



# Kafka Transformed

## International Conference

Wadham College, University of Oxford  
18-20 September 2024

### Contents

<b>Keynote Speaker Abstracts</b> .....	2
<b>Paulo de Medeiros</b> (Warwick University): <i>Kafka and World-Literature: Reading, Registration, Resistance</i> .....	2
<b>Kata Gellen</b> (Duke University): <i>Laughter unto Death: Kafka's 'Abraham' between Jewish Humour and Mortification</i> .....	2
<b>Panel Sessions</b> .....	3
<b>PANEL 1:</b> Transformations I: "Feeling Kafka": The 'Kafkaesque' as an Atmospheric Quality in Intermedial Adaptations and Transformations.....	3
<b>PANEL 2:</b> New Voices I .....	4
<b>PANEL 3:</b> Resonances, Networks, Legacies I: "Kafka Behind the Iron Curtain" .....	5
<b>PANEL 4:</b> Transformations II .....	5
<b>PANEL 5:</b> New Voices II: 'Scripts in Silicon: Kafka's Allegories between Codes and Bodies' .....	6
<b>PANEL 6:</b> Resonances, Networks, Legacies III.....	8
<b>PANEL 7:</b> Transformations III .....	9
<b>PANEL 8:</b> New Voices III .....	10
<b>PANEL 9:</b> Resonances, Networks, Legacies III.....	11
<b>PANEL 10:</b> Transformations IV: "BUG: Bodies of Difference and Infestation" .....	12
<b>PANEL 11:</b> New Voices IV.....	13
<b>PANEL 12:</b> Resonances, Networks, Legacies IV .....	14
<b>PANEL 13:</b> Transformations V .....	15
<b>PANEL 14:</b> New Voices V.....	16
<b>PANEL 15:</b> Resonances, Networks, Legacies V .....	17
<b>PANEL 16:</b> Transformations VI.....	18
<b>PANEL 17:</b> New Voices VI.....	19
<b>PANEL 18:</b> Resonances, Legacies, Networks VI .....	20
<b>PANEL 19:</b> Transformations VII.....	21

<b>PANEL 20:</b> New Voices VII.....	22
<b>PANEL 21:</b> Resonances, Networks, Legacies VII .....	23
<b>PANEL 22:</b> Transformations VIII.....	24
<b>PANEL 23:</b> New Voices VIII.....	25
<b>PANEL 24:</b> New Voices IX.....	26
<b>PANEL 25:</b> Transformations IX .....	27
<b>PANEL 26:</b> Transformations X.....	29
<b>PANEL 27:</b> New Voices X.....	29
<b>PANEL 28:</b> Transformations XI.....	30
<b>PANEL 29:</b> New Voices XI.....	31

## Keynote Speaker Abstracts

**Paulo de Medeiros** (Warwick University): *Kafka and World-Literature: Reading, Registration, Resistance*

Kafka is generally acclaimed as one of the greatest writers of all times his name has come to signify what generally is considered to be the best of World Literature understood as a hallowed canon of great authors. This, however, also has led to a kind of domestication and co-optation of Kafka. I propose questioning some accepted notions concerning the way we read Kafka and understand the field of World Literature. My talk is divided in three sections, as expressed in the subtitle: Reading, Registration, and Resistance, and throughout I will draw principally on *Der Verschollene*. (1983 [*Amerika: The Missing Person*, 2008]) In the first I want to examine a few well-known previous readings of Kafka, principally Theodor Adorno’s ‘Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka’ (1953 [‘Notes on Kafka’]), which, to an extent, greatly influence mine, even if I do not always follow them. In the second I will examine the concept of registration as proposed by the Warwick Research Collective, so as to reflect on Kafka in terms of the semi-periphery as part of Immanuel Wallerstein’s World-System Theory. And in the final one, I want to draw on those two and suggest Kafka’s writing as a form of resistance.

**Kata Gellen** (Duke University): *Laughter unto Death: Kafka’s ‘Abraham’ between Jewish Humour and Mortification*

Though largely overlooked, a handful of scholars have examined Kafka’s 1921 “Abraham letter” for its theological implications. In this talk, I read it as a reflection on humor and mortification, both in the sense of deep embarrassment and the Christian idea of putting sinful impulses to death. Following Kierkegaard, Kafka retells the biblical legend several times, though his point is to highlight the absurdity and banality of Abraham’s predicament, not the gravity and awesomeness of his actions. Indeed, Kafka’s increasingly far-fetched and ludicrous takes resemble a stand-up routine in which Abraham appears avoidant, insecure, and hapless—a real schlemiel. The final version devolves into a scene of childhood humiliation, driven by the fear of being “totgelacht” (laughed to death) by fellow pupils and shamed by a sadistic teacher. While there is no corporal punishment, Kafka draws a parallel between the cruel mortifications of adolescence and Abraham’s trial: both hinge on the deeply vulnerable moment of being called upon, by God or teacher, and the social risks involved in answering the call—above all, the risk of being cringe. Kafka humanizes the ancient patriarch in ways that are deeply humorous and painfully relatable.

## Panel Sessions

### PANEL 1: Transformations I: "Feeling Kafka": The 'Kafkaesque' as an Atmospheric Quality in Intermedial Adaptations and Transformations

**Laura Vordermayer** (Saarland University): *Kafka(esque) Experiences on Stage: Theatre and Ballet Adaptations*

This paper deals with the question of how the "Kafkaesque", understood as an atmospheric and emotional quality, is evoked in adaptations of Kafka's literary texts on stage. In a first step, I shall take a look at the reception of stage productions in an attempt to examine the use of the term 'Kafkaesque' in greater detail. What exactly does it mean to make the audience 'feel Kafka'? How is the concept generally conceived in the media?

The examination will be complemented by the analysis of selected theatre and ballet adaptations from a semiotic perspective in the tradition of Erika Fischer-Lichte, taking into account acoustic and kinetic codes including proxemic movements, facial expression and gestures, as well as visual codes with respect to performers (external appearance, i.e. costume, make-up, hairstyle) and spatial aspects (stage design, props and lighting). Being at the heart of the paper, this approach allows for a comparative analysis of different stage productions, aiming to identify specific strategies and means of representation that are used to convey the 'Kafkaesque'.

**Juliane Blank** (University of Freiburg): *Kafkaesque Immersion. Dream Logic in Comics and Games Based on Kafka's Works*

Although largely discredited in serious criticism, the 'Kafkaesque' seems to flourish in transformations of Kafka's works. In films, stage productions, games, comics and other media, the "Kafkaesque" is invoked as an atmospheric and emotional quality – a "mood" closely linked to recurring aesthetic and structural features. Among the visual media in which Kafka's texts have been adapted, comics, animated films and games are particularly suited to providing non-realistic, surreal experiences, allowing the audience to immerse themselves in the peculiar logic of Kafka's world.

