly stable thought patterns. Sudden breaks and deferrals suggest a tendency at work in individuals' minds that subverts their supposedly integrated world-view, gradually deconstructing it as a form of self-delusion and mental immobilisation in the name of ‘order’ – but at the cost of repression. In the dialogue between the hunter and the burgomaster, for example, this inner conflict is realised in the interplay of challenge and withdrawal – a pattern of ‘Schaukelbewegung’, that can be found in various forms in numerous texts by Kafka.

Yet while the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ that governs these texts is expressive of protagonists' intensely felt uncertainty about existence, the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ that we perform when reading and re-reading texts provides us with a sense of coherence. The seemingly

unproblematic image of the child seated on a swing from the beginning of *Betrachtung* can be seen to function as a metonymy or metaphor for the dynamic patterns not only of the early collection but also of the texts discussed in this second part of the thesis. Although the literal ‘Schaukel’ disappears from view after that initial story, the dynamic of the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ remains a central characteristic of Kafka’s imaginative grasp on experiences of being in the world. In ‘Blumfeld, ein älterer Junggeselle’, for example, the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ is maintained in the interlocution of external ‘plot’ and inner processes that brings to the surface Blumfeld’s state of repression. In the ‘Gracchus’-fragments, too, the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ is not only present in the dialogical dynamics of challenge and withdrawal: maintaining a striking coherence of figural, thematic and narrative manifestations of restlessness, Gracchus’ existential conflict of ‘Aufschwung’ and ‘Erdenschwere’ is also linked to an image of physical movement that reaches back to the early collection: the oscillating motion of ascent and fall on the eternally frustrating ‘Treppe’ that entices him upwards only to leave him exactly where he was.

### **‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’**

I will conclude my examination of Kafka’s figurations of restlessness with an analysis of yet another act in this ‘drama’: in the narrative ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’, written around the same time as the ‘Gracchus’-fragments, the dynamic patterns that have formed the focal point of this study emerge, I believe, with particular clarity.

The text presents itself as a historical account of the building of the Great Wall of China. The thematic focus of the text thus lies on a dynamic process that incidentally echoes movement patterns which are central to texts discussed previously: invasion and defence, movements within a structure and beyond it, construction and destabilisation. Over the course of the text, these images of physical movement are linked to general themes of existence, thus providing a vehicle for exploring not only the great building project but the themes of nation-building and ideology-construction associated with it.

The narrative flow of this text, however, emerges from the account given by a personal narrator. This perspective draws attention to the mental movements as expressed in historiography. Throughout the narrative, such movements are constructed with particular precision, which suggests that here, the perspective on restlessness as an intellectual problem is explored more prominently than in texts discussed previously. As the narrator reflects on the problems of existence in the world as it is presented to him, Kafka explores the potential of movements of the mind to construct and challenge stability.<sup>57</sup> A close analysis of the interlocation of dynamic patterns on different levels of the text can be expected to bring to the surface the striking degree of this imaginative coherence and the peculiar way in which questions of individual order and social existence – the relation between self and world – are addressed here.

---

<sup>57</sup> The assumption that the form of the account and the themes it evolves around are linked in a meaningful way has inspired much critical commentary. Christian Goodden and John Rignall, for example, have provided valuable starting points for an analysis of patterns underlying physical and mental movement in the text. See Christian Goodden, 'The Great Wall of China: The Elaboration of an Intellectual Dilemma', in *On Kafka. Semi-Centenary Perspectives*, ed. by Franz Kuna (London: Paul Elek, 1976), pp.128-145; John M. Rignall, 'History and Consciousness in "Beim Bau Der Chinesischen Mauer"', in *Paths and Labyrinths*, ed. by Joseph P. Stern and John J. White. (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1985) pp.111-126.

It would exceed the limits of the current study to attempt an exhaustive account of every narrative detail in this complex text. In order to appreciate both the coherence on the level of rhetorical detail and content on one hand, and the links between general themes and modes of narration on the other, I will therefore once again follow Kafka's recommended technique of 'nahe herantreten' while also stepping back. This objective necessarily results in a circular reading of the text, but also in a 'Schaukelbewegung' between micro analyses of the 'construction' of the account and explorations of the general themes pursued by the narrator. To begin at the most obvious place, I shall take a close look at the opening section.

### **'Natürlich entstanden auf diese Weise viele große Lücken' – introducing the concept of completion and opening gaps**

The narrator of 'Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer' presents himself as a historian who provides an account of the building project. In his opening sentence, the narrator conjures up an image of completion as he confidently declares the wall to be 'beendet':

Die chinesische Mauer ist an ihrer nördlichsten Stelle beendet worden.  
(KA6, 65)

This brief sentence can be taken to establish a stable spatial and temporal structure: the construction of the Wall has been ended 'an ihrer nördlichsten Stelle', which suggests that the building is a stable structure in space that has been built over a defined period of time. The use of the perfect tense further invites a reading of this sentence as an account of a

building process that has been completed in the past, emphasising both the dynamic element of ‘werden’ and the sense of completion associated with ‘beendet’. Having determined the end of the project – and thus of the account on which he has embarked – leads us to believe that the narrator’s report, too, will be linear and progressive – an end-determined narrative that mirrors the assumed dynamics of the building process. Yet although this sentence invites us to read it in terms of closure, the verb ‘beendet’ can also mean ‘abgebrochen’. As early as in the first sentence, the narrator’s account contains an element of uncertainty and ambivalence. We also know, after all, that his account, too will be ‘abgebrochen’ rather than ‘beendet’.<sup>58</sup>

With this opening, the narrator supposedly establishes himself as an authority on the Wall. His account of the particulars of the building process is introduced with the assertive expression ‘es geschah dies so, daß’ (KA6, 65), which suggests that we are in the hands of an expert. This impression is further cemented throughout the account as the narrator credits himself not only with the first hand experience of the ‘Erbauer’ (KA6, 66), but also with the authority of the historian. Declaring that ‘ich habe mich, schon teilweise während des Mauerbaues und nachher bis heute fast ausschließlich mit vergleichender Völkergeschichte beschäftigt’ (KA6, 73), the narrator presents himself in the light of academic credibility – a credibility that has been repeatedly questioned by the many academic readers of this attempt at historiography, not least because of the various

---

<sup>58</sup> John Rignall, who analyses the gradual destabilisation of the narrator’s account during the opening paragraph with relatively great detail, does not observe that elements of instability are already contained in this first sentence. See Rignall 1985, pp.116-118.

‘incoherences’<sup>59</sup> with which the account is interspersed. These ‘incoherences’ emerge through the interplay of stabilising and destabilising tendencies:

Von Südosten und Südwesten wurde der Bau herangeführt und hier vereinigt. Dieses System des Teilbaues wurde auch im Kleinen innerhalb der zwei großen Arbeitsheere, des Ost- und des Westheeres befolgt. Es geschah dies so, daß Gruppen von etwa zwanzig Arbeitern gebildet wurden, welche eine Teilmauer von etwa fünfhundert Metern Länge auszuführen hatten, eine Nachbargruppe baute ihnen dann eine Mauer in gleicher Länge entgegen. Nachdem dann aber die Vereinigung vollzogen war, wurde nicht etwa der Bau am Ende dieser tausend Meter wieder fortgesetzt, vielmehr wurden die Arbeitergruppen wieder in ganz andere Gegenden zum Mauerbau verschickt. (KA6, 65)

The narrator sets out to describe how the completion of the building is achieved by connecting individual pieces of Wall in a process of ‘Vereinigung’. This assertion of stability, however, is subverted by images of incompleteness and disintegration. The ‘System’ followed here is a ‘Teilbau’, containing sections of ‘Teilmauer’ that – once completed – are not ‘fortgesetzt’ but abandoned (temporarily?) as the workers are ‘verschickt’. The narrator’s inquiry into the building process eventually leads to the observation that the ‘Teilbau’ not only created ‘Lücken’ but that these may have been ‘überhaupt nicht verbaut’. Here, not only is the concept of a complete Wall destabilised, but also the assumed linear progression of historical events: some gaps in the building may only have been filled ‘nachdem der Mauerbau schon als vollendet verkündigt worden war’ (KA6, 65).

This interplay of images suggestive of completion and images of fragmentation introduces an element of instability into the narrator’s account, gradually frustrating the expectations raised in the opening sentence. The narrator’s use of words such as ‘aber’, ‘nicht etwa’

---

<sup>59</sup> Rignall 1985, p.117.

and ‘vielmehr’ further contributes to the impression that the building process frustrates expectations of linearity and completion. Eventually, the narrator even has to admit that his key information on the Wall is based on hearsay, impossible to be tested ‘mit eigenen Augen’ (KA6, 65).

The narrator’s self-understanding as a historian assigns him a clear role within society. Similar to the “Hausvater” and the hunter, he attributes to his role a form of duty – the telling of national history. As he sets out to do so, however, he both discovers and reveals gaps (‘Lücken’) in the literal sense as well as in the assumed historical continuum – but also in the intellectual and emotional foundations of the wall. ‘Lücken’ have been found to define the character of this text, not least because they describe the narrator’s failed account at telling a story.<sup>60</sup> The beginning of the account is thus reminiscent of texts discussed previously in that the narrative impetus lies in an experience of restlessness and the individual’s response to it: we are following the movements performed by a mind that tries to ‘make sense’ of an experience of instability – a movement expressed in historiography.

A micro analysis of the interplay of elements of stability and instability revealed on the thematic and formal level of this opening sets the scene for the overall dynamics of the narrative: the narrator touches on various themes related to the building of the Wall and the nation of the Chinese. These investigations are directed at ‘making sense’ of the experience of restlessness which motivates the account. Yet as he seeks to ‘make sense’,

---

<sup>60</sup> This link has made ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’ a popular example for readings of Kafka’s stories as a representation of the process of writing. See for example Annette Schütterle, *Franz Kafkas Oktavhefte. Ein Schreibprozeß als “System des Teilbaues”* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2002).

the narrator gradually reveals not only the dynamic processes at the heart of the building project, but also the dynamic tendencies at the heart of the national ideology governing the lives of the Chinese – and, ultimately, the dynamic pulls at work in the narrator’s own mind. Like most of Kafka’s protagonists, the ‘historian’ gets more than he bargained for.

**‘Gegen wen sollte die große Mauer schützen?’ – a pattern of invasion and defence**

As the narrator tries to ‘make sense’ of the building project, he explores possible reasons for the building itself. Quoting a commonly accepted explanation, the narrator describes the building as a defence against the ‘Nordvölker’:

Die Mauer war doch, wie allgemein verbreitet wird und bekannt ist, zum Schutz gegen die Nordvölker gedacht. (KA6, 65)

In this statement, the function of the Wall seems fairly straightforward: to provide a spatial boundary between the ‘Volk’ of the Chinese and the nomads in the North of the ‘Reich’ and to protect the Chinese against invasion, which introduces a clear dynamic pattern: the Wall, it appears, functions primarily as an inhibitor to movement from the outside to the inside. Over the course of the account, the narrator cements the opposition between the two social groups by describing them in terms of diametrically opposed forms of movement. Life in the Chinese Empire is characterised as a stable existence within the more narrowly defined ‘Heimat’:

Warum also, da es sich so verhält, verlassen wir die Heimat, den Fluß und die Brücken, die Mutter und den Vater, das weinende Weib, die lehrbedürftigen Kinder [...] unser kleines Gewerbe [...] und das Gebet das der Hausvater am Abend im Kreise der Seinigen sagt [...]. (KA6, 72)

In this description, the narrator creates an image of stability and continuity that bears a strong resemblance to the ordered family world of the 'Sorge des Hausvaters'. In this case, the 'Kreis der Seinigen' describes the stable circle of the family, but also the cycle of generations represented by father, mother, children and grandparents. The stable spatial and social order of the 'Haus' is mirrored in the 'Dorf' and the landscape dominating the immediate surrounding of the individual: 'Brücke' and 'Fluß' are signifiers of what the Chinese people perceive as their 'Heimat'.

Defining the supposedly invasive enemies as 'Nomaden' (KA6, 66) from the North, the narrator establishes them as antipodes to the concept of 'Heimat'. Not only do they come from a sphere distinctly other than the Chinese Empire – the 'Norden' –, their nomadic nature also means that they do not have a permanent place of residence to give their existence a stable point of reference. In the Chinese imagination, the nomads' apparent lack of stable structures<sup>61</sup> makes them seem rootless and in constant motion. Fast and unpredictable like 'Heuschrecken' (KA6, 66), they 'hetzen und jagen' on 'wilden Pferden' (KA6, 72). The motion of the nomads recalls the kind of movement described in 'Wunsch, Indianer zu werden', which highlights the impression that these horse-people represent an

---

<sup>61</sup> In the other 'Nomaden'-text Kafka wrote around this time, 'Ein altes Blatt', this challenge to common structures of stability becomes even more explicit. Here, the nomads not only lack a stable place of residence, they negate the stability of any form of 'Haus': 'Ihrer Natur entsprechend lagern sie unter freiem Himmel, denn Wohnhäuser verabscheuen sie' (KA6, 81). Furthermore, their behaviour radically opposes social conventions in the town they invade. The narrator's statement that they 'haben kaum eine eigene [Sprache]' (KA6, 81) reflects the more fundamental doubt about whether they have any social structures.

alternative way of living. Within Chinese consciousness, however, such movements cannot be perceived in any other way than as ‘hetzen’.<sup>62</sup> Yet although the narrator’s descriptions of the supposed opposition between the Chinese and the nomads echo visitor stories throughout the texts discussed so far, it has to be remarked that he does not encounter the kind of extra-ordinary event so characteristic of these visitor-stories: no ghosts turn up in his bedroom, no Odradek falls down the stairs in his house, and as far as we can see, there are no particularly abnormal events taking place in China. The contrast between movement patterns assigned to the Chinese and the dynamic force associated with the nomads, however, links the potential invaders to the irrational, ‘unbegreiflich’ (KA6, 66) and uncontrollable dynamic forces erupting into other protagonists’ lives. While initially describing the danger coming from the nomads as a historical fact, however, the narrator’s inquiry into their nature leads him to admit that there is no evidence of their actual existence: they are peculiarly immaterial.

The narrator states that ‘ich stamme aus dem südöstlichen China’ where no northern tribes could ever pose a threat. His knowledge of the nomads is thus derived exclusively from books that show figures ‘mit hoch zugespitzten Zähnen’ and ‘verkniffenen Augen, die schon nach dem Raub zu schielen scheinen, den das Maul zermalmen und zerreißen wird’ (KA6, 72). The narrator’s claim that these images are ‘wahrheitsgetreu’ is strangely at odds with the fairy-tale character of this description. At the same time, the statement can

---

<sup>62</sup> A similar ‘interpretation’ can be found in *Der Proceß*, where Josef K. perceives those who live different from what he perceives to be the ‘normal’ course of things in terms of what Walser calls a ‘Feindwelt’, i.e. in terms of chase and combat, as ‘hetzen’, ‘Kampf’ and ‘Niederlage’. When commenting on ‘Ein altes Blatt’, Rolf Goebel states that the nomads’ existence is ‘diametrically opposed to the Chinese people’s longing for social stability and humanity’. See Rolf Goebel, *Constructing China. Kafka’s Orientalist Discourse* (Columbia: Camden House, 1997), p. 97. This perspective shows that the nomads primarily represent an alternative way of living that within the Chinese world-view cannot be understood in other terms than as primitive and disruptive.

be read as an inadvertent admission of the actual effect of the nomads' existence – be it concrete or at work merely in the imagination of the Chinese who 'aufseufzen in unserer friedlichen Laube' (KA6, 72): the nomads represent powerful forces that challenge concepts of social and spatial stability.

To read the narrator's comments on the nomads in the light of the visitor stories points us towards the ambivalent relation between this supposedly external threat and the Chinese. Throughout his account, the narrator's thoughts reveal that the challenge posed by the nomads may lie in the way in which their allegedly 'Heuschrecken'-like movements resonate with a tendency in the Chinese that is at odds with the ideology of stability and stasis governing their lives. When conjuring up an image of the 'Heimat', the narrator imagines it with 'Brücke' and 'Fluß'. His seemingly stable concept of the familiar landscape surrounding the 'Dorf' thus already contains elements which point towards forms of movement directed beyond the reach of the contained social and spatial sphere represented by the 'Hausvater'. The narrator's description implicitly contains the possibility for movement over the bridge and along the flowing water, following the 'Schiffer, die doch nicht nur unser Flößchen, sondern auch die heiligen Ströme befahren' (KA6, 74). As it turns out, the image not only contains hints at a subtly stirring 'Fernweh', but a powerful dynamic force at work in human nature:

Das menschliche Wesen, leichtfertig in seinem Grunde, von der Natur des auffliegenden Staubes, verträgt keine Fesselung, fesselt es sich selbst, wird es bald wahnsinnig an den Fesseln zu rütteln anfangen und Mauer Kette und sich selbst in alle Himmelsrichtungen zerreißen. (KA6, 70)

This 'Natur des auffliegenden Staubes' opposes diametrically existence within the stable spatial and social order of the 'Heimat', negating it as a form of 'Fesselung' – as static confinement. At the same time, however, the narrator's reflections on the possibility of a nomadic invasion not only lead him to the conclusion that this threat is fundamentally unconvincing – his thoughts suggest that within the Chinese Empire any release of dynamic tendencies is impossible, whether 'Heuschrecken'-like or otherwise:

Aber mehr wissen wir von diesen Nordländern nicht, gesehen haben wir sie nicht, und bleiben wir in unserm Dorfe, werden wir sie niemals sehn, selbst wenn sie auf ihren wilden Pferden geradeaus zu uns hetzen und jagen; zu groß ist das Land und läßt sie nicht zu uns, in die wilde Luft werden sie sich verrennen. (KA6, 72)

Within the vast space that is China, the movements of the nomads are bound to lose any direction or meaning. The immensity of the territory makes any attempt at invasion pointless, since it will run into 'leere Luft'. As he describes the opposition between the nomads' gallop into dispersal and the static Chinese who 'bleiben in unserm Dorfe', the narrator thus creates a peculiar image of the possibility of movement within the Chinese Empire: the 'Reich', it appears, is so vast that any form of movement going beyond the stable circle of the 'Heimat' is associated with the likelihood of 'sich verrennen'. The only alternative, it seems, is stasis.

In the narrator's descriptions of the 'Reich', the Chinese Empire takes on such vast proportions that it gains the character of a country in a fairy tale:

So groß ist unser Land, kein Märchen reicht an seine Größe, kaum der Himmel umspannt es. (KA6, 74)

The fantastical proportions of the 'Reich' are accompanied by a complete loss of any sense of time: historical events are perceived in the wrong order and the course of life and death gets confused. In the minds of the Chinese, time seems to perform surreal somersaults:

So verfährt also das Volk mit den Vergangenen, die Gegenwärtigen aber mischt es unter die Toten. (KA6, 76)

The Chinese lack any temporal and spatial reference points, which appears to result in a fundamental 'Verwirrung' about time and space, life and death as 'Peking selbst ist den Leuten im Dorfe viel fremder als das jenseitige Leben' (KA6, 77). The temporal and spatial confusion is complemented by an unstable sense of the larger social 'Ordnung' surrounding the supposedly secure 'Heimat'. The 'Reich' is comprised of 'fünfhundert Provinzen' with 'zehntausend Dörfern' (KA6, 78) – numbers that do not so much express statistical exactness as the experience of a multiplicity that evades any sense of unity.

This link between the size of the Empire and the Chinese' inability to conceive of stable social structures finds its most explicit expression in the passage that Kafka included in the collection 'Ein Landarzt' under the title 'Eine kaiserliche Botschaft'. In the description of the 'Bote' whose attempts at crossing the impossibly vast distance between 'Kaiser' and 'Untertan' are doomed to fail, the inability of the Chinese even to conceive of a reliable connection with their Emperor is expressed in an image reminiscent of the

nomads' dispersal. In the Chinese Empire, not only do invaders never reach their goal: it seems to frustrate any sense of goal-directed movement or unity so that both the leader and the villager become 'nichtig'.

Thus, the narrator's descriptions progressively destabilise an understanding of the 'Reich' as a stable structure capable of supporting the desire for unity expressed in the Chinese attachment to their immediate 'Heimat'. The Chinese' existence within this immediate circle does not appear as a representation of their integration within the 'Reich' as a whole. Instead, the limitation of their existence to the 'Heimat' appears to be a strategy directed at avoiding a threatening experience of 'Zerstreuung'. The dynamic image used here recalls the very personal experience of dispersal captured in 'Zerstreutes Hinausschaun'. In 'Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer', the same sensation is projected onto the level of a collective experience. The deliberate repression of a dynamic impulse in the name of 'Ordnung' can be read as an extrapolation of the strategies applied by figures like Blumfeld onto the level of a collective strategy. The Chinese obsession with the nomads can thus be read as a powerful mechanism of repression: 'bleiben wir im Dorfe', the narrator states, 'werden wir sie niemals sehn' (KA6, 72). To remain in the 'Heimat' is to remain safe from the 'Nomads' as well as from the experience of dispersal they reflect back on those who fear this very tendency within themselves.

### **‘Einheit, Einheit!’ – the ‘System des Teilbaues’ as a collective coping strategy**

Insight into the conflicting dynamic pulls experienced by the Chinese motivates a change of perspective when exploring the building project: the dynamic processes of interest in this building project seem to take place within the Wall rather than beyond it.

The project of building the Wall is ostensibly directed at defending the ‘Reich’ against an invasion from the outside. The impression that the nomads’ movements correspond to an experience central to the Chinese sense of being in the world, however, suggests that the building of the Wall is in reality a form of collective coping strategy directed at resolving restlessness: an attempt at creating a spatial and social ‘Ordnung’ that will integrate the opposing dynamic pulls experienced by the Chinese.

The Wall represents the creation of a spatial border to the ‘Reich’ – one that will satisfy the desire to believe that the life of the Chinese people can be contained within a structure that is both spatial and social. The Wall as an assertion of this order thus becomes a symbol of the ‘Volk’:

[...] Einheit! Einheit! Brust an Brust, ein Reigen des Volkes, Blut, nicht mehr eingesperrt im kärglichen Kreislauf des Körpers, sondern süß rollend und doch wiederkehrend durch das unendliche China. (KA6, 68)

In the words used by the narrator, the Wall appears as a ‘Volkswerk’ in a double sense: built by the people, the building process also generates a sense of national identity that the completed wall is intended to make concrete. Here, the physical process of building a wall

around the empire is associated with the creation of a stable sense of ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’. The narrator’s use of organic images illustrates the unifying effect he associates with this building: the concept of the individual ‘Kreislauf des Körpers’ is replaced with a greater organism as the narrator conjures up the image of a ‘Volkskörper’.<sup>63</sup> While the narrator’s description of the five hundred times ten thousand villages creates an impression of dispersal, the encircled ‘Reich’ is expected to contain this multiplicity within a greater whole. The ‘Volkswerk’ thus becomes a symbol for the individual’s desire for integration in the organism of the ‘Volk’. The feared experience of ‘sich verrennen’ is evaded in the motion of ‘sich [...] auf einen Zweck hin sich zu sammeln’ (KA6, 70).

In terms of movement, the concept of ‘Volk’ and ‘Reich’ as an ‘organism’ provides a way of releasing the desire for motion beyond the borders of the immediate ‘Heimat’ while at the same time containing it within a greater whole.<sup>64</sup> The desire for expansion, if directed at building the Wall, is intended to displace the fear of ‘Zersprengen’. Blood no longer flows within the ‘kärghlichen Kreislauf des Körpers’ but becomes part of a greater circulation: ‘das unendliche China’. Describing the motion as ‘rollend’ grasps the way in which the duality of dynamic tendencies experienced by the Chinese is imagined to be contained within the ‘System des Teilbaus’ (KA6, 67).

---

<sup>63</sup> Ritchie Robertson recognises that the concept of the ‘Volk’ as an organism united by ‘primäre Elemente’ such as ‘Blut’ echoes the rhetoric used in Martin Buber’s ‘Der Jude’. The use and abuse of this concept in different political environments is well-known, but what strikes me about Kafka’s image is the fact that he makes both the dynamic and the containing elements of the ‘Blutkreislauf’ explicit. See Robertson 1985, p.145.

<sup>64</sup> Christian Goodden aptly comments on the double function of the wall as a containing structure directed at ‘stav[ing] off discomposure’ (134) by serving as a ‘defining agent’ (135) for individual and national identity, while also containing the dynamic element of the ‘quest’ (134). Goodden 1976.

According to the narrator, the ‘Chinesische Mauer’ was not built in one go, but in sections of five hundred metres. What appears like a surprising system might make more sense if it is seen as a way of balancing the two opposing tendencies at the heart of restlessness. Rather than creating the desired sense of unity and stability, any attempt at building the Wall in one uninterrupted process would lead to a form of endless movement reminiscent of the nomads’ undirected lives:

[...] die Hoffnungslosigkeit solcher fleißigen aber selbst in einem langen Menschenleben nicht zum Ziele führenden Arbeit hätte sie verzweifelt und vor allem wertloser für die Arbeit gemacht. (KA6, 67)

The entirety of the Wall cannot be imagined by the individual and is thus incompatible with the desire for stability and closure. The ‘System des Teilbaus’, however, seems to provide a solution to this problem. By building the Wall in sections that can be completed within a few years, both the desire for the restful ‘Leben in der Heimat’ and the impulse to move ‘weit, weit’ into open space can allegedly be satisfied in an oscillating motion of advance and retreat:

Deshalb wählte man das System des Teilbaus, fünfhundert Meter Mauer konnten etwa in fünf Jahren fertiggestellt werden, dann waren zwar die Führer in der Regel zu Tode erschöpft, hatten alles Zutrauen zu sich, zum Bau, zur Welt verloren, wurden aber, während sie noch im Hochgefühl des Vereinigungsfestes der tausend Meter Mauer standen weit, weit verschickt [...], alles dieses besänftigte ihre Ungeduld, das ruhige Leben der Heimat in der sie einige Zeit verbrachten kräftigte sie [...]. (KA6, 67-68)

This description of the physical ‘Schaukelbewegung’ associated with the ‘Teilbau’ further contributes to the impression that the building project is a collective coping strategy

directed at resolving restlessness. The narrator describes this project in terms which suggest that here the force of the ‘Natur des fliegenden Staubes’ is potentially reconciled with the pull towards the ‘Heimat’ via a perpetual motion that nevertheless provides the individual with a sense of stability. Like blood flowing through an organism, movement and stasis, ‘Zerstreuung’ and ‘sammeln’ are – in theory – to be contained within the greater whole of the ‘Volkswerk’.

Throughout the texts analysed so far, ‘Schaukelbewegungen’ do not tend to be associated with the kind of celebratory exuberance the narrator attempts to communicate. Instead, ‘Schaukelbewegungen’ appear generally as bad copies of an idea of perfect motion in perfect rest as represented by Zeno’s flying arrow. The project of building the Chinese Wall is no exception to this rule. The narrator’s account reveals that the Great Wall fails in fact to unite the conflicting tendencies in many respects. Rather than providing him with a way of resolving restlessness, the narrator’s thoughts point him towards ever new gaps not only in the fabric but in the very conception of the Wall.

First of all, how is a Wall with holes going to protect the Chinese against movement from outside?

Wie kann aber eine Mauer schützen die nicht zusammenhängend ist.  
(KA6, 65)

The building of the Wall as a collection of disconnected pieces – which gives it an appearance suspiciously reminiscent of an Odradek – clearly does not provide a form of

enclosure and protection against irrational and eruptive forces, be they imagined or concrete. A recursion to the initially assumed purpose of the Wall as a protection against invasion from the outside supports this. As before, the coping strategy applied by the Chinese is challenged by an imagined confrontation with movements performed by the nomads:

Diese in öder Gegend verlassen stehenden Mauerteile können ja immer wieder leicht von den Nomaden zerstört werden, zumal diese damals geängstigt durch den Mauerbau mit unbegreiflicher Schnelligkeit wie Heuschrecken ihre Wohnsitze wechselten und deshalb vielleicht einen bessern Überblick über die Baufortschritte hatten als selbst wir die Erbauer. (KA6, 65-66)

The narrator formulates his fear that the nomads, instead of being fended off by the Wall, merely find a goal for their destructive tendencies in this vulnerable structure. Rather than limiting their movements, the boundary of the Wall appears likely to make the nomads' movements even more threatening. Such fears are in line with assumptions about the relation between the Chinese and the nomads as a variation on the visitor theme. The Chinese are haunted by the idea that their 'Volkswerk' is easily brushed aside by disruptive forces. The fact that the nomads are imagined to merely destroy the 'Mauerteile' without making any attempt at invasion supports the assumption that the Chinese gesture of self-defence is not a gesture directed against external threats. The image of the nomads' simple strokes of destruction appears like a constant and mocking reminder of the feeble stability to be gained from such attempts at creating unity.

Additionally, the sense of control and systematic motion associated with the allegedly carefully planned 'Mauerbau' is destabilised as the narrator ponders the possibility that the

locust-like motions of the nomads gain them greater 'Überblick' of the 'Baufortschritte' than the 'Erbauer' have. This fear corresponds to the opening of the narrator's account, during which he admits to not being in a position to test commonplace assumptions 'mit eigenen Augen', thus revealing a distinct lack of 'Überblick'.

The movements of the nomads demonstrate that the strategy of the 'Teilbau' neither succeeds in creating a sense of unity nor in containing uncontrollable dynamic energies: the 'Nomaden' thus once again confront the Chinese with a mirror of their self-delusion. Their attempt at creating a spatial and social 'Ordnung' that contains opposing dynamic tendencies results in an experience of instability and uncertainty.

Unsurprisingly, the narrator's account reveals that thoughts about the 'Natur des fliegenden Staubes' are 'dem Mauerbau sogar gegensätzlich' (KA6, 70). The impossibility of controlling the erratic movements of the nomads reflects the impossibility of containing the impulse for unrestricted motion within the Chinese. 'Ungeduld' is merely 'besänftigt' – not resolved. Accordingly, the narrator admits that: 'der Teilbau war nur ein Notbehelf und unzweckmäßig' (KA6, 70). The narrator's account remains intrinsically ambivalent as he asks questions about the building project but never answers them.

### **'Soweit denke den Anordnungen der Führerschaft nicht nach' – the movement of thought**

The narrator's thoughts, rather than establishing a sense of stability and 'sense', not only seem to shift swiftly from one theme to another, but also appear to perform rather erratic

(locust-like) jumps between reflections on the ‘Nomaden’, the ‘Teilbau’, questions concerning the ‘Kaisertum’ and the ‘Reich’. For any reader of the text, the initially raised expectation of a linear historical account is quickly frustrated as he tries to follow the movements of thought produced by the self-appointed historian.