Focusing on graphic adaptations (e.g. Mairowitz and Montellier's *The Trial*, 2008), animated films (Yamamura's *A Country Doctor*, 2007), and video games (e.g. *Playing Kafka*, 2024), this paper examines how visual adaptations create a Kafkaesque experience by employing atmospheric strategies of disorientation and alienation. Furthermore, it will consider the surreal dream-like story logic that characterises these adaptations and analyse the relation between immersive and narrative dimensions.

**Barry Murnane** (University of Oxford): "[W]eder eine alte Ritterburg noch ein neuer Prunkbau": *Kafkaesque Architectures between Gibson and Bofill*

In the 100 years since Kafka's death, every generation has rediscovered 'their' Kafka, translating, adapting, and transforming his works in almost every medium and location imaginable. Such transformations bring Kafka's works to life, adding new layers of complexity, creating and maintaining his world-literary presence. In this paper I draw on research conducted for the Oxford centenary exhibition *Kafka. Making of an Icon* to trace some of the processes through which Kafka's fictional geographies and imagined architectures have gained a literal, concrete presence in the world. Drawing on examples from science fiction, architectural theory, visual art, and finally postmodern architectural practice, I will show how these interact to generate something approaching an 'architectural kafkaesque'.

## PANEL 2: New Voices I

### **Elisabeth Herrmann** (Warwick University): *Why Teaching Kafka's Fiction is More Relevant than Ever and Informs a New Concept of World Literature*

Teaching Kafka is teaching world literature. In this paper, however, I argue that Kafka's prose should be read against the mainstream conception and be introduced, not only to students but on any research agenda for the study of world literature, as anti-world literature in its very own right, meaning and origin. I argue that Kafka's prose has developed a sustainable afterlife despite the fact that it does not fulfil most or any of the prerequisites that would turn it into world literature. It has done so through creating a literary archive of (post)modern human's relationship to the world that is fundamentally based on alienation and the experience of uncertainty. Having taught Kafka's work at university for more than 20 years, I can claim that it has been one of the most impactful subjects within my teaching repertoire. What is it that fascinates students with Kafka's stories time and again, and even does the trick to spark new interest in the study of literature? By developing the concepts of 'anti-world literature' and 'social energy' and setting them in context, I will demonstrate why Kafka's fiction turns out to be more relevant to young generations today than it has been before. These texts provide students with a voice to articulate the unsettling experience of current transformation processes and often mark a turning point in students' understanding of how narratives shape our understanding of and relationship to the world.

### **Shuangzhi Li** (Fudan University): *Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' in Classrooms of Chinese High Schools: A Case Study*

Regarding the still increasing amount of Chinese translations and adaptations of Franz Kafka's works in China, it would be unnecessary to claim how popular and influential this modernist author in Chinese audience is. Strikingly interesting is nonetheless the fact that an official textbook of Chinese course for high school students (first published in 2019) contains *Metamorphosis* as an exemplary piece of world literature. As part of the institutionalized project of national literary education, this appropriation of Kafka gives us an example of interconnection of aesthetic, cultural and political shaping powers in the current Chinese Kafka-reception process.

In my presentation I will analyze firstly the textual appearance of Kafka's famous short story as well as the related context (introduction and exercise questions in the textbook) to examine the interpretive frame and indications. Secondly, I will investigate the teaching practices through interviews with high school teachers and students, focusing on the didactic approaches to Kafka's text and eventual modifications. Based on such observation and survey, I will explain how the case of teaching Kafka in Chinese high school in the last years mark a new phase of a century of preoccupation with Kafka in China. The ongoing canonization of Kafka in the wide field beyond the avant-garde scenes of artists and writers signifies not only the popularity of the author but also the diversity of reading experiences that make Kafka be Kafka, a unique model of world literature inspiring cultural changes in heterogeneous countries.

### **Peter Zusi** (University College London): *Kafka and 'Decolonization': The Case of 'Minor Literature'*

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, scholars of the history and culture of the Russian Empire and USSR have been reflecting on the ways that scholarly discourse has unwittingly reinforced not simply cultural hierarchies but also certain modes of analysis. This reflective process has taken on the label 'decolonization'—arguably a problematic term here, as the situation need not literally be one of exploitative colonization of the more familiar type. Rather, it refers to an epistemic ordering, to what is or is not deemed a legitimate part of 'the conversation' and on what terms.

The case of Kafka is particularly significant here, as he has long served as icon of 'minor literature', which would seem to dovetail smoothly with the decolonization project. The historical errors of Deleuze and Guattari's account were demonstrated long ago, but the theoretical terms

they set up (reterritorializing v. deterritorializing, roots v rhizome, etc) have become part of the bedrock of most injunctions of the term 'minor literature'. What is striking for one who works on Czech literature, however, is that in the two dismissive references to Czech literature in D&L's study they link it with reterritorializing and rootedness: canonization of Kafka as epitome of 'minor literature' thus involved the erasure of the actual minor literature surrounding him. This talk will examine what would be needed—and if it is even possible—to make the category of 'minor literature' useful for the process of epistemic decolonization at work in the Humanities today.

### **PANEL 3: Resonances, Networks, Legacies I: "Kafka Behind the Iron Curtain"**

**Simone Costagli** (University of Udine): *'Die Strafkolonie': Traces of Kafka in Heiner Müller's Work*  
Kafka can be identified as a primary influence on Heiner Müller, both through intertextuality and as an important reference point for his literary theory. Traces of this influence can be found as early as the first half of the 1960s, following the Kafka Conference in Liblice, which sparked increased interest in Kafka among East German writers and intellectuals, and persisted throughout Müller's career until his death in 1995. As shown by his fictional works, Müller's approach to intertextual relations with Kafka is not systematic, shifting from mere allusions in titles and situations, such as the "Man in the Lift" sequence of the drama "The Mission", to extensive verbatim quotations, with entire passages directly "cut and pasted" into Müller's works. Since the former type is more prevalent during the GDR years, it can be related to (self-)censorship and to the enduring suspicion towards the Prague author by GDR authorities. In his theoretical writings, this relationship can be further explored in the "Fatzner/Keuner" essay, where Kafka is juxtaposed to Brecht as a poetic model, as well as in various interviews. My contribution aims to examine these occurrences, to eventually focus on the rewriting of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony". This text not only represents the zenith of Heiner Müller's engagement with the Prague writer but also marks a critical juncture of his reflections on the "death of the author" concept.