These erratic and often elliptic movements are in striking contrast to the narrator’s descriptions of his investigative impulse, which he describes in dynamic terms as a form of ‘nachzuspüren’ (KA6, 73) and to ‘get to the bottom of things’:

Will ich den Gedankenkreis und die Erlebnisse jener Zeiten vermitteln  
und begreiflich machen, kann ich gerade dieser Frage nicht genug tief  
nachbohren. (KA6, 68-69)

Such descriptions are suggestive of the narrator’s desire to perform a relentless linear and goal-directed movement of thought. Like the “Hausvater”, he gives this account the air of a rational and balanced scientific approach. Seemingly careful to distinguish between ‘Legenden’ and first hand knowledge, and to qualify assumptions as ‘möglichlicherweise’ trustworthy while presenting supposedly certain knowledge in apodictic expressions such as ‘natürlich’, the narrator creates the impression that he is on a quest for rational insight. This supposedly unwavering quest, however, is interspersed with elements of instability. What seems like an attempt at avoiding hasty conclusions often appears rather like an expression of vagueness and uncertainty. Saying that statements can ‘möglichlicherweise’ be considered true and that the nomads have ‘vielleicht’ an overview of the building process is essentially to say nothing of great clarity. Rather than probing into the depths of the questions of being he is concerned with, the narrator seems strangely reluctant to make

definite statements, which is most obvious in his pervasive use of the word 'wohl': the wall 'konnte wohl nicht anders ausgeführt werden', the 'System des Teilbaues hatte wohl noch andere Gründe', 'man kann wohl sagen' and so on. Such elements of uncertainty sit alongside a peculiar willingness to adopt commonplaces without questioning them, which subverts the narrator's supposedly critical objectives:

Die Mauer war doch, wie allgemein verbreitet wird und bekannt ist, zum Schutz gegen die Nordvölker gedacht. (KA6, 65)

This uncritical tendency – one may describe it as even actively counter-critical – becomes most evident whenever the narrator's line of thought seems to touch on the 'bottom of things'. Throughout his account, the narrator's thoughts repeatedly point in a direction that forces him to question the 'sense' to be found in the building project. As he concludes that the 'Teilbau ist unzweckmäßig', the narrator pinpoints the thought at the heart of the sense of restlessness that motivates his account. Furthermore, he asks the fundamental question 'Warum, also, [...] verlassen wir die Heimat?', thus touching the nerve of the Chinese self-delusions about the conflicting dynamic tendencies within them. Neither thought process, however, is brought to a conclusion. In a gesture of mental immobilisation, the narrator brings such thoughts to a sudden halt by assigning authority on the subject to superior forces other than himself: 'Frage die Führerschaft' (KA6, 72).

Such elements of instability and retardation confirm the assumption made during the analysis of the opening section: tendencies in the narrator's movement of thought mirror the dynamic tendencies in the physical movements of his surroundings. A tendency

directed at asserting the social and spatial structure of ‘Volk’ and ‘Reich’ is opposed by a tendency of thought that challenges the possibility of gaining a sense of unity from such structures. Both the Chinese desire for unity and stability and the ‘Natur des fliegenden Staubes’ seem to find their equivalents in the narrator’s mental practices. The result is an oscillating motion of challenge and withdrawal strongly reminiscent of the thought patterns observed in Gracchus and the burgomaster. Here, too, we are confronted with an individual constantly in dialogue with himself. To resolve the two conflicting pulls, the narrator applies a strategy that mirrors the building project he is concerned with: he ‘builds’ a wall to the movement of his own thought.

Suche mit allen Deinen Kräften die Anordnungen der Führerschaft zu verstehen, aber nur bis zu einer bestimmten Grenze, dann höre mit dem Nachdenken auf. (KA6, 71)

The strategy resembles Gracchus’ attempts at reading ignorance as a form of knowledge. Stating that he does not understand the ‘Gedankengang der Patrone’, Gracchus creates the impression that however incomprehensible his fate may remain to him, it is contained within an overarching structure that merely remains outside his grasp. The narrator of ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’ seems to develop this consoling possibility into a conception of life as a wilful limitation to movement in the name of stability.<sup>65</sup> Using a water-image commonly used as a symbol of life, he exemplifies the value of keeping motion – whether physical or mental – strictly within ‘Grenzen’:

---

<sup>65</sup> Goodden similarly observes this wilful submission to both formal and mental restrictions that nevertheless ‘afford[s] the comfort and security of a well-ordered life’. See Goodden 1976, p. 134.

Es wird Dir geschehn wie dem Fluß im Frühjahr. Er steigt, wird mächtiger, nährt kräftiger das Land an seinen langen Ufern, behält sein eigenes Wesen weiter ins Meer hinein, wird dem Meere ebenbürtiger und willkommener. Soweit denke den Anordnungen der Führerschaft nach. Dann aber übersteigt der Fluß seine Ufer, verliert Umrisse und Gestalt, verlangsamt seinen Abwärtslauf, versucht gegen seine Bestimmung kleine Meere im Binnenland zu bilden, schädigt die Fluren, und kann sich doch für die Dauer in dieser Ausbreitung nicht halten, sondern rinnt wieder in seine Ufer zusammen, ja trocknet sogar in der folgenden heißen Jahreszeit kläglich ein. Soweit denke den Anordnungen der Führerschaft nicht nach. (KA6, 71)

Here, the experience of dispersal associated with the nomads' movements is projected onto the movement of thought. Images of the movement of water and movement in water grasp an ambivalent experience of both active and passive motion throughout Kafka's writing.<sup>66</sup>

The way in which the image of the river is used in 'Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer' echoes this ambivalent sensation. The movement of the river is shaped by the expansive and eruptive motion of water and the shaping and constricting force of the riverbed. The narrator ostensibly asserts the need for movement to be contained within such stable borders, as they provide protection against experiences of dispersal. The possibility of finding 'Umriss' and 'Gestalt' beyond such borders is considered impossible – such extraordinary experiences remain the brief and fleeting privilege of those who risk a 'Plötzlicher Spaziergang'. Translated into the movement of thought, this motion in 'Grenzen' corresponds to a 'mythical' world-view.

---

<sup>66</sup> The "Kaufmann", for example, uses the image of the 'Flut' to grasp the sensation of dynamic impulses of which he is both the origin and the subject. It remains ambivalent whether the thoughts of the "Kaufmann" are the 'Flut' or whether the mental movements he performs are subject to other, intrinsically incomprehensible forces. In any case, this eruption is experienced by the "Kaufmann" as a challenge to the very borders of his being.

By ‘mythical world-view’, I mean a world that is divided mentally into two spheres. One sphere can be grasped by ‘Menschenverstand’ while the other sphere, although lying beyond the grasp of human thought, is believed to be filled with a meaning about which man can at best conjecture. As he refers to the ‘Führerschaft’, the narrator establishes two such spheres of ‘knowledge’:

Wir – ich rede hier wohl im Namen vieler – haben eigentlich erst im Nachbuchstabieren der Anordnungen der obersten Führerschaft uns selbst kennengelernt und gefunden, daß ohne die Führerschaft weder unsere Schulweisheit noch unser Menschenverstand auch nur für das kleine Amt, das wir innerhalb des großen Ganzen hatten, ausgereicht hätte. (KA6, 70)

The narrator suggests that his authority merely amounts to ‘Schulweisheit’ and ‘Menschenverstand’, which are insufficient means of ‘making sense’ of his conflicting experiences of being in the world. Knowledge of the ‘großen Ganzen’ and the individual’s ‘Amt’ within this assumed greater unity lies beyond the individual’s grasp and in the hands of the ‘Führerschaft’. The narrator’s reflections on the ‘Führerschaft’ remain vague, however, so that it is not possible to determine whether it is equivalent to the ‘Kaiser’ or whether the term refers to an even more ambiguous form of leadership:

In der Stube der Führerschaft – wo sie war und wer dort saß, weiß und wußte niemand den ich fragte – in dieser Stube kreisten wohl alle menschlichen Gedanken und Wünsche und in Gegenkreisen alle menschlichen Ziele und Erfüllungen, durch das Fenster aber fiel der Abglanz der göttlichen Welten auf die Pläne zeichnenden Hände der Führerschaft. (KA6, 70)

The order of the human world is assumed to be in the hands of a 'Führerschaft' that remains anonymous and inaccessible to the individual. Yet even their work of ordering and directing is believed to be sanctioned by the 'göttlichen Welten'. The ultimate organising principle of the world is thus described as a meta-physical force, removed from the spatial and temporal order of 'reality' and beyond the grasp of what man – or presumably even the 'Führerschaft' – can know. Here lies omniscient insight into human existence and the structure of the world: the duality of 'Gedanken und Wünsche' and 'Ziele und Erfüllungen' suggests that in the 'Stube der Führerschaft' both the expansive and extra-ordinary impulse of wishes and the tendency for movement within stabilising structures are united in 'Gegenkreisen' that form a harmonious whole.

Just as the dynamic tendencies shaping physical movement within the 'Reich' are to be contained within the 'Volkswerk', the 'mythical' world-view creates a greater 'Ganzes' designed to contain conflicting tendencies in the movement of thought. Within the boundaries of 'Menschenverstand', questions concerning existence can be discussed without ever challenging the 'Ganzes'. By subordinating his own authority to the authority of the 'Führerschaft' and ultimately the Gods, the narrator points towards the possibility that the conflicting movements of his thoughts – and the experience of restlessness associated with them – are integrated in the 'grand narrative' of a 'mythical superstructure'.<sup>67</sup>

This structure is based on a paradox: the structure of 'reality' depends on something that remains beyond the grasp of 'reality'. This paradoxical relation, however, reveals the

---

<sup>67</sup> Goodden 1976, p.141.

central mechanisms of ‘myth’ as a collective strategy directed at resolving restlessness. Transcending experiences of restlessness by making them part of a greater whole allows the individual to perform a parallel strategy of inclusion and externalisation. A by now familiar example of this is the Chinese relation to the nomads: the images described by the narrator are more likely to depict mythical creatures than anything which could be encountered in ‘reality’. The narrator’s claim that these figures are ‘wahrheitsgetreu’ grasps – at best – the function of these figures within the social and spatial structure of the ‘Reich’. Placing the nomads within the sphere of myth allows the Chinese to externalise their own disruptive tendencies into an external threat and to make it part of the ‘Ganzes’ – not being able to ‘make sense’ of the ‘Amt’ this tendency may have within the structure of the world can thus be interpreted as a confirmation of the limitations to ‘Menschenverstand’. The authority of this challenge lies in its universal mythical quality: what makes the children flee to their parents is not the realistic fear of an enemy but the irrational fear of the bogeyman: only as a ‘Schreckgespenst’ can the nomads become a functional social corrective.<sup>68</sup>

The most obvious example of the paradox at the heart of such a world-view, however, is the Chinese’ relation to the ‘Kaiser’. This relation is entirely based on an authority that remains beyond the individual’s immediate experience of the world. The narrator’s statement that ‘es gibt vielleicht kein kaisertreueres Volk als das unsrige’ (KA6, 77) follows the carefully qualified statement ‘daß wir im Grunde keinen Kaiser haben’ (KA6, 77). Again, these seemingly conflicting statements demonstrate that the loyalty of the Chinese to their ‘Kaiser’ is not loyalty to a ‘real’ figure but to the social order of which the

---

<sup>68</sup> Goodden 1976, p.136.

concept of the emperor is the keystone. Just as the spatial order of the ‘Reich’ is described in terms that are more suited to a fairy-tale country than any ‘real’ conception of space, the ‘Kaiser’ is described as a figure that reaches ‘durch alle Stockwerke der Welt’ (KA6, 74) – a ‘mythical’ figure representing social order that ‘aus alten Zeiten zu uns herüberweht’ (KA6, 78).

The narrator’s account turns out to be expressive of a world-view in which all aspects constituting the structure of ‘reality’ are removed from the individual’s authority. Placing knowledge of ‘uns selbst’ and the world in the hands of others appears to provide individuals with a sense of unity and stability that allows them to live life in the ‘friedlichen Laube’<sup>69</sup> where all fear of instability and disorder – internal or external – is mollified by the trust that such tendencies somehow form a part of a greater whole. This ‘mythical’ world-view thus represents a powerful strategy which resolves experiences of restlessness by integrating them into a larger structure of stability, a ‘grand narrative’.

The narrator’s account, however, betrays an ambivalent response to this ‘Wall’. Repeatedly, he draws attention to the fact that the stability of this world-view depends on a wilful act of repression. Pictures of the nomads are a powerful tool for repressing disorderly tendencies in children and making them prepared to retreat into the safety of the parents’ order. The parallels with physical movement in the country are once again striking. The wall-building games in the ‘Gärtchen unseres Lehrers’ (KA6, 66) impose

---

<sup>69</sup> Kafka’s use of this term once again gives the story a contemporary (satirical) relevance, as the concept of the ‘Gartenlaube’ can be seen as the quintessence of German petit-bourgeois desire for ‘order’. The popular magazine ‘Die Gartenlaube’ uses this idea of ‘Heimat’ and family in a generalized form to create an idea of the nation. See Kirsten Belgum, *Popularizing the nation: audience, representation, and the production of identity in 'Die Gartenlaube', 1853-1900* (Nebraska: Lincoln, 1998).

fear of imperfection even in the children's playful attempts at wall-building. The narrator's attempt at marginalising his memory of such events as a 'winziger Vorfall' (KA6, 67) cannot hide the fact that he 'erinnere mich noch sehr wohl' (KA6, 66), which illustrates how firmly such exercises place fear of destruction and disintegration in the individual's mind. From early childhood, it seems, the Chinese are prepared for wilful subjection to both physical and mental immobilisation in the name of order:

Umso auffälliger ist es, daß gerade diese Schwäche eines der wichtigsten Einigungsmittel unseres Volkes zu sein scheint, ja wenn man sich im Ausdruck soweit vorwagen darf, geradezu der Boden auf dem wir leben. Hier einen Tadel ausführlich begründen, heißt nicht an unserem Gewissen, sondern was viel ärger ist an unsern Beinen rütteln. Und darum will ich in der Untersuchung dieser Frage vorderhand nicht weiter gehn. (KA6, 79)

Here, the narrator grasps the central mechanism at the heart of the 'mythical' world-view. The Chinese are not able 'das Kaisertum aus der Pekinger Versunkenheit in aller Lebendigkeit und Gegenwärtigkeit an seine Untertanenbrust zu ziehn' (KA6, 78), i.e. to draw the question of leadership into the sphere of human authority. This inability to imagine a 'Kaiser' as a figure within 'reality' that could provide social order is thus contained within the 'mythical' world-view, where any sense of social and spatial order is provided by something that lies outside the authority of 'reality'. The 'real' 'Kaiser' is a mere proxy for the concept of an organising principle that lies beyond the grasp of 'reality'. This inability to imagine any authority that could provide social order within 'reality' and the assumption that this inability is an expression of an order outside the grasp of 'Menschenverstand' is 'eines der wichtigsten Einigungsmittel': the collective

coping strategy of the ‘Volksmythos’. To question this ‘mythical’ world-view would be to ‘an unseren Beinen rütteln’, to unleash an experience of what Kafka describes elsewhere as ‘Seekrankheit’.

In ‘Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft’, a separately published part of ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’, this mechanism is grasped in images of movement. The ‘Kaiserliche Botschaft’ will never reach the individual: it remains a representation of the link between the individual and an organising principle – a link that is imagined by every individual as a ‘Botschaft’ directed at him personally:

Du aber sitzt an Deinem Fenster und erträumst sie Dir wenn der Abend  
kommt. (KA6, 76)

Roy Pascal emphasises the dynamic character of the individual’s dream: in a process of ‘er-träumen’ the message from the emperor, the individual brings ‘the dream to completion, to fulfilment’. The ‘Kaiserliche Botschaft’ therefore has no authority outside the individual’s own agreement not to question it, i.e. not to draw it out of the sphere of dreams. Unity, Pascal correctly points out, ‘depends on the subjective act.’<sup>70</sup> This ‘subjective act’, however, is both an act of creation – of ‘erträumen’ – and the act of a wilful confinement to a static existence in the ‘friedlichen Laube’, not only physically but also mentally.

---

<sup>70</sup> Pascal 1982, p.166.

The narrator's thoughts, however, repeatedly stray from the 'Laube' of conventional wisdom and national ideology. In his reflections on various theories concerning the building project, he comes across a theory that seems to illustrate the understanding of the Wall as a foundation for other, less tangible things: the theory that the Wall may have been intended as a foundation for a much greater building project, a new 'Turmbau von Babel' (KA6, 69). The horizontal building, so goes the theory, is meant to lead ultimately to a vertical movement: man's ascent into divine spheres. Strikingly, the narrator does not appear to be a great supporter of such elementary confusion between the 'real' and the metaphysical. Wondering how the Wall 'die doch nicht einmal einen Kreis, sondern nur eine Art Viertel- oder Halbkreis bildete' (KA6, 69) could ever serve as a foundation for the building of the tower, the narrator muses that 'das konnte doch nur in geistiger Hinsicht gemeint sein' (KA6, 69). He consequently dismisses the theory on the grounds that it confuses the Wall as 'etwas Tatsächliches' (KA6, 69) with the 'geistig' project of the tower.

The irony of this verdict cannot escape the reader: the narrator dismisses a theory developed by a 'Gelehrter' (KA6, 69) like himself – an individual clearly on the same mission, i.e. to make 'sense' of the events in the world around him. The narrator's line of thought, directed at critically testing the theory, leads him to conclusions which ultimately reveal the paradox at the heart of the national 'myth' or ideology that he seeks to defend: placing one's 'Beine' on the foundations of something outside 'reality' is to base one's world-view on precisely the same confusion between the concrete and the 'mythical'.

The movements of thought performed by the narrator thus illustrate a fundamental weakness of the ‘mythical’ world-view. This weakness becomes most evident in the river-image: rivers do not tend to stay in their riverbeds. Rather than illustrating the successful containment of movement, the confinement to ‘Grenzen’ represents a conflict between opposing forces: the natural force of the river permanently challenges the borders of the riverbed, slowly eroding its stability and occasionally destroying it in an eruptive overflow of dynamic energy. This image is reminiscent of the impression given throughout *Betrachtung*: that contained movement is always only a bad copy of the unintelligible dynamic impulse feeding it. Rivers cannot be contained reliably by means of wilful intervention. To push the analogy further: river regulations and dams merely increase the pressure placed on the inhibiting construction. Accordingly, as the narrator contemplates the inhibitions to his ‘Denkfähigkeit’, he seems to become acutely aware of the ‘Endlosigkeit’ his thoughts could actually penetrate:

Die Grenzen, die meine Denkfähigkeit mir setzt, sind ja eng genug, das Gebiet aber, das hier zu durchlaufen wäre, ist das Endlose. (KA6, 71)

Here, the narrator admits that the dynamic force of his ‘Denkfähigkeit’ can ‘durchlaufen’ a ‘Gebiet’ without limitations, thus implicitly acknowledging the challenge his mental capacities pose to the ‘Wall’ set by the ‘mythical’ world-view.

Introducing his thoughts about the ‘Führerschaft’ with a seemingly humble acknowledgement of his inability to grasp their ways – ‘wenn ich mir einen solchen Gedanken über die Führerschaft erlauben darf’ (KA6, 72) – the narrator nevertheless exhibits a tendency that challenges any inhibition to the movement of his thoughts.

However humbly introduced: the narrator's thoughts clearly push against the boundaries of the 'mythical' riverbed. His declaration that 'will ich den Gedankenkreis und die Erlebnisse jener Zeiten vermitteln und begreiflich machen, kann ich gerade dieser Frage nicht genug tief nachbohren' (KA6, 68-69) exhibits both a desire to 'get to the bottom of things' and an admission that this desire is likely to be frustrated by failure to reach such depths.

As we follow the narrator's 'line of argument' – to use a euphemistic expression for this erratic movement –, the impression created in the opening section is confirmed: the narrator's account is clearly not the linear progressive historiography we are led to expect in the opening sentence. Instead, the narrative flow is shaped by movements of thought performed by an individual who tries to 'make sense' of the world as it is presented to him in the national ideology of the 'Mauerbau'. The narrator's self-understanding as a national chronicler illustrates his defensive position. The 'historian' does not set out to challenge national ideology, but to confirm it. This assertive project, however, turns into a defence strategy as the narrator's line of thought repeatedly leads him in directions that pose a challenge to his understanding of unity and stability. As he discovers literal and conceptual gaps in the 'Mauerbau', the narrator reveals that the Chinese sense of unity is based on a quasi-mythical world-view. In his defence of national ideology, the narrator thus appears increasingly like a mytho-historian. History and 'myth' emerge as two sides of the same coin: they both represent ways of 'making sense' of the world.

The overall character of the narrative is one of restlessness. The narrator's account is shaped by the conflict between opposing dynamic pulls. His position oscillates between

rhetoric that seems to be directed at establishing the ‘Volksmythos’ of the ‘Mauerbau’ and the coherent whole of individual, ‘Volk’ and ‘Reich’ with the ‘Führerschaft’ as its organising principle, and a rhetoric that destabilises this possibility by challenging the ‘mythical’ world-view. The conflict between these tendencies results in a peculiar narrative dynamics that makes for a highly frustrating reading experience. As the narrator shifts from one ‘mode’ of thought to the other, he creates expectations of ‘truth’ in the reader only to frustrate them by his next mental somersault. Like Gracchus, he seems to hover in a perennial state of being ‘von der Wahrheit nicht weit entfernt’ (KA6, 77) without ever getting ‘to the bottom’. The result is an oscillating movement of thought, a ‘Schaukelbewegung’ of challenge and withdrawal, destabilisation and assertion.

A brief look at the title already confirms this impression of a ‘Schaukelbewegung’. The narrative is not called ‘Die chinesische Mauer’, or even ‘Der Bau der chinesischen Mauer’. Not only does the use of the word ‘Bau’ place the focus on the movement of building, the use of the preposition ‘beim’ further suggests that the focus of the text lies on events occurring during the building process. Thus subtly introducing a dynamic element to the seemingly stable image of the Wall, the preposition further makes the title appear like an incomplete sentence: what, the reader will ask, happened during the building of the Great Wall? Thus engaged, we are prompted to swiftly move on to the first sentence of the narrative. As we have seen, this interplay between elements of stability and instability, dynamics and stasis is then carried into the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ of the opening section. The narrator opens his account with what seems like a stable and coherent ideology. The Chinese people, he suggests, are united spatially and socially in a ‘Reich’ that the

completed Wall makes concrete. This image is immediately destabilised as the narrator observes that the Wall has ‘Lücken‘. Yet this observation is quickly brushed over as the narrator turns back to statements that assert the coherence if not of the Wall then of the motives for building it:

Die Mauer war doch, wie allgemein verbreitet wird und bekannt ist, zum Schutz gegen die Nordvölker gedacht. (KA6, 65)

This strategy at directing a line of thought away from reflections that challenge the individual’s attempt at establishing stability is also used by Gracchus, who brushes off the visitor’s question for ‘Zusammenhang’ with the arrogant remark that his fate is common knowledge. The narrator’s statement – firmly contained in the riverbed of the collective ‘myth’ – however, is immediately challenged by a tendency that negates this attempt at re-direction:

Wie kann aber eine Mauer schützen die nicht zusammenhängend ist. (KA6, 65)

This question leads the narrator beyond the established ‘myth’ and towards thoughts about the effect of the Wall on the nomads. Yet before the challenge posed by wild riders and critical thought can become too overpowering, the narrator’s thought withdraws again into the riverbed of consensus:

Trotzdem konnte der Bau wohl nicht anders ausgeführt werden, als es geschehen ist. (KA6, 66)

One should notice the element of instability inherent in this statement. Declaring that the Wall could ‘wohl’ not have been built in any other way, the narrator’s rhetoric betrays uncertainty about this affirmation of ‘sense’. As if to sweep aside such doubts, the narrator then embarks on a lengthy account on the ‘System des Teilbaus’. Over the course of this account, his mode of speech noticeably shifts towards rhetoric, and he eventually becomes the emphatic orator of the national ‘myth’ of the ‘Teilbau’:

Einheit! Einheit! Brust an Brust, ein Reigen des Volkes, Blut, nicht mehr  
eingesperrt im kärglichen Kreislauf des Körpers, sondern süß rollend  
und doch wiederkehrend durch das unendliche China. (KA6, 68)

This shift towards emphatic patriotic fervour is in sharp contrast to the doubtful and critical language applied by the narrator whenever his line of thought begins to push against the boundaries of the riverbed. Rignall observes that the narrator’s style vacillates ‘between a soberly descriptive and analytical style on the one hand, and a highly figurative and rhetorical one on the other.’<sup>71</sup> This assumed duality may not grasp the subtle and ambiguous interplay of stabilising and destabilising tendencies that constitutes the complexity of the account, but Rignall rightly links the narrator’s shifts into a ‘high style’ with mental processes that reach ‘towards larger and more inclusive certainties’<sup>72</sup> beyond the narrator’s experience, further pointing out that such rhetorical strategies appear like

---

<sup>71</sup> It seems surprising that in the case of the passage quoted above, Rignall assumes that the narrator takes an ironic stance towards his fellow countrymen, while other passages are understood to be expressions of the narrator’s tendency to shift into the high style of the ‘knowing and declarative solemnity of the prophet’. It seems peculiar to me that these passages should be judged so differently. See Rignall 1985, p.117-118.

<sup>72</sup> *op.cit.*, p.118.

acts of ‘persuasion, perhaps even self-persuasion’.<sup>73</sup> In terms of movement, such persuasive acts seem like hardly concealed limitations of mental processes within the ‘mythical’ riverbed.

A similar shift into rhetoric can be observed in the narrator’s descriptions of the ‘Natur des fliegenden Staubes’:

Das menschliche Wesen, leichtfertig in seinem Grunde, von der Natur des auffliegenden Staubes, verträgt keine Fesselung, fesselt es sich selbst, wird es bald wahnsinnig an den Fesseln zu rütteln anfangen und Mauer Kette und sich selbst in alle Himmelsrichtungen zerreißen. (KA6, 70)

The passage is highly ambiguous. An understanding of the statement on the ‘Natur des fliegenden Staubes’ as a biblical reference<sup>74</sup> reveals its inherent ambivalences. Here, the implicit warning that ‘for dust you are and to dust you will return’<sup>75</sup> can be read as an expression for the experience of restlessness: that existence is not stable but restless, instable and transient. At the same time, the implication that this experience forms part of a greater conception of human existence – even if it was in the form of divine punishment – illustrates the integrative function of ‘myth’. When referring to the nomads as ‘Heuschrecken’-like, the narrator similarly shifts the existence of uncontrollable forces in the world into the sphere of divine punishment. The sentence immediately following the

---

<sup>73</sup> Rignall rightly describes the narrator’s desire to assert stability by means of a ‘rhetorical construct’, which nevertheless also reveals the ‘opposite power of the mind to overthrow such structures’. See Rignall 1985, p.122. The interplay between the different tendencies in the narrator’s account, however, is not developed with greater detail.

<sup>74</sup> *op.cit.*, p.118.

<sup>75</sup> Genesis, 3:19.

assertion of the ‘Natur des fliegenden Staubes’ reads like an elliptic variation on the same thought, projected onto the building project:

Es ist möglich, daß auch diese dem Mauerbau sogar gegensätzlichen Erwägungen von der Führung bei der Festsetzung des Teilbaues nicht unberücksichtigt geblieben sind. (KA6, 70)

The narrator admits that thoughts about the ‘Natur des fliegenden Staubes’ challenge the idea of the ‘Mauerbau’, yet only to mention in the same breath that such thoughts may have played a part in the planning of the building project as a ‘Teilbau’ – a process that satisfies both the desire for unity and eruptive dynamic impulses. To make the interplay between stabilisation and destabilisation even more complex, this possibility is once again qualified as ‘möglich’, i.e. as a mere hypothesis.

Similarly, the narrator breaks off his declaration of the ‘Einheit’ of the people in an abrupt shift from emphatic verve to the sober style of his seemingly rational discourse:

Dadurch also wird das System des Teilbaues verständlich, aber es hatte doch wohl noch andere Gründe. (KA6, 68)

In a manner similar to Gracchus, who disrupts his brief excursion into a possible elevation of his position into that of the ‘Schutzgeist der Matrosen’ (KA6,) with the nearly embarrassed statement ‘lache nicht’ and a consequent change of topic, the narrator of ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’ interrupts his invocation of national spirit with a

return to sobriety – yet once again not without betraying the fundamental uncertainty of the theory he just presented: there are always ‘wohl noch andere Gründe’.

Such rapid changes between assertion and uncertainty, challenge and withdrawal also characterise the narrator’s ambiguous reflections on the authority of the ‘Führerschaft’:

Und deshalb will es dem unbestechlichen Betrachter nicht eingehn, daß die Führerschaft, wenn sie es ernstlich gewollt hätte, nicht auch jene Schwierigkeiten hätte überwinden können, die einem zusammenhängenden Mauerbau entgegenstanden. Bleibt also nur die Folgerung, daß die Führerschaft den Teilbau beabsichtigte. Aber der Teilbau war nur ein Notbehelf und unzweckmäßig. Bleibt die Folgerung, daß die Führerschaft etwas Unzweckmäßiges wollte. Sonderbare Folgerung, gewiß. (KA6, 70-71)

Following a logical line of thought to its conclusion, the narrator’s mind clearly leaves the ‘riverbed’ of conventional wisdom. The stability to be gained from the ‘Führerschaft’ depends on the separation of two spheres of authority. The ‘Führerschaft’ is not to be challenged if the individual does not want to risk losing the ‘Boden auf dem wir stehen’. Bringing his movement of thought to a conspicuously sudden halt, the narrator returns to the safe boundaries of conventionally established patterns of thought. Like the strange movements of the nomads, this kind of thinking, he declares, would be ‘sonderbar’. Like other protagonists before – and after – him, the narrator belittles an experience as odd that would otherwise radically challenge the stability of his world-view.

The ‘Schaukelbewegung’ of such movements of thought is maintained throughout the text, including its (incomplete) end. This end is reminiscent of the ‘Gracchus’-fragments,

where a variety of endings seems to correspond to the conflict between assertions of closure and their negation throughout the text. The end of ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’ is suggestive of a similar coherence between theme and form. The structure of the narrative invites an identification of two endings,<sup>76</sup> which seem to represent the conflict of opposing tendencies in the narrator’s thought. The account comes to a possible end as the narrator decides not to pursue his ‘Untersuchung’ any further, before continuing the narrative with a childhood memory of the day when the ‘Nachricht des Mauerbaus’ reached his home village. The first ‘endpoint’ has already been analysed with detail earlier in this section:

Umso auffälliger ist es, daß gerade diese Schwäche eines der wichtigsten Einigungsmittel unseres Volkes zu sein scheint [...]. Hier einen Tadel ausführlich begründen, heißt [...] an unsern Beinen rütteln. Und darum will ich in der Untersuchung dieser Frage vorderhand nicht weiter gehn. (KA6, 79)

The narrator declares to end his account as he reaches the insight that only the collective coping strategy of the ‘Volksmythos’, i.e. the retreat into ignorance, allows the Chinese to avoid the experience of ‘Seekrankheit’ – the resolution of restlessness depends on the willingness to remain within the ‘riverbed’. The narrator’s concluding remark can be read as a subjection to this world-view, a deliberate immobilisation of his ‘Denkfähigkeit’ in the name of stability.

---

<sup>76</sup> In Max Brod’s edition of the text, this effect of the ‘double’-ending is lost because he presented the last section of the text as an independent ‘Fragment’. For a detailed discussion of the manuscript and editions of the ‘Oktavhefte’ see Schütterle 2002.

Yet even in this final remark, the tendency for unrestricted movement asserts itself. Declaring that he will ‘vorderhand nicht weiter gehn’, rather than suggest that movement is being brought to an end, expresses a willingness to suspend momentarily – ‘vorderhand’ – this motion. This ambivalent remark becomes even more suspicious as ‘vorderhand’ invites the association with an action asserted ‘vor der Hand’, only to be taken back ‘hinter vorgehaltener Hand’. The narrator may ostensibly bring his account to closure by affirming the ‘mythical’ world-view. Yet what seems like the beginning of a new text contains a continuation of his movement of thought.