**Claudia Scandura** (Sapienza University of Rome): *Kafka in Russia: a Dead End?*

Despite the "infinite attraction" (Diaries, entry from 14 Feb. 1915) that Franz Kafka exerted on Russia and despite his undoubtedly deep attachment to Russian literature, to Gogol, Dostoevsky and Chekhov, in whose works the origins of his poetics can be found, the Bohemian writer was long ignored in the Soviet Union. The present article follows two streams of thought: it traces the relationship between Kafka and Russian culture, and the troubled reception of his works in the Soviet Union until today.

### **PANEL 4: Transformations II**

**Anni Shen** (Tsinghua University): *Reviving from the Archive: Kazuo Ishiguro's Transformation of Kafka in the Manuscripts*

Kafka is acknowledged by Ishiguro as one of his major literary influences, but their relationship has not been closely verified. The archive of Ishiguro's manuscripts and papers in the Harry Ransom Center in Austin houses Ishiguro's extensive notes on Kafka's works, revealing his fascination with Kafka's *The Trial* (1925). This article explores Ishiguro's unpublished essays and critical notes about Kafka's narrative techniques, and his millennial novels adapting Kafka's tactics to reflect on Kafka's influence on Ishiguro's writings. Referring to the archives of the Ishiguro Papers, I argue that reading and thinking about Kafka helped Ishiguro incorporate surreal aspects of dream and memory into *The Unconsoled* (1995) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000). To support this argument, I use the coined dream narrative terms that Ishiguro identified in Kafka's writing (such as "unwarranted emotion and relationship", "delayed recognition", "weird placing and venues", and "normalization of the oddity") to cross-examine Ishiguro's two novels with Kafka's *The Trial* to show how Ishiguro experiments and gradually founds his characteristic "appropriation" technique by adding more realistic foreground to

the Kafkian dream language. Through his profound reading and adaptation of the master, Ishiguro develops the “slightly tilting off the real” effect that significantly sets apart his early and later works. It bears testimony to Kafka’s legacy.

**László V. Szabó** (J. Selye University): *Peter Weiss’s Political-Aesthetic Adaptations of Kafka*

The German writer Peter Weiss (1916–1982), who spent most of his life in Swedish exile, is the author of one of the most significant political-aesthetic adaptations of Kafka in German literature. As a politically engaged author and adherent of the policy of the German left, without being a politician himself, although he was the member of the Swedish communist party for a while, Weiss regarded literature as a political-aesthetic means of resistance and self-understanding of the German and European left. He was convinced of the necessity of a left-wing-aesthetics as a distinctive dimension of political manifestation and influence. In the context of Weiss’s aesthetic-political legacy, as manifested in his novel-trilogy *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, but also in his dramas, his interpretations and adaptations of Kafka play a significant role. Even more so in his two (!) Kafka-dramas *Der Prozess* (1976) and *Der neue Prozess* (1982), theatrical adaptations of Kafka’s renowned novel, also motivated by Weiss’s friend, the famous Swedish director Ingmar Bergman. The paper will examine Weiss’s trilogy, his two Kafka-dramas as well as his notes in order to show in what political-aesthetic terms his interpretations and adaptations of Kafka can be understood in a globalized world.

**Katrin Kohl** (University of Oxford): *The Transformative Energy of the ‘Kafkaesque’*

The paper is designed to contribute to the context for discussing the wealth of creative transformations of Kafka’s works that will be addressed in the course of the conference. Each narratively crafted process of transformation acts as a challenge to rethink what was previously given, glimpse new possibilities, and interpret causes and effects. This in turn acts as a stimulus to adapt, recreate, and experiment with Kafka’s plots, his character configurations, and the psychological responses and motivations of his protagonists.

The focus will be on moments in his narratives which enable the reader to experience transformation in action, most obviously in texts which have come to exemplify the ‘Kafkaesque’. A close reading of such moments in the brief story ‘It was in summer ...’ – not published by Kafka – will consider how a subtle shift into the surreal or mutation of a thought into a real event changes the pace of the narrative, offers a new perspective, unsettles assumptions and raises new questions. Such moments and processes are found throughout Kafka’s work, engaging the imagination with particular intensity while offering creative licence for new transformations. These may allude in subtle, provocative, thought-provoking ways to an existing text or transform the transformations to take us way beyond a manifest connection.

It will be argued that intriguing moments and processes of transformation are so characteristic of Kafka’s narratives that they go some way towards explaining why his writings inspire such an exuberant wealth of transformations into new narratives and other art forms.

**PANEL 5: New Voices II: ‘Scripts in Silicon: Kafka’s Allegories between Codes and Bodies’**

**Alex Mentzel** (University of Cambridge): *Third Nature: Kafka’s Allegorical Topography in the Age of Digital Entanglement*

In 1911, Franz Kafka began work on *Der Verschollene (Amerika)*, whose concluding gesture is the compelling space of ‘Das Naturtheater von Oklahoma’ (‘The Nature Theater of Oklahoma’). In epidemiological terms, this is ‘Text 0’, an index case of what Walter Benjamin calls ‘Zweite Natur’ (Second Nature), the human practices, customs, technologies, and constructed environments that result from human interventions imposed upon the natural world (‘Erste Natur’, First Nature). This

paper will turn towards Benjamin's 'wolkige Mitte' to dialecticise this binary, taking the form of a 'passage-through' First, Second, and Third Nature.

This paper proposes a prototype model of thinking about Kafka's works that looks towards a digital regime, considering 'Das Naturtheater von Oklahoma' as an allegory for the spatial and temporal dimensions of code. One immediate issue is that a spatial model might initially seem unsuitable for representing the dimensions of a text, whether the analogue form of Kafka's stories or the command-and-control language of digital code. Drawing parallels between Kafka's potentially speculative and temporally reflective construction and Benjamin's urban topographies, this analysis extends to the digital realm, considering how Kafka's proto-digital scenography might enable the user to engage in speculative thinking about their own future.

By examining Kafka's 'Kodex von Gesten' (codex of gestures, after Ruprecht) through the lens of media archaeology, this paper illuminates how his texts foreshadow a deep entanglement of human cognition and experiential reality with the fabric of digital protocols.