The childhood memory opens with a remark that seems to challenge the mythical overtones of the previous account:

In diese Welt drang nun die Nachricht vom Mauerbau. (KA6, 79)

In this account, the narrator supposedly makes an attempt at writing the origin story of the ‘Mauerbau’ by asserting a stable spatial and social structure: the ‘Kaiserliche Botschaft’ reaches its goal. The text, however, ends at the point at which the narrator’s father is about to repeat the message:

Mein Vater sagte also etwa: (KA6, 80)

This sentence, which introduces what could be the final assertion of stability and unity, already contains elements of instability that subvert the possibility of completion: the content of the father’s speech is only vaguely – ‘etwa’ – present in the narrator’s

memory.<sup>77</sup> This uncertainty is in sharp contrast to the narrator's declaration that 'gemäß der Bedeutung dieser oft besprochenen Stunde, erinnere ich mich der kleinsten Umstände' (KA6, 79). The narrator's sudden hint at forgetfulness introduces a hesitation that eventually amounts to the breakdown of the line of thought. Similar to the 'Gracchus'-fragments, the text breaks off at the point at which the narrator would establish a coherent line between cause and effect, origin and end – which would affirm the original objective of the account as an end-determined narrative. The delivery of the message would establish a conventional order within 'reality', which becomes particularly obvious if we take the liberty to briefly share Max Brod's desire for closure and quote the text of the message that Kafka deleted:

Ein fremder Schiffer [...] hat mir eben erzählt, dass eine grosse Mauer gebaut werden soll um den Kaiser zu schützen. Es versammeln sich nämlich oft vor dem Kaiserlichen Palast die ungläubigen Völker unter ihnen auch Dämonen, und schiessen Pfeile gegen den Kaiser. (KKA/NS I App.320f.)

This report establishes an experience of being in the world as existence within a stable spatial and social structure. The 'Heimat' is not a static place of retreat from dispersal, but a mirror of the greater unity of the 'Reich', while the social order of the 'Hausvater' reflects the order provided by the 'Kaiser'. The signifier of this integrated world-view is the possibility of goal-directed movement from Peking to the village. Within this world,

---

<sup>77</sup> Rignall comments on the different effects of withdrawal and stabilisation that are created in the different endings, yet as in his analysis of the opening sentence, he does not comment on the elements of instability pervading the narrator's 'childhood-memory'. Stating that this passage 'bears the quiet authority of first-hand experience' and that it 'carries no suggestion of an ironic discrepancy' (125), Rignall overlooks the narrator's suspicious forgetfulness. See Rignall 1985.

there is a clear sense of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, of ‘Volk’ and strangers, so that the nomads can be conceived as a ‘real’ threat that has to be fended off with a ‘Mauer’.<sup>78</sup> Within the integrated world-view, the ‘Mauerbau’ makes ‘sense’.

The only reason to quote this omitted passage, however, is to emphasise what is explicitly not realised in the text.<sup>79</sup> In the opening of the passage, the narrator states that the message reaches ‘diese Welt’. Over the course of the narrative, however, ‘diese Welt’ has been established as a world in which ‘true’ leadership, the structure of the ‘Reich’ and the possibility of movement that reaches a goal cannot be imagined: the structure of the world depends on ‘myth’ that remains outside ‘reality’. If the message were to reach the village, the paradox on which the stability of the ‘mythical’ world-view depends, would break down. To imagine this meeting of ‘myth’ and ‘reality’ lies outside the narrator’s ‘Denkfähigkeit’. At this point, the oscillating motion of challenge and withdrawal cannot be further maintained and the text breaks off.

The position of the historian cum mytho-historian cum psychologist narrating the story of the ‘Bau der chinesischen Mauer’ can be seen to be summarised in the image of the children’s wall-building exercises:

Ich erinnere mich noch sehr wohl wie wir als kleine Kinder, kaum  
unserer Beine sicher, im Gärtchen unseres Lehrers standen, aus

---

<sup>78</sup> This supposedly positive reading of the possibility of an integrated world-view becomes questionable if we are to read it in association with ‘Ein altes Blatt’, where even this supposedly stable structure reveals that the nomads are merely a challenge to a false sense of stability.

<sup>79</sup> Annette Schütterle, who is primarily concerned with the text as a representation of the ‘Schreibprozeß’, emphasises the implication of a reason that has to remain beyond language: ‘Die Worte des Vaters als Erklärung für den Mauerbau werden gestrichen, so daß nach dem ankündigenden Doppelpunkt eine Leerstelle bleibt, in welcher der sich jeder Formulierung entziehende Grund für den Mauerbau präsent ist.’ Schütterle 2002, p.158.

Kieselsteinen eine Art Mauer bauen mußten, wie der Lehrer den Rock schürzte, gegen die Mauer rannte, natürlich alles zusammenwarf und uns wegen der Schwäche unseres Baues solche Vorwürfe machte, daß wir heulend uns nach allen Seiten zu unseren Eltern verliefen. (KA6, 66-67)

The ‘Schaukelbewegung’ at the heart of the narrator’s account suggests that he, in a way, represents both the teacher and the children. The narrator’s seemingly untiring efforts at asserting the national ideology of the ‘Mauerbau’ is expressive of a tendency in him that corresponds to the ‘ewig hoffende Kinder’ he sees in his fellow countrymen. He, too, follows the dynamic pull of a desire for unity and stability. Wall building games – be they childish, driven by national ideology or narrative impulse – represent a desire for stable structures and the ability to believe in them. At the same time, the narrator’s line of thought leads him just as unerringly into regions of thought that challenge and negate the possibility of such structures. The destructive force of the teacher’s boot, overflowing rivers and the powerful destabilisation of ‘myth’ by the narrator’s uninhibited ‘Denkfähigkeit’ represent an eruptive dynamic force that cannot be contained by the walls individuals surround themselves with – not even the majestic Chinese Wall or the powerful limitation to mutinous critical thought that is ‘myth’.

Rather than providing an objective socio-historical study, the narrator’s account thus reflects a fundamental experience of restlessness: confronted with a world that does not seem to provide any sense of stability or certainty, the individual sets out to find a coherent ‘sense’ that contains these experiences. Any attempt at establishing stability, however, merely seems to emphasise the impossibility of doing so. The account remains a ‘Teilbau’.

In my introduction to this section, I proposed a view on ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’ as one of the conjectures to be drawn from the central experience of restlessness. This assumption is supported, as I hope to have shown, by the striking level of coherence between the dynamic tendencies shaping physical, mental and narrative motion in this text, but also the way in which these tendencies emerge as a form of ‘Schaukelbewegung’ that links this text with those discussed previously.

‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’ has been read as a comment on the Orientalist discourse of Kafka’s time,<sup>80</sup> but also in the context of Judaism<sup>81</sup> or structures of power.<sup>82</sup> In the light of my analysis, I would like to suggest a similar turn of perspective as in my comment on metaphysical readings of the ‘Gracchus’-fragments. The striking parallels between dynamic patterns characterising texts with otherwise very different characters leads me to pose the question whether the dynamics of national ideology and ultimately the dynamics of a ‘mythical’ world-view as presented in the narrator’s account can be read as reflections of the same central experience pervading Kafka’s writings: restlessness. The mechanisms of externalisation and integration at the heart of the ideological framework dominating the Chinese’ lives as well as the ‘mythical’ character of their world-view suggests that these ‘narratives’ can be seen as collective coping strategies. Here, restlessness appears to be dispersed and at the same time integrated into the greater whole of collective experience.

---

<sup>80</sup> This perspective has been explored with great detail by Rolf Goebel. See Goebel 1997.

<sup>81</sup> Ritchie Robertson comments on the text as a ‘meditation on the sources of social cohesion, with particular reference to the history of the Jews’, thereby limiting his study of the text to elements which can be linked to the context of Kafka’s interest in Judaism. Robertson 1985, p.176. Günther Anders even states that ‘in den “Chinesische Mauer” genannten Stücken ist das Wort “Jude” sogar durchweg durch das Wort “Chineser” ersetzt’. See Günther Anders, *Kafka Pro und Contra* (Munich: Beck, 1951), p.10

<sup>82</sup> See for example Herbert Kraft, *Mondheimat* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1983), pp.51-56.

‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’ appears like a critical reflection on the relation between individual unity and collective social order. The peculiar dynamics of the narrator’s account suggests that ultimately, the possibility of stability depends on the individual’s ability to conceive of the structures suggested to him in the world surrounding him – be it the unity of social convention and routine, the order of ‘Haus’ and ‘Heimat’, the order of nation and ‘Reich’ or even the order provided by the ‘göttlichen Welten’.

The text does not provide a resolution of this problem. As in previous narratives, the possibility of stability and movement in the world is neither affirmed nor negated, but charged with a fundamental sense of uncertainty, i.e. restlessness. In a once again striking coherence of theme and form – conceptual or not – the oscillating movement of thought performed by the narrator corresponds to the assertion and negation of closure that characterises the incomplete end of the narrative. Like a series of deceptive cadences at the end of a musical piece, the narrative makes the reader expect a resolution that never comes. The dynamics of the narrative, rather than coming to closure, appears to gradually wane, as if the creative impulse driving the narrative motion lost its force. The Chinese building project, the narrator’s attempts at ‘making sense’ of it, but also the narrative remain ‘Teilbauten’.

**PART III: CONCLUSION: MOVEMENT AS A THEME WITH VARIATIONS IN KAFKA'S  
WRITINGS – THE 'RADIENPROJEKT'**

This thesis set out to explore movement images as a form of patterning in Kafka's fictions. The first thing that emerges from the analyses of *Betrachtung* and fictions from a later period of Kafka's writings is the presence of a dominant pattern connecting the most varied descriptions of movement.

Throughout these stories, protagonists' lives are generally shaped by activities that we – and they – are prepared to accept as 'normal'. In the seemingly natural and socially determined patterns of work and rest, waking and sleeping, living and dying, protagonists experience their existence as a regular and, to an extent, predictable dynamic process. Such quotidian expressions of movement, however, are subverted as protagonists experience intermittent impulses for unrestricted motion directed beyond the borders of conventional 'reality'. Throughout the stories considered here, the relation between these different manifestations of movement in protagonists' lives invariably emerges as a conflict that is as 'simple' as it is 'unerträglich' for those who experience it. Physically and conceptually rooted within the forms of movement associated with 'reality', individuals remain 'erdenschwer', unwilling or unable to escape into the kind of weightless and unlimited motion combined with rest envisaged in the flight of Zeno's arrow. Yet at the same time, these texts assert that the capacity to conceive of such extraordinary forms of movement – whether desired or not – is a part of the protagonists' nature. This eruptive tendency negates all forms of 'order' created around individuals, by themselves and by others, as the ultimately pointless result of all attempts at excluding

uncontrollable dynamic forces or containing them within the routine, goal-directed movements of quotidian existence. Drawn between seemingly irreconcilable pulls, the protagonists find themselves in a dynamic limbo. Surrounded by the ruins of their physical, emotional and intellectual wall-building (and wall-destroying) games, they are left in a state of restlessness that appears to be the ineluctable condition of their existence. The texts analysed in this study appear as a series of re-enactments of this drama of unrest. Ceaselessly exploring the multiplicity of forms in which this condition can manifest itself in human existence, these stories trace the dynamic patterns from which restlessness arises and its possible consequences. The sheer number of these figurations and the oscillating ‘Schaukelbewegung’ emerging from it, from the very first story in *Betrachtung* onwards, may evoke a slight feeling of seasickness in any reader, yet at the same time, the re-emergence of this pattern throughout texts from different periods suggests that a coherent ‘choreography’ pervades the oeuvre. What I hope to have shown in this study is that the dynamics of restlessness forms a key feature of what one might call Kafka’s narrative syntax.

What further emerges is that throughout the fictions considered here, images of movement are deployed productively as means of giving imaginative expression to the most varied experiences of being in the world. The condition of restlessness, as we have seen, is transposable to different levels of being, thereby providing a way of exploring questions of individual existence, social integration, the formation of national ideology and myth. In the experiences of protagonists and narrators alike, these questions revolve around the central conflict between their ability to conceive of overarching structures or ‘grand narratives’ and their inability to leave such structures unchallenged, which is reflected in a

‘Schaukelbewegung’ that pervades the physical, mental and narrative movements dominating these stories.

In ‘Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer’, this dynamic pattern is enacted as a building project, centred on the activities of planning, construction and destruction. Here, the dynamic pattern of the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ results in the monumental ‘Teilbau’ as a kind of physical manifestation of the restlessness affecting the thematic and formal levels of the text. It has not gone unnoticed that the atmosphere of this gigantic building site is mirrored in the equally fragmentary narrative ‘Der Bau’, written significantly later than the Chinese Wall, in 1924.<sup>1</sup> By comparison, the effort of this much smaller ‘Baumeister’ may appear modest, but the animal’s building project repeats the motivations and dynamic impulses reflected in the work on its great predecessor.

Like the Chinese, the animal in its burrow is motivated by a desire for a stable and unified defensive structure that has dominated its life since youth. The animal, too, represents an existence that asserts its stable sense of self by engaging in a building project, albeit on a subjective level. This intimate relation between builder and building becomes particularly clear as self and building merge in the animal’s mind:

Mir ist dann, als stehe ich nicht vor meinem Haus, sondern vor mir selbst, während ich schlafe, und hätte das Glück gleichzeitig tief zu schlafen und dabei mich scharf bewachen zu können. (KA8, 177)

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example Gerhard Kurz, ‘Das Rauschen der Stille. Annäherungen an Kafkas “Der Bau”’, in *Franz Kafka: Eine ethische und ästhetische Rechtfertigung*, ed. by Beatrice Sandberg and Jakob Lothe (Freiburg: Rombach, 2002), pp.151-174.

Yet like the “Hausvater”, troubled by the visits of Odradek, the animal does not perceive itself as ‘Herr im eigenen Haus’. Only rarely does it experience ‘Frieden’ (KA8, 167) and ‘Ruhe’ (KA8, 171) within the burrow. Its general state is more adequately described as restlessness. Like the Chinese, the animal is obsessed with the possibility of invasion from outside – an invasion that is described in similarly mythical terms as the nomads:

Und es sind nicht nur die äußern Feinde die mich bedrohen, es sind auch solche im Innern der Erde, ich habe sie noch nie gesehn, aber die Sagen erzählen von ihnen und ich glaube fest an sie. (KA8, 167)

The animal’s paranoia eventually finds its most disturbing expression in a ‘Zischen’ (KA8, 188) that nevertheless remains as immaterial as the ‘Schnauze’ (KA8, 166) that resides in the animal’s head like Damocles’ Sword. Once more, a protagonist is plagued by fears of uncontrollable events that are most likely to be a mirror of tendencies originating in itself. The animal’s inability to conceive of its ‘Bau’ as an impenetrable structure is due to a tendency in the individual that negates the possibility of stability. This conflict surfaces with greatest clarity in the animal’s concern about the necessity of an ‘Ausgang’ (KA8, 167):

Es ist aber doch nicht möglich, gerade die Vorsicht verlangt, daß ich eine sofortige Auslaufmöglichkeit habe, gerade die Vorsicht verlangt wie leider so oft, das Risiko des Lebens. (KA8, 166)

Like the Chinese Wall, the ‘Bau’ has ‘Lücken’. The animal perceives the necessity of an exit as a ‘Mangel’ (KA8, 174), as the escape hole makes the structure vulnerable to

potential invasion. Yet although dreams about a ‘Bau’ that is ‘uneinnehmbar’ bring the animal ‘Tränen der Freude und Erlösung’ (KA8, 175), it acknowledges that this ‘Mangel’ is ‘unausrottbar’ (KA8, 175). The imperfection, it declares, has to be put up with out of ‘Vorsicht’. It is revealing that the fear of an enemy from the outside seems less threatening than the fear of an enemy within the ‘Bau’. This ‘enemy’, however, is the animal’s own fear of entrapment, which leads him to assert powerfully the need for an ‘Auslaufmöglichkeit’. As with the earlier texts, ‘Der Bau’ expresses an experience of life as fundamentally informed by movement. The animal’s tears of gratitude for his salvation would be directed at an existence free from the need for an ‘Auslaufmöglichkeit’, but the text negates this possibility. As Rotpeter teaches us in his ‘Bericht für eine Akademie’, the need for an ‘Ausweg’ (KA1, 237) is a fundamental aspect of all life. The ‘Auslaufmöglichkeiten’ provided within ‘reality’ may be bad copies of the movement envisaged in the ‘Wunsch Indianer zu werden’, but they provide at least a form of ‘sich in die Büsche schlagen’ (KA1, 244) – which is precisely what the animal does whenever it leaves the ‘Bau’. Unable to fully embrace the potentially liberating effect, at least to a limited extent, of this impulse, however, the animal never strives far from the ‘Ausgang’, so attached is it to a dream of a life held in perfect security in his burrow. The ‘Lücke’, as we see, is the central focus of the animal’s existence: in its function as an ‘Eingang’ (KA8, 176) it represents a goal for the animal’s desire for stability and containment. In its function as an ‘Ausgang’, however, it also represents the possibility for motion beyond such constraints.

This conflict is eventually brought to the point in the animal’s ‘Traum eines ganz vollkommenen Baues’ (KA8, 183), a perfectly stable – and paradoxical – structure:

Einer dieser Lieblingspläne war es gewesen, den Burgplatz loszulösen von der ihn umgebenden Erde, d. h. seine Wände nur in einer etwa meiner Höhe entsprechenden Dicke zu belassen, darüber hinaus aber rings um den Burgplatz bis auf ein kleines von der Erde leider nicht loslösbares Fundament einen Hohlraum im Ausmaß der Wand zu schaffen. In diesem Hohlraum hatte ich mir immer, und wohl kaum mit Unrecht, den schönsten Aufenthaltsort vorgestellt, den es für mich geben könnte. Auf dieser Rundung hängen, hinauf sich ziehen, hinab zu gleiten, sich überschlagen und wieder Boden unter den Füßen haben und alle diese Spiele förmlich auf dem Körper des Burgplatzes spielen und doch nicht in seinem eigentlichen Raum. (KA8, 192)

Here, the animal conjures up the image of a void without any contact to the world – the ‘Fundament’ being a reluctant concession to make the dream appear more plausible, a concession that undercuts the whole project, however, since it would be as subject to invasion as any other link to the world around. Strikingly, the animal envisages itself lying outside this perfect structure. This peculiarity strikes us as an inadvertent insight into the ‘reality’ of this dream: animal existence – like human existence – is informed by movement. The animal is unable to conceive of a structure in which both its desire for perfect rest and its impulse for movement can be contained. It therefore conjures up a peculiar version of the kind of utopian image Kafka devises when he writes: ‘Der begrenzte Kreis ist rein’ (KA10, 192). In the animal’s vision, the possibility of order and stability depends on a paradox. To imagine it, the individual has to stay outside the circle, and thereby live without the perfect protection the dreamt-of structure would afford.

This brief excursion into Kafka’s latest period of writing indicates that restlessness is a drama with many acts, manifesting itself throughout the oeuvre in what presents itself as a kind of self-varying process. As acknowledged from the start, this thesis can only hope to outline dynamic elements that pervade Kafka’s fiction in a selection of texts, thus hopefully stimulating further inquiries into the topic of movement in his writings as a

whole. Although such insights into the role of movement images for Kafka's narrative 'method' suggest that his writing betokens an abiding concern with the condition of restlessness and the experiences these dynamic patterns capture, we are not offered any explanation as to the nature or direction of such states. What these texts present us with is a kaleidoscope of states of mind, which remain ultimately subjective experiences of protagonists and intra-diegetic narrators to whom being in the world seems to present itself in terms of conflicting forms of movement. The pervasiveness with which these experiences are portrayed in the fictions invites the question whether we could see such patterning as the result of authorial design.

This kind of question tempts critics to reach for Kafka's extra-diegetic writings, such as the diaries. Even a brief look at these notebooks shows that these writings, too, are pervaded by dynamic images, many of which recur in the fictions.<sup>2</sup> Throughout his diaries, Kafka reflects on the experience of writing primarily in kinetic terms. Writing, he declares, is associated with dynamic impulses originating in what he referred to as the 'world in his head':

Die ungeheure Welt, die ich im Kopfe habe. Aber wie mich befreien und sie befreien ohne zu zerreißen. Und tausendmal lieber zerreißen, als sie in mir zurückhalten oder begraben. Dazu bin ich ja hier, das ist mir ganz klar. (KA10, 179)

---

<sup>2</sup> For discussions of this relation see for example Julian Preece, 'The Letters and Diaries', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.111-130; Mark Harman, 'Life into Art: Kafka's Self-Stylization in the Diaries', in *Franz Kafka (1883-1983): His Craft and Thought*, ed. by Roman Struc and J.C. Yardley (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), pp.101-112.

In this passage, Kafka describes an experience of restlessness, during which he became subject to forces emerging from an extra-ordinary, ‘ungeheure’, world at the core of his being. The subjective ‘reality’ of this world – his ‘traumhaftes inneres Leben’ (KA10, 167) – is such that the forces emerging from it powerfully challenge the external stability of the self. Like the ‘Flut’ emerging in the “Kaufmann” as he returns home from his shop, this impulse brings with it the threat to ‘zerreißen’ the very boundaries of the self.

This challenge to the stable self, however, is associated with the promise of liberation and the possibility of more authentic modes of movement, which leads Kafka to assert that he would ‘tausendmal lieber zerreißen, als sie in mir zurückhalten oder begraben’. To suppress this inner force would be to bury a dynamic impulse that Kafka felt he had to release if he was to fulfil what might be the purpose of his being. The conflict between the ‘ordinary self’ and the ‘ungeheure Welt’, as we know, expresses itself in the dynamics of writing.

In 1912, Kafka stated that ‘in mir kann ganz gut eine Konzentration auf das Schreiben erkannt werden’, and that this form of movement is the ‘ergiebigste Richtung meines Wesens’. Listing a series of activities associated with ‘ordinary’ existence – ‘die Freuden des Geschlechtes, des Essens, des Trinkens, des philosophischen Nachdenkens der Musik’ – he concluded that such normative patterns need to be excluded from the ‘Gemeinschaft’ of his organism in order ‘mein wirkliches Leben anzufangen’ (KA9, 264-265).

At least in the experience described here, Kafka sensed that in order to follow the direction of his ‘innermost being’, he had to subordinate his social and ‘natural’ impulses to the dynamics of writing – or, to be more precise, to the ultimately incomprehensible dynamic impulse that appeared to be feeding it. As in his stories, the origin of this impulse

is reflected on in ambiguous terms. Kafka experienced himself as the origin, channel or ‘instrument’ of forces that nevertheless remained obscure and inaccessible to his consciousness. This experience is grasped in images that express similar sensations to those appearing throughout the narratives. Kafka felt drawn along in a ‘Strömung’ (KA9, 195), and repeatedly drew on the traditional image of the writer as carried by Pegasus, horse of the muses. Like the Red Indian, he felt ‘vorwärtsgerissen, auf dem Pferd’ (KA10, 226), carried along by forces to which he could at best – if at all – give direction but which he could never actively control in their dynamic development.<sup>3</sup> At times Kafka felt that he could use fruitfully the images made available by the liberating forces at work in him:

Ich fühle mich gelockert bis auf den Boden meines Wesens und kann  
aus mir heben was ich nur will. (KA9, 44)

The descending motion of reaching into the ‘Boden meines Wesens’ and ‘unterzutauchen’ into the ‘Strömungen’ (KA11, 12) he felt flowing in these depths could then lead to ascending motions not only of ‘heben’ but of existential elevation, as ‘Erhebung’ (KA9, 71). ‘Tieferes hervorzulassen’ (KA9, 110) is assigned the transformative power of ‘himmlische Auflösung und ein wirkliches Lebendigwerden’ (KA9, 45). Not only the movement in a story, but also the process of its narration could thus lead to sensations of what is described in ‘Ein plötzlicher Spaziergang’ as ‘sich zu seiner wahren Gestalt zu erheb[en]’. In view of such sensations it seems therefore unsurprising that Kafka should describe writing not as an artistic desire but an existential yearning (KA9, 223).

---

<sup>3</sup> A story, he once states, is experienced like a ‘heranfahrende Lokomotive aus Stahl, Kohle und Dampf’. To write is to be chased by this story, and to run ‘aus eigenem Schwung vor ihr [...] wohin sie nur stößt und wohin man sie lockt’ (KA9, 33).

Such moments, however, are rare. The movements in which the ‘ungeheure Welt’ expresses itself are – like extra-ordinary forms of movement throughout Kafka’s narratives – expressed in terms of a conflict with everyday existence:

Ich glaube, diese Schlaflosigkeit kommt nur daher, daß ich schreibe. Denn so wenig und so schlecht ich schreibe, ich werde doch durch diese kleinen Erschütterungen empfindlich, spüre besonders gegen Abend und noch mehr am Morgen, das Wehen, die nahe Möglichkeit großer mich aufreißender Zustände, die mich zu allem fähig machen könnten und bekomme dann in dem allgemeinen Lärm der in mir ist und dem zu befehlen ich nicht Zeit habe, keine Ruhe. Schließlich ist dieser Lärm nur eine bedrückte, zurückgehaltene Harmonie, die freigelassen mich ganz erfüllen, ja sogar noch in die Weite spannen und dann noch erfüllen würde. Jetzt aber verursacht mir dieser Zustand neben schwachen Hoffnungen nur Schaden, da mein Wesen nicht genug Fassungskraft hat, die gegenwärtige Mischung zu ertragen, bei Tag hilft mir die sichtbare Welt, in der Nacht zerschneidet es mich ungehindert. (KA9, 43)

Writing, it appears, not only provides an outlet for the impulses originating in the ‘ungeheure Welt’, but also intensifies Kafka’s awareness of their stirring. These impulses express themselves as the promise of a ‘Harmonie’ and a fantastic expansion of the self. Within the constrictions of Kafka’s ordinary ‘Wesen’, however, such energies have to remain contained, ‘zurückgehalten’ and ‘bedrückt’. Throughout Kafka’s diaries, ‘Schlaflosigkeit’ (KA10, 184) and ‘Nervositäten’ (KA10, 74) are constant reminders of the conflict emerging from the ways in which the ‘ungeheure Welt’ expresses itself within his ‘ordinary’ existence.

At times, Kafka responded to this conflict in ways that are strikingly reminiscent of the ‘Entschlüsse’ attempted by some of the protagonists in *Betrachtung*. Exhausted from the ‘Lärm’ within him, he imagined being ‘möglichst schwer [...], was ich für das Einschlafen

für gut halte‘. Yet such attempts are grasped in images more suited to describe a state of siege than the possibility of rest as Kafka pictured himself lying in bed like a ‘bepackter Soldat‘ (KA9, 44-45). Like the various coping strategies applied by his protagonists, however, such attempts at repressing extra-ordinary impulses in order to preserve his ‘ordinary self’ routinely fail. They merely seem to lead to even more radical challenges of this self, expressed in images of violent opening, such as being cut open with a ‘Selchermesser’ (KA10, 177) or experiencing a ‘fast schmerzlose Sektion bei lebendigem Leibe’ (KA9, 57).

At other times, Kafka expressed a desperate desire to actively release the impulses stirring inside him, ‘und wenn es mir das Gesicht zerschneiden sollte‘ (KA9, 100). Repeatedly, he envisaged conditions under which such states of restlessness might be resolved, as in the wish to retreat into the isolation of a cellar about which he famously wrote to Felice. ‘Ich muß viel allein sein’, he declares in the diaries, stating that ‘was ich geleistet habe, ist nur ein Erfolg des Alleinseins’ (KA10, 184).

The dynamics of the ‘ungeheure Welt’, however, can neither be wilfully suppressed nor wilfully brought into being. In this, too, Kafka shared the experience of the protagonist in ‘Entschlüsse’. Repeatedly, he felt expelled from the dynamic flow of his stories, when narratives ‘stocken’ (KA9, 252) or when he experiences a complete ‘Mißlingen beim Schreiben’ (KA10, 69). While the ability to write is associated with elated dynamism and the possibility of a ‘wirkliches Leben’, such disruptions are perceived as a form of severe accident or death:

Ich bin ja wie aus Stein, wie mein eigenes Grabdenkmal bin ich, da ist keine Lücke für Zweifel oder für Glauben [...] Wenn ich mich zum Schreibtisch setze ist mir nicht wohler als einem der mitten im Verkehr des place de l'Opera fällt und beide Beine bricht. (KA9, 102-3)

Repeatedly, Kafka blamed his 'schreckliches Doppelleben' (KA9, 26) for such states. Famously, he complained about the demands placed on him by social convention, economic needs and the simple but powerful need to follow the pattern of waking and sleeping. Such complaints about the inability to write, however, appear primarily as an expression of the inability to actively draw on forces lying beyond his wilful control:

8 IV 14 Gestern unfähig auch nur ein Wort zu schreiben. Heute nicht besser. Wer erlöst mich? Und in mir das Gedränge, in der Tiefe, kaum zu sehn. Ich bin wie ein lebendiges Gitterwerk, ein Gitter, das feststeht und fallen will. (KA10, 142)

Writing, Kafka reckoned, depends on a form of 'Selbstzufriedenheit und eine Verlorenheit in sich selbst' that allows the writer to 'still abgleiten' when the narrative has unfolded itself successfully. Yet just as the impulse for unrestricted movement causes Kafka the suffering of sleeplessness, the impulse for stability and closure frustrates his ability to maintain such uncontrolled unfolding. Driven by the desire to wilfully resolve such states of restlessness, the writer has to 'den Schluß von außenher geradezu mit Händen [beendigen], die nicht nur arbeiten, sondern sich auch festhalten müssen' (KA10, 255). The problem of 'Beendigung' and 'abreißende Anfänge' is thus not caused by a lack of 'Feuer', but the inability to maintain this state of 'Verlorenheit in sich selbst', which results in 'abreißende Anfänge' that remain without the force of the 'Strömung', 'unbrauchbar, trocken, weit vor dem Ende abgebrochen' (KA9, 229):

Sicher ist, daß ich alles, was ich im voraus selbst im guten Gefühl Wort für Wort oder sogar nur beiläufig aber in ausdrücklichen Worten erfunden habe, auf dem Schreibtisch beim Versuch des Niederschreibens, trocken, verkehrt, unbeweglich, der ganzen Umgebung hinderlich, ängstlich, vor allem aber lückenhaft erscheint, trotzdem von der ursprünglichen Erfindung nichts vergessen worden ist. Es liegt natürlich zum großen Teil daran, daß ich frei vom Papier nur in der Zeit der Erhebung, die ich mehr fürchte als ersehne, wie sehr ich sie auch ersehne, Gutes erfinde, daß dann aber die Fülle so groß ist, daß ich verzichten muß, blindlings also nehme nur dem Zufall nach, aus der Strömung heraus, griffweise, so daß diese Erwerbung beim überlegten Niederschreiben nichts ist im Vergleich zur Fülle, in der sie lebte, unfähig ist, diese Fülle herbeizubringen und daher schlecht und störend ist, weil sie nutzlos lockt. (KA9, 195)

What Kafka described here is a similar conflict to that experienced by the narrator of ‘Wunsch, Indianer zu werden’. The limitation of fantasy lies in its inability to grasp an experience without material substance. Just as the Red Indian on his horse approximates the perfect motion and perfect rest of Zeno’s flying arrow, he has to be let go of as the narrator cannot fully capture the kind of dynamic experience he initiates in words. Thus Kafka the writer expressed something much like the conflict that dominates the experiences of his protagonists: a seemingly irresolvable clash between the ability to conceive of forms of movement that go beyond the boundaries of ‘normal’ existence and the inability to do more than snatch such impulses randomly out of a ‘Strömung’ and watch them dry out as they are transfixed in language.<sup>4</sup> Kafka’s writing, too, was subject to the limitations of ‘Erdgebundenheit’.