**Phyllis Koehler** (University of Cambridge): *No Nature: 'Das Schloss' and Computations of Sex*

If literary criticism may be conceived as the attempt to elaborate counter-narratives and counter-representations beneath a presumed textual surface, how should we respond to texts that illustrate a procedure independent of political, historical, or unconscious refractions? Theo Lutz' algorithmic poem *Nach Franz Kafka* (1959), based on a selection of words from Franz Kafka's *Das Schloss* and written by a computer, generates a synthesis of undirected information particles, animated formulas of a potentially endlessly rotating machine. *Das Schloss*, the novel fed to the computer, feeds, in a quasi-computational circulation of data, on endlessly frustrated exchanges of orders, pleas, letters, and bodies: language by the decree of Lutz' writing machine and Kafka's machinic writers, readers, and lovers, appears as alien from human purposes, a stranger to human wishes and will. This paper approaches the interfacing of gendered bodies and language in Kafka's work: can we theorize alternatives to the violence with which reasoning discourse, phantasms of intentionally directed speech, usurp the experience of the senses, turning bodies, especially routinely marginalized ones, into criticism's outcasts? Lutz's poems, written by stochastics, provide an entry-point into the dormant, alternative narratives of Kafka's novel: how can we turn towards the unsettling eroticism that accompanies Kafka's narrative of failed transmissions, and concentrate on the ways in which somatic experiences generate meaning outside the limits of signification and critical interpretation?

**Syamala Roberts** (University of Cambridge): *Elastic Nature: Medial Expression in Kafka's Letters and Diaries*

This paper reflects upon and responds to Alex Mentzel's concept of 'Third Nature' and Phyllis Koehler's exploration of 'No Nature' in Kafka's work. For Mentzel, Third Nature describes our current condition, both natural and man-made, in which consciousness and experience are inseparable from the codes of digital technology. Koehler, meanwhile, considers the unsettling erotic materiality of Kafka's writing, its evocations of desire and its explosion of the common categories of bodily experience.

My contribution will explore the 'Elastic Nature' of Kafka's literary communication that extends both to the friends and lovers of his time (his first audience) and to contemporary readers, still pulled into Kafka's unique orbit. Writing can be 'elastic' in several ways: extendable to a great distance, prone to snap back, at risk of breakage at the same time as it binds together or pulls closer. These qualities are especially germane to Kafka's personal writings, which suggest the multiple functions he saw for writing: as a device for communication, an outlet for self-articulation, a proxy for friendships and major relationships, all the while an expression of his imagination. Taking writing as fundamentally communicative, whether to oneself (the diary) or to the other (the letter), I will consider one paradox of Kafka's talent: how his writing is expressive while simultaneously exceeding the bounds of expression, and what this means for an experience of the written word in a historical moment which has perhaps left that medium behind. The paper will lead into an open discussion with all three presenters.

## PANEL 6: Resonances, Networks, Legacies III

**Traian-Ioan Geană** (University of Bucharest): *Kafka and Romanian Literature: A Preliminary Assessment with an Emphasis on Three Representative Novels* (Sorin Titel's 'The Prisoner's Long Journey', Matei Vişniec's 'Mr. K. Released' and Mircea Cărtărescu's 'Solenoid')

The purport of the following paper is a threefold one. Firstly, it attempts to provide a rough overview on a rather poorly researched topic as of today: Kafka's reception in Romanian literature. Starting from the premise that a general interest in Kafka outside the non-German speaking world is primarily dependent on translations, it will be argued that the breakthrough regarding Kafka's reception in Romania occurred at the end of the 1960s, i.e. at the time when Kafka's best-known works were being translated into Romanian. Secondly, I intend to single out for analysis three Romanian novels from different periods that explicitly draw upon Kafka's work and that may with time be regarded as staples of Kafka-inspired literature: Sorin Titel's *The Prisoner's Long Journey* (1970; not translated yet into English), Matei Vişniec's *Mr. K Released* (2010; Engl. trans. 2019) and Mircea Cărtărescu's *Solenoid* (2015; Engl. trans. 2022). Thirdly, at the very end, apart from summarising the main ideas of the article, I draw some conclusions regarding the link between the reception of Kafka and the questioning of authority (in a broad sense) and briefly discuss the – rather problematic – possibility of dividing Kafka's impact on Romanian literature into a pre-1989 (i.e. 'communist') and a post-1989 (i.e. 'post-communist'/'democratic') phase.

**Paula Odenheimer** (Heidelberg University): *Swedish-German Entanglements: Reception and Influence of Kafka in Swedish Post-War Poetry*

"Schweden ist ein schönes Land [...], aber es ist nicht mehr Lagerlöfs Land", reflects the German-language poet Nelly Sachs in Swedish exile in 1946 and juxtaposes this with a fascination of the young poets with "vor allem de[m] jüdischen Dichter Franz Kafka" (Sachs 1984; 64). Sachs' seismographic perception of this shift, and the comparison made between her and Kafka by the Swedish poet Ragnar Thoursie (see Strob/Louth 2014), hint at a deeper transnational dialogue between Scandinavian and German-language literature at this time. While Germany had long served as "Skandinaviens Tor zur Weltliteratur" (Paul 1997), it seems to be Kafka's work that emerges as a vital influence for Swedish poets navigating post-war disorientation and redefinition.

My contribution focuses on the Swedish literary reception of Kafka during the 1940s, a period marked by a notable engagement with Kafka's work. Through relentless advocacy of cultural intermediaries such as Margit Abenius, Karl Vennberg or Herrmann Hesse the expansion of Kafka's internationally translated oeuvre was initiated. At the same time, I suggest, Kafka's work began to shape the discourse of a generation of poets loosely known as 'fyrtiotalisterna,' who saw him as emblematic of existential crisis and modernist language. This engagement with Kafka provided Swedish poets with a lens through which to grapple with their own nation's cultural and existential dilemmas in the aftermath of the war, embodied in the intricate networks of the Swedish literary scene with exile writers like Nelly Sachs.

**Sofia Isabel Ribeiro** (University of Aveiro): *Kafka and Portuguese Microfiction: Intercrossings and Transformational Approaches*

The reception of Kafka in Portugal is still a largely unexplored field of research, both in terms of the history of translation and other transfer processes (Espagne, 2012), including academic criticism on Kafka and his work, literary creative transformation, or adaptation and remediation (theatrical productions, especially). As far as creative reception is concerned, there are many echoes of Kafka in Portuguese literature, especially in short stories and novels, but also, more recently, in microfiction, which has so far received little attention.

As a sub-genre with scarce representation in the Portuguese literary field, microfiction nevertheless maintains a revealingly productive dialogue with Kafka's short fiction, which manifests itself in the narrative architecture, in the choice of isolated characters oscillating between vigilance



and paranoia (Duttlinger, 2022), in the visual writing, in the exploration of the unusual and of the bleak oneiric, in the construction of the absurd and in the interweaving of the real, the unreal and the super-real.

The present paper will highlight contemporary Portuguese microfiction that reveals clear Kafkaian influence, exploring the aspects mentioned above, as well as explicit or implicit interconnections with Kafka's texts. This presentation will focus on (transl. titles): "The story of so and so", "A terrible blow to the scientific pride of geckos" and "The man who created God in a laboratory", included in *Doctor Avalanche* (2010), by Rui Manuel Amaral, and "8:46", "The crows" and "Antimatter", from the collection *The Butterfly Effect and other Stories* (2008) by José Mário Silva.