---

<sup>4</sup> These concerns have repeatedly been placed in the context of the turn of the century ‘Sprachkrise’. See for example Peter-André Alt, ‘Doppelte Schrift, Unterbrechung und Grenze’, *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 29 (1985), 455-490. Again, it is notable that Kafka expresses experiences shared by his contemporaries, yet in dynamic images.

On at least one occasion, however, Kafka felt that he had successfully resolved this conflict. In his comments on ‘Das Urteil’, Kafka used images of movement which suggest that during the writing of this story, he felt he had resolved and transcended restlessness:

*23 (September 1912) Diese Geschichte “das Urteil” habe ich in der Nacht vom 22 zum 23 von 10 Uhr abends bis 6 Uhr früh in einem Zug geschrieben. Die vom Sitzen steif gewordenen Beine konnte ich kaum unter dem Schreibtisch hervorziehen. Die fürchterliche Anstrengung und Freude, wie sich die Geschichte vor mir entwickelte wie ich in einem Gewässer vorwärtskam. Mehrmals in dieser Nacht trug ich mein Gewicht auf dem Rücken. Wie alles gewagt werden kann, wie für alle, für die fremdesten Einfälle ein großes Feuer bereitet ist, in dem sie vergehn und auferstehn. [...] Nur so kann geschrieben werden, nur in einem solchen Zusammenhang, mit solcher vollständigen Öffnung des Leibes und der Seele. (KA10, 101)*

Kafka described the process of writing ‘Das Urteil’ as a successful liberation from the limitations usually imposed on him by his physical and social existence. As ‘Müdigkeit’ disappears and his legs become immobile, a very different, inward form of movement is released. Kafka emphatically declared that only with such ‘Zusammenhang’ could writing be done. This central term refers to the physical process of writing as a continuous activity through time, the inner unity of what is written and the connection between the narrative and the writer.

Kafka felt that the inner unity of a narrative depended crucially on the undividedness of the writing process. He famously suffered from having to write narratives ‘lückenhaft’ (KA9, 195), thus never achieving the kind of fluidity and inner connectedness that could be achieved when writing ‘in einem Zug’.<sup>5</sup> ‘Zusammenhang’ further describes the inner

---

<sup>5</sup> Kafka’s desire for this unity of the physical motion of writing and uninterrupted periods of writing is frequently commented on. Malcolm Pasley’s analyses of the manuscripts have provided insight into the

connectedness of the narrative and the writing self. Poured out from him in a complete 'opening of body and soul', Kafka felt that here, he had successfully released a new creation out of the 'Wehen' of his 'inner world'. In 1913, Kafka grasped this sensation in the image of birth. Stating that 'die Geschichte ist wie eine regelrechte Geburt mit Schmutz und Schleim bedeckt aus mir herausgekommen' (KA11, 125), he suggested that the 'birth' of the story also constituted his own 'wirkliches Lebendigwerden'. The image of childbirth further resolves the ambivalent sensation of being actively involved in the process of creation while remaining passively subject to it. Moving and being moved become the same as 'sich die Geschichte vor mir entwickelte wie ich in einem Gewässer vorwärtskam': here at last the creator and the created moved as one, as 'mother' and as 'child'. Yet not only activity and passivity coalesce during this process, but also the potential of the dynamic impulse to both destroy and create. Like phoenix from the ashes, all 'Einfälle' burn and 'auferstehen'.

In his comments on writing 'Das Urteil', Kafka asserted not only his capacity for envisaging the possibility of extra-ordinary, liberated motion but also his ability to realise such movements in writing. Such moments of seemingly successful elevation were rare, but when they occurred, they are commented on in images of elated dynamism and transcendence. During such moments Kafka felt that the 'Geist' (KA11, 189) supplying his inner energies could be a higher force, and that his writing could be a form of prayer or

---

ways in which Kafka's desire for 'Zusammenhang' finds expressions in the physical process of writing. See Pasley 1995; see also Jürgen Born, "'Das Feuer zusammenhängender Stunden". Zu Kafkas Metaphorik des dichterischen Schaffens', in *'Da zwei in mir kämpfen...'* und andere Aufsätze zu Kafka (Prag: Vitalis, 2000), pp.17-35.

calling with the potential to elevate not only himself, but the world as a whole in a process of ‘die Welt ins Reine, Wahre, Unveränderliche heben’ (KA11, 167).

The challenge of this desire lies in the ability to balance the various forms of movement in which life expresses itself. At times, Kafka felt that this precarious balancing act could be accomplished in forms of writing that provide a different perspective on the world:

Ich prüfte die Wünsche, die ich für das Leben hatte. Als wichtigster oder reizvollster ergab sich der Wunsch, eine Ansicht des Lebens zu gewinnen (und – das war allerdings notwendig verbunden – schriftlich die andern von ihr überzeugen zu können) in der das Leben zwar sein natürliches schweres Fallen und Steigen bewahre aber gleichzeitig mit nicht minderer Deutlichkeit als ein Nichts, als ein Traum, als ein Schweben erkannt werde. (KA11, 179)

Here, Kafka envisaged a realisation of the ‘Wunsch’ within ‘reality’. The ‘perspective’ he imagines here is not directed at breaking out of the ‘schweres Fallen und Steigen’ that characterises the ‘Schaukelbewegung’ of an earthbound existence. Instead, he proposed a kind of positive version of the ‘Vexierbild’ in which to be ‘erdenschwer’ is reconcilable with being free from gravitation. To live within the ‘Fallen und Steigen’ while also being aware of its ‘Nichtigkeit’ is not conceived of as conflict but as equilibrium. Yet once again, the possibility of any form of stability – and be it the precarious balancing act envisaged here – depends on the individual’s ability to conceive of it, but also to sustain it as a realisable project. The passage asserts this ability, but also its opposite: ‘Vielleicht ein schöner Wunsch, wenn ich ihn richtig gewünscht hätte’ (KA11, 179):

Aber er konnte gar nicht so wünschen, denn sein Wunsch war kein Wunsch, er war nur eine Verteidigung, eine Verbürgerlichung des Nichts, ein Hauch von Munterkeit, den er dem Nichts geben wollte. (KA11, 180)

The 'Wunsch', Kafka feared, is not 'richtig'. Writing, it seems, is not so much an expression of the ability truly to envisage a view of the world as 'schwebend', but its opposite: a 'Verteidigung', a form of containment designed to mask the impossibility to conceive of the kind of movement envisaged in the 'true' wish. Essentially, writing then emerges as a form of construction.

At very rare moments, as we have seen, Kafka thought it possible that an impersonal force operated through the dynamics of his writings, so that his stories carried the echo of a form of 'innere Wahrheit' (KKA/B2, 128). More often, however, Kafka's reflections are expressive of equally strong doubts about the possibility that writing might be any kind of calling by higher forces. He feared that it could even be 'Teufelsdienst', or something worse, a form of self-gratifying or self-exculpating deceit. When Kafka described his writing as an 'Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze', he created the impression of movement directed beyond the limitations of 'reality'. Yet by describing this 'Ansturm' as a form of 'Jagd' (KA11, 199), Kafka placed it in a line with Gracchus' journey. The 'irdische Grenze' could be nothing but a welcome goal, a form of 'Verteidigung' devised by his attraction to the stability of a grand narrative. What finds expression in this ambiguous use of imagery is the question whether the 'Wunsch' expressed in the notion of writing as a mission is merely a realisation of the desire for yet another stabilising structure.

The dynamics of writing, then, emerges as yet another 'Schaukelbewegung' between movement and stasis, the desire for closure and its negation, construction and destabilisation. The assertion of the 'Wunsch' is in conflict with an inability to conceive of

forms of extra-ordinary movements except in the form of negation – the ‘Nichts’. The ‘Ansturm’ thus turns into a ‘stehender Sturmloch’, a ‘Teilbau’ erected by a writer who is engaged in a movement directed *both* at building a wall around the Chinese Empire that is his existence *and* at challenging or destroying borders. At times, Kafka feared that writing could be a vain series of essentially self-gratifying reflections:

Die Kunst fliegt um die Wahrheit, aber mit der entschiedenen Absicht, sich nicht zu verbrennen. Ihre Fähigkeit besteht darin, in der dunklen Leere einen Ort zu finden, wo der Strahl des Lichts, ohne daß dies vorher zu erkennen gewesen wäre, kräftig aufgefangen werden kann. (KA6, 197)

What emerges from this brief outline of movement images in Kafka’s reflections on writing is that these too are pervaded by the patterns dominating his fictions. Rather than providing us with a somehow superior perspective on the nature and direction of such dynamic patterns, these pieces of extra-diegetic evidence present us with what appears like a re-enactment of the ‘drama’ of restlessness. In 1922, Kafka uses an image in which writing is described as but one expression of the experience of restlessness amongst many:

Es war so als wäre mir wie jedem andern Menschen der Kreismittelpunkt gegeben, als hätte ich dann wie jeder andere Mensch den entscheidenden Radius zu gehn und dann den schönen Kreis zu ziehn. Statt dessen habe ich immerfort einen Anlauf zum Radius genommen, aber immer wieder gleich ihn abbrechen müssen (Beispiele: Klavier, Violine, Sprachen, Germanistik, Antizionismus, Zionismus, Hebräisch, Gärtnerei, Tischlerei, Litteratur, Heiratsversuche, eigene Wohnung) Es starrt im Mittelpunkt des imaginären Kreises von beginnenden Radien, es ist kein Platz mehr für einen neuen Versuch, kein Platz heißt Alter, Nervenschwäche, und kein Versuch mehr bedeutet Ende. (KA11, 206)

This 'Radienprojekt' is expressive of an experience in which existence presents itself as a conflict between the desire for the 'Kreis' of life as a representation of stability and completion on the one hand and a tendency that negates such stability on the other. The dynamic pattern emerging here is that of the 'Schaukelbewegung': the image that intimates the dynamic pattern dominating Kafka's narratives remains a central expression of experiences of restlessness. Writing, it appears, is not the source of these experiences but merely one of its many expressions.

Another source that is frequently turned to when looking for statements by Kafka that may have some form of superior status within the oeuvre are the aphorisms. Here, too, Kafka uses images of movement pervasively, and in a way that is suggestive of an attempt at systematising the kinds of experience which emerge in so many varied and ambivalent ways throughout his narratives. By returning to and re-interpreting the story of the Fall of Man, above all, Kafka seems to offer a perspective on restlessness as a generally human condition.

The theme of human existence as a state of eternal falling recurs throughout Kafka's writings. The experience of 'steigen' and 'fallen' (KA1, 13) is central to 'Kinder auf der Landstraße' and *Betrachtung* as a whole. In Gracchus' eternal journey on the 'Treppe', the theme of human 'Erdenschwere' and the desire for transcendence then finds a more disturbing expression.<sup>6</sup> In the 'Aphorismen', this theme is grasped within the framework of the banishment from paradise. Here, Kafka describes the condition of man as earthbound while also being exposed to the pull towards transcendence:

---

<sup>6</sup> The theme of human existence as fall is also present in the death of Therese's mother in *Der Verschollene*.

Er ist ein freier und gesicherter Bürger der Erde, denn er ist an eine Kette gelegt, die lang genug ist, um ihm alle irdischen Räume frei zu geben und doch nur so lang, daß nichts ihn über die Grenzen der Erde reißen kann. Gleichzeitig aber ist er auch ein freier und gesicherter Bürger des Himmels, denn er ist auch an eine ähnlich berechnete Himmelskette gelegt. Will er nun auf die Erde, drosselt ihn das Halsband des Himmels, will er in den Himmel jenes der Erde. Und trotzdem hat er alle Möglichkeiten und fühlt es, ja er weigert sich sogar das Ganze auf einen Fehler bei der ersten Fesselung zurückzuführen. (KA6, 239)

This condition is not, however, something subsequent to man's banishment from paradise.

'Der entscheidende Augenblick der menschlichen Entwicklung ist immerwährend' (KA6, 229), Kafka writes in another aphorism, thus suggesting the 'Ewigkeit des Vorgangs' of being banished from paradise:

Die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies ist in ihrem Hauptteil ewig: Es ist also zwar die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies endgiltig, das Leben in der Welt unausweichlich, die Ewigkeit des Vorgangs aber macht es trotzdem möglich, daß wir nicht nur dauernd im Paradiese bleiben können, sondern tatsächlich dort dauernd sind, gleichgültig ob wir es hier wissen oder nicht. (KA6, 239)

The aphorism implies that what expresses itself in the experience of being as a condition of restless stasis is a reflection of the human condition as a state of being both banished from paradise and of being in it, of life as an everlastingly liminal form of existence, forever on the threshold between two realms, in neither of which man can feel at home. The human condition of restlessness therefore appears to be integrated into a greater structure that merely remains incomprehensible to the individual. The experience of existence as a state of restless stasis could therefore, in theory, be transcended in a higher state of awareness:

Theoretisch gibt es eine Glücksmöglichkeit: an das Unzerstörbare in sich glauben und nicht zu ihm streben. (KA6, 239)

As we can see, some of the aphorisms suggest that Kafka may have been feeling his way towards a conception of existence that allows him to conceive of restlessness as an expression of a general human state, which would approach a kind of metaphysics of movement. In a way, this ‘mental leap’<sup>7</sup> is based on a similar understanding as the wish for an experience of being in the world that allows the individual to see the (physical) world as ‘Nichts’ and still acknowledge its ‘natürliches schweres Fallen und Steigen’ in the certain knowledge of the ‘Unzerstörbare’ at the core of all being. Yet it is not hard to spot the parallels with life in the Chinese ‘Heimat’ which the builders of the wall were bent on defending. The ability to conceive of a stable world-view, once again, depends on an act of immobilisation. If we relate Kafka’s aphorisms to the ways in which he generally deals with ‘myth’ as a way of establishing overarching structures that could contain and transcend the experience of restlessness, it seems unsurprising that Kafka’s reflections on the possibility of conceiving of the ‘Unzerstörbare’ sit alongside statements that negate this possibility. The ‘Glücksmöglichkeit’ is purely theoretical: ‘Man kann doch nicht nicht-leben’ (KA6, 248). The possibility to conceive of a ‘superstructure’ is in conflict with a tendency that negates all structures of stability. ‘Sein’, Kafka notes, ‘bedeutet im Deutschen beides: Da-sein und Ihm-gehören’ (KA6, 235). This may be read as an invitation to a metaphysical view on existence as containment within a greater structure of

---

<sup>7</sup> Robertson 1985, p. 214.

meaning, expressive of what Stanley Corngold calls the ‘Gnostic verve’.<sup>8</sup> To belong to ‘ihm’, however, could also express the experience of being subject to inexplicable dynamic forces – which may or may not be shared by others –, the ‘es’ that makes protagonists leave their parent’s garden or fling themselves from bridges. If there was paradise, Kafka seems to suggest, man would leave it:

Es gibt zwei menschliche Hauptsünden, aus welchen sich alle andern ableiten: Ungeduld und Lässigkeit. Wegen der Ungeduld sind sie aus dem Paradiese vertrieben worden, wegen der Lässigkeit kehren sie nicht zurück. Vielleicht aber gibt es nur eine Hauptsünde: die Ungeduld. Wegen der Ungeduld sind sie vertrieben worden, wegen der Ungeduld kehren sie nicht zurück. (KA6, 228)

It cannot be my objective to provide a full analysis of the aphorisms. Yet although this brief excursion cannot do justice to the complexity of these texts, it hopefully illustrates the value of a differentiated understanding of the ways in which Kafka employs movement images. Even a brief analysis of dynamic imagery used in these texts makes us question a reading of Kafka’s oeuvre as a progression towards the level of formal and reflective abstraction that is reflected in the aphorisms.<sup>9</sup> In the context of Kafka’s general reflections on the possibility and impossibility of sustaining a mythical world-view, it seems more likely that the aphorisms represent yet another exploration of the experience of

---

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Corngold, *Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.112.