#### **PANEL 7: Transformations III**

**Meindert Peters** (University of Oxford) & **Lucia Ruprecht** (Free University of Berlin): *An Art of Introversion: On Arthur Pita's Dance Adaptation of 'A Hunger Artist'*

On 3 June 2024, a new adaptation of Kafka's 'A Hunger Artist' (1922/1924) premiered in Oxford. The piece brought together some of the team of the Royal Ballet's 2011 award-winning production of *The Metamorphosis*: choreographer Arthur Pita, former Royal Ballet principal dancer Edward Watson as the hunger artist, and composer Frank Moon. Opposite Watson performed Australian cabaret performer Meow Meow as the impresario. Supporting the process was the team of the Oxford Kafka Research Centre's AHRC-funded 'Kafka's Transformative Communities' project, including the two of us.

In this talk, we explore how Pita's choreography sheds new light on Kafka's text. Like 'Josefine' and 'First Sorrow' in the same collection, 'A Hunger Artist' is centrally concerned with a performer. Yet, it is not quite clear what the performance of 'hungering' consists of; what the audience is so captivated by. What is the art of hungering? Pita's piece, by foregrounding the role of the impresario and other aspects of the framing such as the cage, highlights an irony in the story that exists between the experience of hungering – a private act – and its communication. Pita's choreographic language for Watson – movements turning toward the core – suggests the outward appearance of the hunger artist's introversion, that is, it suggests a person turned toward his inner life, an inner experience that can be hinted at but never adequately communicated. In a case of historical adjacency to Kafka's work on 'A Hunger Artist', Carl Gustav Jung coined the term 'introversion' in its current usage in a lecture in 1913, and later on in his 1921 book *Psychological Types*.

As part of our involvement in this adaptation, we present these ideas in the form of a programme leaflet.

**Jaе Emerling** (University of North Carolina at Charlotte): *Transmissibility: Kafka's Ear of the Future*

Few figures traverse the theoretical humanities as Kafka does. His work creates relay transmissions between diverse discourses and practices, fields and sub-fields, modes of being and expression. This is why we encounter Kafka's work throughout twentieth-century critical theory. As we are being encouraged to rethink Kafka's survival and requisite transformations for the twenty-first century, we should consider the event of theory itself within and across these fields. Theory survives not as systematic extensive understanding, but—precisely like Kafka's legend and his work—as experimental, performative, and resonating modes of thinking and creating. To resonate is to repeat with difference, to move someone with a pattern that connects: such connections are more important than authoritative explanations. To resonate Kafka is a "matter of digging under stories, cracking open the opinions, and reaching regions without memories." Thus the intensive interest philosophers, artists, cultural critics, and theorists have taken in Kafka's work signals a desire for *transmissibility* rather than representational, fixed, disciplinary images of thought. My contribution addresses the complex relations between Kafka's work and the future of the theoretical humanities through the concept of transmissibility, developed here through a reading of "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse-Folk." Transmissibility is neither historicism nor aestheticism; it is a stammering—or a

“piping” in Josephine’s case—that “does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event.”

**Andrew Webber** (University of Cambridge): *Haunted Houses: Spectres of Property with Kafka, Benjamin and Mickey Mouse*

While there is a well-established way of reading Kafka in relation to early cinema, less attention has been given to possible interactions between his narratives and pioneering works of animation created and screened during his lifetime. This paper will explore this possibility, before proposing a speculative, anachronistic encounter between Kafka and Mickey Mouse, as enabled by Walter Benjamin’s reading of the two as key cultural phenomena of the early twentieth century. In the triangular relations between Kafka, Benjamin and Mickey Mouse, animation emerges as a function that combines playful creative vitality with the uncanny, in a transmedial convocation of unruly domestic spirits.

#### **PANEL 8: New Voices III**

**Kiyoko Myojo** (Seijo University): *Further Transformations of Kafka's Writings: Towards a Dynamic Edition*

There are two broad approaches that can be taken for editing Kafka's writings: static and dynamic. A static approach attempts to produce a definitive work. A dynamic approach attempts to show the writing process and the incomplete nature of the text. Brod's edition is often taken as an example of the former, and the facsimile edition as an example of the latter. The critical edition can be seen as a compromise: it separates the variants from the reading texts. Each of these approaches transforms Kafka's texts in different ways, allowing us to see different aspects of Kafka's writings. However, I believe the dynamic approach has never actually been realised. The facsimile edition reproduces the physical material, but does not reveal the writing process itself. In this paper I want to consider how a dynamic edition could actually be produced. I will use *The Trial* and *The Castle* as examples for this approach to editing, focusing on how to determine the boundaries of the work and the writing chronology. In particular, I argue that there are good reasons to include material from Kafka's writings that have traditionally been considered extraneous (e.g. notes, other short stories, etc.). In doing so, I aim to show how a further transformation of Kafka's texts can shed new light on his writing.

**Urs Büttner** (University of Oxford) *The Kritische Kafka-Ausgabe: Transformation and Editorial Poetics*

Every reception, translation and creative appropriation is based on an edition of Kafka's works. However, editorial scholarship has been primarily interested in questions of literary production and faithful adherence to the manuscripts. Only recently has scholarship begun to question the 'poetics of edition' as a genuine transformation of the original manuscripts, which to a certain extent also dictates the way of reading. In my paper, I will apply this approach to the Kritische Edition of Kafka's writings, on which all recent readings of Kafka have depended. Using archival material from the S. Fischer Archive at the DLA Marbach, I will show how and why the editors made certain decisions regarding their editorial guidelines. Drawing on comparisons with Kafka's manuscripts, I then analyse the transformations of the Kritische Ausgabe. Its editorial poetics include the arrangement of texts, changes in spelling and punctuation, and the division between the main text and the apparatus. Finally, I contrast the Kritische Ausgabe with Max Brod's edition, which it was intended to replace, and show how strongly it relies on decisions made by Brod in his edition.

**Maja Mateas** (University of Trier): *Transformation von Krise: Zwei Versionen von Kafkas ‚Kleiner Fabel‘*

Die von Max Brod als *Kleine Fabel* betitelte Kürzestprosa Kafkas, bestehend aus lediglich drei Sätzen und beinahe durchgängig wörtlicher Rede, vermag es, über das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Maus und Katze, eine existentielle Krisensituation darzustellen. Nun liegt die *Kleine Fabel* jedoch nicht nur in

einer Version vor, die häufig auch als alleinige in die meisten Kafka-Ausgaben Eingang gefunden hat, sondern es existiert eine zweite, von Kafka selbst verfasste Version des Textes. Gegenstand des Papers ist der Vergleich dieser beiden Versionen im Hinblick auf den Themenkomplex der Krise. Es wird herausgestellt, dass eine der beiden Versionen die Krise deutlich zugespitzter präsentiert. Hierbei werden besonders die Aspekte des Zeitverlaufs und der Relation von Subjektivität und Objektivität in den Blick genommen. So lässt sich beispielsweise eine deutliche Betonung der zeitlichen Dimension in einer der Versionen feststellen, was vor allem durch einen überproportionalen Gebrauch von Temporaladverbien erreicht wird, die in der anderen Version fehlen. Es wird gezeigt, dass solche vermeintlich kleinen Unterschiede zwischen den Versionen mit einer veränderten Eindringlichkeit der Krisenwahrnehmung korrespondieren. Dass es Kafka gelingt, gerade durch Reduktion das Gefühl der Beklemmung noch weiter zu steigern, ist hierbei besonders bemerkenswert. Bezieht man darüber hinaus auch noch die den beiden Endversionen des Textes *vorausgehenden* Korrekturen Kafkas ein, so zeigt sich, dass diese für sich genommen bereits als auf eine Verstärkung des Krisenmoments hinarbeitende Transformation gelesen werden können.

#### **PANEL 9: Resonances, Networks, Legacies III**

**David Brehm** (University of Marburg): *Fragments and Ruins: Reading Kafka in Bits and Pieces in Post-War Germany*

In a *Frankfurter Allgemeine* article from 3 July 1958, West German writer Martin Walser recounts how for post-war Germans Franz Kafka “became modern for a second time”. Having read “Kafka’s books after the war”, Walser remembers, he “could not simply put them back on the shelf and return to some old agenda” (Walser 1958:10). Yet when Walser associates his disruptive encounter with Kafka with the culturally prestigious book format, he ignores that most German readers in the immediate post-war period did not come across Kafka’s works in the form of “books” at all. For years, they mostly circulated in bits and pieces, with a text only appearing here and there in a newspaper, a little magazine or a cheaply produced brochure.

Drawing on Roger Chartier’s notion that readers “are never confronted with abstract or ideal texts” but only with material objects whose specific “structures and modalities govern their reading” (Chartier 1994:3), the talk aims to show how the post-war republication of Kafka’s texts in small forms and ephemeral formats shaped their reception in surprising ways. Examples will include a 1945 reprint of “Kleider” in the first issue of the cultural journal *Die Wandlung* and a 1947 republication of “Die Verwandlung” in the Berlin rubble magazine *Athena*. Situating Kafka’s fragmented recirculation within the wider frame of German ‘rubble culture’, the paper tries to shed light on how the material transformations of Kafka’s texts significantly transformed their post-war meanings and uses (cf. Felski 2008).

**Anna Nakai** (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies): *Kafka with a Human Face: From Indigenous Prague Writer to Symbol of Socialist Humanism*

At the monumental Liblice Conference in 1963, so-called the Kafka Convention, the Prague-born Germanist Eduard Goldstücker emphasized the importance of Franz Kafka as a native of Prague. According to this Kafka’s compatriot, Kafka’s literary oeuvre was best understood within the specific socio-cultural contexts of the Austro-Hungarian metropolis, which was characterized by a multilingual, ethnically diverse atmosphere. While Goldstücker’s analysis paved the way for the new research direction using materials written by Czech(o-Slovak) scholars, this interpretation was not immediately recognized by his contemporaries. The Czech participants in the conference, such as Alexej Kusák (Goldstücker’s student), Ivan Sviták (philosopher), and Jiří Hájek (literary critic; not to be confused with one of the spokespersons for Charter 77) did not share the view of Kafka as an indigenous Prague writer; instead, they sought in the author’s relic an illustrative humanism compatible with their international socialist (re)visions. By focusing on the differing positions on the relationship between Kafka and revolutionary ideas, my paper aims to trace the trajectory of the development of socialist

humanism (alternatively called Marxist humanism) in late socialist Czechoslovakia from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s. This period, which coincided with remarkable cultural and academic flourishing and major political upheavals, witnessed the rise and fall of socialist-humanist debates regionally in East-Central Europe as well as globally. I argue that the Czech speeches at Liblice Castle represented the expansion of the revisionist trend and its relevance.

**Sophia Buck** (University of Oxford): *'We were born to make Kafka come true': (Re)Embodying Literature or (Re)Metaphorising Life in Soviet Socialist Realities*

Following the fragmented and interrupted, partially samizdat reception and translation of Kafka into Soviet Russian and Soviet Ukrainian context from the 1960s onwards, a number of idioms developed which posit that reality becomes 'more' literary than literature.

Kharkiv artist and writer-conceptualist Vagrich Bakhchanan (1938-2009) coined in the 1980s the infamous phrase 'We are here to make Kafka come true [to turn life into Kafka]' (мы рождены, чтоб Кафку сделать былью). But many more expressions arose, pushing for this tendency, for example, "with Kafka in life" (с Кафкой по жизни); "Kafka after Kafka" (Кафка за Кафкой), "visiting Kafka" (в гостях у Кафки); "Kafka Korchagin" (Кафка Корчагин); "Kafka for Kafka" (по Сеньке и Кафка). One result of the fragmented and even partially obstructed Kafka reception lead readers to promote certain parallels between Kafka and a lived Socialist (readers') experience. This paper will overview and examine the specific nexus of how tendencies of re-embodiment literatures and re-metaphorizing lived experience got intertwined thereby.

**PANEL 10:** Transformations IV: "BUG: Bodies of Difference and Infestation"

**N. Eda Erçin** (York St John University), **Irina Kruchinina** (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), **Josiah Pearsall** (Louisiana State University): *'BUG': Bodies of Difference, Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' and Radical Empathy. A video performance followed by discussion*