<sup>9</sup> The aphorisms are frequently considered to mark a shift in Kafka’s development towards a kind of mysticism and an ethical world-view in which insight into the ‘Unzerstörbare’ is associated with responsibility towards humanity. See for example Werner Hoffmann, “*Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze*”: *Aphorismen und Spätwerk Kafkas* (Bern: Francke, 1983); Robertson 1985, pp.185-217. This would not only assign the aphorisms the status of a milestone on what Amann calls Kafka’s ‘Weg zu sich selbst’ (10) but also on a ‘Weg zum Nebenmenschen’ (KA6, 226). See Jürg Johannes Amann, *Das Symbol Kafka* (Bern/München: Francke, 1974). As discussed, this positive reading has to be taken with care as a range of aphorisms cast a more doubtful light on this possibility.

restlessness. Kafka's oeuvre, I would like to propose, cannot be grasped in teleological terms. I consider it more fruitful to approach it as yet another part of the 'Radienprojekt', as another exploratory motion.

In this thesis, I have traced out a version of this 'Radienprojekt' with restlessness at the centre, propelling the self outwards along its multifarious radii. To follow the variety of radii to be drawn from this central experience may not allow us to come full circle. It does however provide us with a view on Kafka's strikingly productive exploration of experiences quintessentially characterised as restlessness: 'eine Bewegung ohne Ende, eine Unruhe, übertragen von dem unruhigen Element auf die hilflosen Menschen und ihre Werke' (KA2, 23-24).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Works by Kafka

- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), I: *Ein Landarzt und andere Drucke zu Lebzeiten*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), II: *Der Verschollene*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), III: *Der Proceß*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), V: *Beschreibung eines Kampfes und andere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), VI: *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer und andere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), VIII: *Das Ehepaar und andere Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), IX: *Tagebücher. Band 1: 1909-1912*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), X: *Tagebücher. Band 2: 1912-1914*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden nach der Kritischen Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2003), XI: *Tagebücher. Band 3: 1914-1923*.
- Kafka, Franz, *Schriften Tagebücher Briefe. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley, Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer): *Briefe 1900-1912*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 1999).
- Kafka, Franz, *Schriften Tagebücher Briefe. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Gerhard Neumann, Malcolm Pasley, Jost Schillemeit (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer): *Briefe 1913-März 1914*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 1999).

## Other Primary Literature

- Baudelaire, Charles. *The Poems in Prose*. Vol. II, ed. by Francis Scarfe (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1989).
- Mach, Ernst, *Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1886).
- Mann, Thomas, 'Süßer Schlaf', in *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden. XI: Reden und Aufsätze 3* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1990), pp.333-334.
- Mann, Thomas, *Der Tod in Venedig* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992).
- Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden. III: Prosa und Dramen*, ed. by August Stahl (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1996).
- Schiller, Friedrich, 'Ueber den Zusammenhang der thierischen Natur des Menschen mit seiner geistigen', in *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*, ed. by Julius Petersen and others (Weimar: Böhlau, 1943-), XX: *Philosophische Schriften. Erster Teil*, ed. by Benno von Wiese (1962) pp.37-75.

## Secondary Literature

- Adorno, Theodor, 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), X.1: *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I. Prismen. Ohne Leitbild*. pp.254-287.
- Allemann, Beda, 'Stehender Sturm. Zeit und Geschichte im Werke Kafkas', in *Zeit und Geschichte im Werk Kafkas*, ed. by Diethelm Kaiser and Nikolaus Lohse (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), pp.15-36.
- Alt, Peter-André, 'Doppelte Schrift, Unterbrechung und Grenze', *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 29 (1985), 455-490.
- Amann, Jürg Johannes, *Das Symbol Kafka* (Bern/Munich: Francke, 1974).
- Anders, Günther, *Kafka Pro und Contra* (Munich: Beck, 1951).
- Anderson, Mark, *Kafka's Clothes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
- Arnold, Heinz Ludwig (ed.), *Franz Kafka* (Munich: edition text+kritik, 1994).
- Backenköhler, Gerd, 'Neues Zum Sorgenkind Odradek', *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 89 (1970), 269-73.
- Baum, Marlene, "Es schlug mein Herz, geschwind zu Pferde!": zur Poesie des Pferdemotivs in Goethes Alltag und in seinem Werk (Jena: Quartus, 2004).
- Bay, Hansjörg, 'Kafkas Tinnitus', in *Odradeks Lachen. Fremdheit bei Kafka*, ed. by Hansjörg Bay and Christof Hamann (Freiburg: Rombach, 2006), pp.41-68.
- Beißner, Friedrich, *Der Erzähler Kafka und andere Vorträge* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1983).
- Belgum, Kirsten, *Popularizing the nation: audience, representation, and the production of identity in 'Die Gartenlaube', 1853-1900* (Nebraska: Lincoln, 1998).

- Benjamin, Walter, 'Franz Kafka. Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages', in *Walter Benjamin. Ein Lesebuch*, ed. by Michael Opitz (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), pp.222-251.
- Bergel, Lienhard, 'Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor', in *The Kafka Problem*, ed. by Angel Flores (New York: Octagon Books, 1963), pp.172-8.
- Binder, Hartmut (ed.), *Kafka-Handbuch in zwei Bänden. Band 2: Das Werk und seine Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1979).
- Binder, Hartmut, *Kafka in neuer Sicht : Mimik, Gestik und Personengefüge als Darstellungsform* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976).
- Binder, Hartmut, 'Kafkas Literarische Urteile. Ein Beitrag zu seiner Typologie und Ästhetik', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 86 (1967) 211-249.
- Binder, Hartmut, *Kafka: Der Schaffensprozeß* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1983).
- Born, Jürgen, "'Das Feuer zusammenhängender Stunden". Zu Kafkas Metaphorik des dichterischen Schaffens', in *'Da zwei in mir kämpfen...' und andere Aufsätze zu Kafka* (Prag: Vitalis, 2000), pp.17-35.
- Born, Jürgen (ed.), *Franz Kafka: Kritik und Rezeption zu seinen Lebzeiten 1912-1924* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1979).
- Brod, Max, *Über Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1974).
- Cersowsky, Peter, *"Mein ganzes Leben ist auf Literatur gerichtet": Franz Kafka im Kontext der literarischen Dekadenz* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1983).
- Corngold, Stanley, *Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, transl. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- Dietz, Ludwig, 'Franz Kafka und die Zweimonatsschrift Hyperion', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 37 (1963), 463-473.
- Dodd, William (ed.), *Kafka: The Metamorphosis, The Trial and The Castle* (London/New York: Longman, 1995).
- Duttlinger, Carolin, *Kafka and Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Duttlinger, Carolin, 'Between alterness and paranoia: Kafka's poetics of attention from "Betrachtung" to "Der Bau"' (unpublished paper given at the conference 'Kafka and Short Modernist Prose' in Oxford, September/October 2008).
- Ehrich-Haefeli, Verena, 'Bewegungsenergien in Psyche und Text: Zu Kafkas "Odradek"', *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 109 (1990), 238-52.
- Emrich, Wilhelm, *Franz Kafka* (Bonn: Athenäum, 1965).
- Fickert, Kurt, 'The Doppelgänger motif in Kafka's "Blumfeld"', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 6 (1977), 419-423.

- Forderer, Christof, *Ich-Eklipsen. Doppelgänger in der Literatur seit 1800* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999).
- Glinski von, Sophie. *Imaginationsprozesse. Verfahren phantastischen Erzählens in Franz Kafkas Frühwerk* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2004).
- Goebel, Rolf, *Constructing China. Kafka's Orientalist Discourse* (Columbia: Camden House, 1997).
- Goodden, Christian, "'The Great Wall of China: The Elaboration of an Intellectual Dilemma', in *On Kafka. Semi-Centenary Perspectives*, ed. by Franz Kuna (London: Paul Elek, 1976), pp.128-145.
- Grandin, John, 'Defenestrations', in *The Kafka Debate*, ed. by Angel Flores (New York: Gordian Press, 1977), pp.216-222.
- Grandin, John, 'Kafka's "Der plötzliche Spaziergang"', *MLN*, 89 (1974), 866-72.
- Gray, Richard, *Constructive Deconstruction. Kafka's Aphorism: Literary Tradition and Literary Transformation* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987).
- Haase, Donald, 'Kafka's "Der Jäger Gracchus": Fragment or Figment of the Imagination', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 11 (1978), 319-332.
- Harmann, Mark, 'Life into Art: Kafka's Self-Stylization in the Diaries', in *Franz Kafka (1883-1983): His Craft and Thought*, ed. by Roman Struc and J.C. Yardley (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), pp.101-112.
- Hillmann, Heinz, 'Das Sorgenkind Odradek', *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 86 (1967), 197-210.
- Hoffmann, Werner, "*Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze*": *Aphorismen und Spätwerk Kafkas* (Bern: Francke, 1983).
- Kobs, Jörgen, *Untersuchungen zu Bewußtsein und Sprache seiner Gestalten*, ed. by Ursula Brech (Bad Homburg: Athenäum, 1970).
- Kopper, John, 'Building Walls and Jumping over Them: Constructions in Franz Kafka's "Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer"', *MLN*, 98 (1983), 351-65.
- Kraft, Herbert, *Mondheimat* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1983).
- Kübler-Jung, Tilly, *Einblicke in Franz Kafkas 'Betrachtung': Analyse und literaturgeschichtliche Einordnung* (Marburg: Tectum-Verlag, 2005).
- Kurscheid, Georg, 'Stillstehendes Galoppieren – der Spaziergang bei Robert Walser: Zur Paradoxie einer Bewegung und zum Motiv des "stehenden Sturmlaufs" bei Franz Kafka', *Euphorion*, 81 (1987), 131-155.
- Kurz, Gerhard, (ed.), *Der junge Kafka* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984).
- Kurz, Gerhard, 'Das Rauschen der Stille. Annäherungen an Kafkas "Der Bau"', in *Franz Kafka: Eine ethische und ästhetische Rechtfertigung*, ed. by Beatrice Sandberg and Jakob Lothe (Freiburg: Rombach, 2002), pp.151-174.
- Kurz, Gerhard, *Traum-Schrecken: Kafkas literarische Existenzanalyse* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980).

- Lakoff, George, and Johnson, Mark, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- Miller, Karl, *Doubles. Studies in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- Nägele, Rainer, 'Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Paradies. Versuch einer Interpretation zu Kafkas "Der Jäger Gracchus"', *German Quarterly*, 47 (1974), pp.60-72.
- Neumann, Gerhard, 'Der verschleppte Prozeß: Literarisches Schaffen zwischen Schreibstrom und Werkidol' *Poetica*, 14 (1982), 92-112.
- Neumann, Gerhard, 'Umkehrung und Ablenkung: Franz Kafka's Gleitendes Paradox', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 74 (1968), 702-744.
- Pascal, Roy, *Kafka's Narrators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- Pasley, Malcolm, 'Der Schreibakt und das Geschriebene. Zur Frage der Entstehung von Kafkas Texten', in *Die Schrift ist unveränderlich...': Essays zu Kafka*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1995), pp.99-120.
- Pasley, Malcolm, 'Drei literarische Mystikifikationen Kafkas', in *Kafka-Symposion*, ed. by Jürgen Born and others (Munich: dtv, 1969), pp.17-29.
- Politzer, Heinz, *Parable and Paradox* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962).
- Preece, Julian (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- Puchner, Martin, 'Kafka's Antitheatrical Gestures', *The Germanic Review*, 78/3 (2003), 177-193.
- Ramm, Klaus, *Reduktion als Erzählprinzip bei Kafka* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1971).
- Reuß, Roland, 'Augen weit geschlossen: zu Franz Kafkas kleiner Geschichte "Zerstreutes Hinausschaun"', in *Die kleinen Formen in der Moderne*, ed. by Elmar Locher (Innsbruck: Edition Sturzflüge, 2001), pp.219-230.
- Rignall, John M., 'History and Consciousness in "Beim Bau Der Chinesischen Mauer."', in *Paths and Labyrinths*, ed. by Joseph P. Stern and John J. White. (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1985) pp.111-126.
- Robertson, Ritchie, *Kafka. Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
- Rolleston, James (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*, ed. by James Rolleston (Rochester: Camden House, 2002).
- Ryan, Judith, 'Durch kindische Mittel gerettet : zu einem Motiv bei Franz Kafka', in: *Zeitgenossenschaft. Zur deutschsprachigen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Egon Schwarz zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by Paul Michael Lützel, Herbert Lehnert, Gerhild S. Williams (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum, 1987), pp. 48-60.

- Ryan, Judith, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- Sandbank, Shimon, 'Uncertainty in Style: Kafka's "Betrachtung"', *German Life and Letters*, 34 (1981), 385-97.
- Saße, Günter, 'Die Sorge des Lesers', *Poetica*, 10 (1978), 262-284.
- Scheuer, Hans-Jürgen, von Hartlieb, Justus and Höfner, Georg (eds.) *Kafkas Betrachtung – Lektüren* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2003).
- Schütterle, Annette, *Franz Kafkas Oktavhefte. Ein Schreibprozeß als "System des Teilbaues"* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2002).
- Sokel, Walter, 'Frozen Sea and River of Narration: The Poetics behind Kafka's "Breakthrough"', *New Literary History*, 17 (1986), 351-363.
- Sokel, Walter, *Franz Kafka: Tragik und Ironie* (Munich/Vienna: Langen-Müller, 1964).
- Sokel, Walter, *The Myth of Power and the Self* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002).
- Speirs, Ronald, 'Movement, Time, Language: Forms of instability in Kafka's "Das Urteil"', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 23 (1987), 253-264.
- Speirs, Ronald, 'Where there's a Will there's no Way: A Reading of Kafka's "Der Jäger Gracchus"', *Oxford German Studies* 14 (1983), 92-110.
- Steinberg, Erwin, 'The Three Fragments of Kafka's "The Hunter Gracchus"', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 15 (1978), 307-317.
- Strowick, Elisabeth, "'Lauter Niemand': Zur List des Namens bei Homer und Kafka", *MLN*, 119 (2004), 564-79.
- Ternes, Hans, 'Kafka's "Hunter Gracchus": An Interpretation', in: *Probleme der Komparatistik und Interpretation. Festschrift für André von Gronicka* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978), pp. 216-223.
- Thiher, Allen, 'The "Nachlass": Metaphors of Gehen and Ways toward Science', in *Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance: Centenary Readings* ed. by Alan Udoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp.256-265.
- Triffitt, Gregory, 'Kafka, Paradox and "Die Bäume"', *AUMLA*, 63 (1985), 53-64.
- Triffitt, Gregory, *Kafka's "Landarzt" Collection: Rhetoric and Interpretation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985).
- Walser, Martin, *Beschreibung einer Form*, (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1961).
- Weinberg, Kurt, *Kafkas Dichtungen* (Bern: Francke, 1963).
- White, John J., Endings and non-endings in Kafka's fiction, in *On Kafka. Semi-Centenary Perspectives*, ed. Franz Kuna (London: Elek, 1976), pp. 146-166.
- White, John J., 'The Cyclical Aspect of Kafka's Short Story Collections', in *Paths and Labyrinths*, ed. by Joseph P. Stern and John J. White. (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1985), pp.80-97.

- Wilke, Tobias, 'Türkische Objekte: Dinglichkeit und Repräsentation bei Kafka',  
*Colloquia Germanica*, 37 (2004), 51-72.
- Zilcosky, John, *Kafka's Travels: Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New  
York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).