*BUG* is a video performance project offering an ecological reading of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* focusing on animal performance and interspecies subjectivity in times of global crisis and apocalyptic experiences. Six performers (all residing in Baton Rouge, Louisiana during the pandemic) take the human-insect transformation of *The Metamorphosis* as a physical proposal and push their sensory, kinaesthetic and empathetic limits to attend and attune to the insect-bodies crawling in their living environments, particularly cockroaches. A cockroach is not an outdated and mostly forgotten pest from the past, associated with urban poverty, poor housing, infrastructural failure or lack of hygiene. In the humid subtropical climate of Southern Louisiana, it is a prominent resident, crosscutting postcodes and social classes. In this partly industrial, partly wild landscape, the cockroach communicates its needs clearly. It does not recognize human boundaries. With its compulsion to survive, it finds its way to share space, food, water and air. The group of performers, of different passports, races, genders, classes, ages and abilities, work on performance scores derived from Kafka's depictions of Gregor Samsa's bodily transformation. The recordings of the scores display human bodies in their changing environments along with the nonhumans they cohabit with, such as pets, wild animals, storms and floods. The project produced over two hundred hours of audiovisual material of movement, sound and voice including recordings of insects (captured, filmed and then released). All the recordings were edited into an evolving experimental video performance by the director of the project N. Eda Erçin. Different versions of the video have been screened at various international venues and conferences since 2020. The project's conceptual focus is a collective transformation—in other words, a collective disfigurement of humans, instead of one individual's monstrosity. What if there is an infestation of insect-human bodies as an inevitable response to and an outcome of global crises, including racial and ecological injustice? *BUG* has been re-edited for *Kafka Transformed* to redirect its focus to animal agency and the possibility of a radical empathy with nonhuman bodies. How can we read insects, not as metaphors but as our cohabitants, through Gregor Samsa's transformation? Can *The Metamorphosis* offer a non-human-centric way of understanding our coexistence with insects beyond fear, disgust and a desire to kill? Do Kafka's

characters signpost an urgent need for radical empathy, the ability to empathise with an invertebrate's drive to exist? How would we practice such empathy, and why do we need it as human society? The panel will screen *BUG* and conduct an active discussion, guided by the questions above, with the three performers and the director of the project.

#### **PANEL 11:** New Voices IV

**Elizabeth Boa** (University of Nottingham): *Snowy Worlds: Pamuk's 'Snow' and Kafka's 'The Castle'* 'So whenever I sense the absence of Western eyes, I become my own Westerner.' (Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul*). Pamuk's novel *Snow* has many affinities with Kafka's *The Castle*, the most obvious being the protagonists' shortened names, Ka and K., and the snowy weather, which also echoes Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. If *The Castle* is an intertext of *Snow*, is this Pamuk looking at Turkey through Western eyes? Does becoming 'my own Westerner' reveal a subaltern mentality? Or if Pamuk is seeking empowerment by tapping into a modern classic, why the specific choice of Kafka?

**Kirstin Gwyer** (University of Oxford): *The Runaway Metaphor: Figurations of Colonialism, Slavery and Race after Kafka*

Against a backdrop of second-wave postcolonialism and attempts to redefine world literature from the periphery, recent Kafka scholarship has been expanded through readings of his work 'under the rubric of postcoloniality' (Goebel, 2003), for its invocation of 'circum-Caribbean and Black Atlantic processes of racialized exploitation' (Frydman, 2019), or as a 'sustained meditation on racial blackness' (Thompson, 2016). This research has gained important ground in redressing a 'Eurocentric failure to apprehend the racialized imaginaries' in his work, enabling us 'to globalize Kafka in new ways' (Frydman, 2019). Yet for all the emphasis studies place on Kafka's refusal 'to take part in the colonial plot', they also recognize the limitations of the Black subtext of his writings, and that his escape from prevailing ideologies is 'inextricably bound up with the structures it endeavors to avoid' (Zilcosky, 2003).

At the same time, a remarkable number of authors from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and the Pacific, across the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, have looked to Kafka's work in an attempt, in their own writing, to grapple with the very real lived experience of racism or (post)colonialism. In a cross-reading of Kafka with Frantz Fanon's study *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Marie NDiaye's novella 'La Naufragée' (1999), this paper will ask how the broad, and frequently in-depth, engagement with Kafka in the work of these authors might be made sense of in the face of his 'metaphorical and metonymic' use of Blackness 'understood only schematically' (Thompson, 2016).

**Martin Lindner** (University of Oxford): *'In europäischen Anschauungen befangen'? Kafka's Formal Aesthetics of Transcending Empire(s) and Postcolonial Interpretations of His Texts*

Ever since Deleuze and Guattari claimed the 'minor practice of major language' (1986: 18) to be Kafka's aesthetic – and political – programme, scholars have argued whether Kafka's texts can be read as establishing a voice for the disenfranchised. In the past two decades, scholars in Postcolonial Studies have explicitly tried to identify whether Kafka's works such as *Die Strafkolonie* can be read as a critique of European imperial colonialism overseas or internal colonialist power structures within the Habsburg Empire. Postcolonial readings hereby tend to map the power relations between characters or collectives in Kafka's works onto a binary model of colonizer/colonized or tend to read them as direct reflections of concrete socio-historical instances of colonialism. Abstracting from Deleuze and Guattari's conception, my paper will argue that Kafka's anti-colonialist potential lies somewhere beyond – in the creation of a formal 'language' that transcends and defies such binary colonial frameworks or specific historical contextualizations. Through the formal creation of ambiguity around markers of identity/alterity and positions of hegemony/subalternity, Kafka's texts go 'beyond' (specific) Empires and open up a space of critique of colonialist practices that were both prevalent in Western European colonialism overseas and inside Austria-Hungary. Taking *Die*

*Strafkolonie* as a primary example, and looking at language use, the narrative representation of space, and focalization, my paper will discuss the potential and limits of Kafka's aesthetic critique. I will also outline how the phenomena of formal indeterminacy in Kafka's texts can help to reinvigorate recent research efforts to develop a specifically postcolonial narratology.

**PANEL 12:** Resonances, Networks, Legacies IV

**Miroslava Mimi Filová** (Charles University): *Laughing Out Loud at the Edge of the Abyss: Kafka's Influence on the Antipoetry of Nicanor Parra*

The impact of Franz Kafka on Latin American narrative writers is a well-established and thoroughly researched topic. However, Kafka's influence on the Chilean (anti)poet Nicanor Parra is a less explored area. While some notable critics have briefly acknowledged this connection, it has yet to receive the comprehensive analysis it deserves. This paper aims to shed light on Kafka's influence on Parra's poetic production called antipoetry, particularly in terms of antiheroism, dark humor, and existential anxieties that both authors share. Their ongoing relevance in contemporary literature is complex; their work thrives on ambiguity intertwined with irony and humor, leaving readers with a deep sense of bewilderment. They confront the existential void, yet in their view, it becomes the central joke.

**Hebatalla Elakkad** (Cairo University): *Die andere Verwandlung. Kafkaeske Konfigurationen in El-Zohairys „Feathers“*

2021 gewinnt der satirische Autorenfilm des ägyptischen Regisseurs Omar El-Zohairy *Feathers (Federn)* den *Cannes Critics' Week*. Doch bei der Premiere in Ägypten löst der Film starke und unterschiedliche Reaktionen unter den Zuschauern aus. Gegner kritisieren vor allem eine verzerrte Darstellung der erbärmlichen Lebensumstände in den ägyptischen Slums. Anders die Reaktion der Rezensenten, die die Raffinesse der Regie und den Bezug zu Kafka loben. Neu an dem Film ist jedenfalls der ‚Verwandlungsplot‘: Ein strenger Vater wird bei einem dubiosen Zaubertrick auf der Geburtstagsfeier seines Sohns vergebens in ein Huhn verwandelt. Was folgt ist eine lange Schilderung des Existenzkampfes der Mutter, einerseits der Verwandlung des Vaters entgegenzuwirken, andererseits für die Kinder zu sorgen. Der vorliegende Beitrag fokussiert, wie El-Zohairys Film kafkaeske Macht- und Gender Konfigurationen parallelisiert und neu modelliert. Zum Einen evoziert der Film als visuelles Narrativ einprägsame Bilder, die stark an Kafkas *Verwandlung* (1915) erinnern. Zum Anderen ändert er eindeutig die Rollen innerhalb der Familie. Nicht der hilflose Sohn, sondern der strenge Vater erfährt die regressive Verwandlung, während die Mutter die Fürsorger-Rolle übernimmt. Dabei interessiert sich der Film weniger für den Regressierenden selbst als vielmehr für die sich erübrigende Umkehrung der Genderdynamik, zwischen Entmannung und Ermächtigung.

**Ian Ellison** (University of Oxford): *Franz Kafka, Roberto Bolaño, and the Artificial Intelligence of Posthumous Authorship*

This paper undertakes a comparative reading of the lives and legacies of Franz Kafka and Roberto Bolaño in order to explore the nature of their authorship after their deaths. Focusing in particular on Kafka's final short story "Josefine die Sängerin; oder das Volk der Mäuse" ("Josefine the Singer; or the Mouse People") and Bolaño's "Policía de las ratas" ("Police Rat"), a posthumously published sequel-of-sorts to Kafka's tale, this paper offers a speculative and experimental (over-)reading of these two stories as one combined metatextual and metaphorical commentary on the condition of posthumous authorship. In doing so, this paper proceeds to make the case that posthumous authorship as a category of reception and production might be thought of as a form of artificial intelligence.

### PANEL 13: Transformations V

**Carolyn Duttlinger** (University of Oxford): *Kafka's Drawings and the Technical Media: Between Emulation and Inscription*

Recent attempts to understand Kafka's weird and varied drawings have stressed their links to artistic movement past and present, ranging from the conservative Germanic art featured in the *Kunstwart* art magazine via contemporary groups such as the 'Prague Eight' to Emil Orlik's Japanese-inspired prints and drawings. Such contextualisations can yield interesting results, but they also ignore crucial aspects of these images: their fleeting and provisional character and, most importantly, their interaction with popular culture. As I will argue, Kafka's lifelong fascination with technical media such as film and photography is also reflected in his drawings. Looking at three examples, I analyse how his sketches interact with the mass-reproduced material into which they are inscribed, before offering a tentative definition of what drawing means for Kafka as both medium and process.

**Christian Drobe** (Masaryk University): *From Intermedial Exchange to New Religious Grounds? Alfred Kubin's Grotesque Realism and Kafka Illustrations in Interwar Central Eastern Europe*

In 1932, Alfred Kubin produced six illustrations for Kafka's 'Ein Landarzt' and continued to engage deeply with the author's work. Kubin's realistic grotesque style of the early 1930s exemplifies the first artistic responses to Kafka's writing. Notably, Kubin was not only an accomplished illustrator but also a writer who significantly influenced Kafka with his utopian novel 'Die andere Seite' (1909). The reciprocal influence between their art and literature has been widely studied, particularly in the context of magic realism (or 'Fantastik') in early 20th-century Prague. Artists and illustrators such as Gustav Meyrink and Paul Leppin, whose work influenced Kafka, contributed to this pool of intermedial exchange. These interactions later shaped the emerging visual culture surrounding Kafka's work after his death, including contributions by Kubin.

However, parallel developments in Central and Eastern Europe have been less explored. Publishers like Josef Portman in Litomyšl and Josef Florian in Stará Říše produced exclusive editions of contemporary authors, including some of the earliest Czech translations of Kafka's texts by Ludvík Vrána, often featuring elaborate illustrations. In 1931, the German graphic artist Albert Schamoni, now little-known, illustrated 'Ein Landarzt' for Portman. Surprisingly, these efforts were accompanied by new religious tones in rural Czechoslovakia, raising questions about the impact of translation and cultural exchange in the process. Portman, who also published illustrations by Kubin's friend Otto Coester, and especially Florian advocated for a new spiritual awakening grounded in Catholicism. This paper aims to demonstrate how Kafka's texts inspired visual and intermedial exchanges in Central Eastern Europe and how they were reinterpreted for new purposes.

**Sahib Kapoor** (Jawaharlal Nehru University): *Words Through Images: C.O. Bartning Illustrations (1977) of Kafka's 'Die Verwandlung' (1915)*

*Die Verwandlung* (1916) by Franz Kafka is one of the few works published during Kafka's lifespan. This timeless text goes beyond the thematic of father-son conflict and explores the changing dynamics of family relationships. Half a decade later appears the most extensive visual representation of Kafka's text, i.e. 18 lithographs by Carl Otto Bartning (1977). Bartning (1909-1983) is known for his work as a film cutter on various German films. Less known is the fact that he was also a graphic artist. This paper examines the points of intersection between the two mediums, i.e. text and image and discusses how far the visual illustrations of Bartning (1977) correspond to the Kafka's text (1916). The existential situations, such as the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa, Gregor's encounters with his family members and Gregor's death, are uniquely illustrated by Bartning. To explore the dynamic relationship between Kafka's text and Bartning's images, following research questions will be discussed. In what ways do the written narrative and its corresponding visual representations interact and inform one another? To what extent do different visual representations offer distinct or convergent interpretations of the

written text? What are the specific points of intersection between the written and visual mediums, and how do these intersections contribute to the overall meaning-making process?

**PANEL 14: New Voices V**

**Lawrence Alexander** (University of Oxford): *Towards a 'Less Good' Kafka: A Report*

The South African theatre practitioner Phala Ookeditse Phala has described his engagements with Franz Kafka as a process of interrogating 'the depths of otherness' and what they can mean. In 2021, he directed a series of performances, which he adapted from Kafka's fragments and short stories. *A Kafka Moment* was performed at the Centre for the Less Good Idea in Maboneng, Johannesburg, an 'incubator space' for experimental and interdisciplinary performance projects established by artists William Kentridge and Bronwyn Lace. This paper considers what happens when Kafka's texts are transposed from their author's historical experience in twentieth-century Austro-Hungary to the situatedness of the Centre's performers and audiences in contemporary South Africa. In these experiments, categories of citizen and alien, human and animal, minor and major, sound and voice, self and other, are all put under intense pressure. At the same time, these productions (including *Metamorphosis*, *Odradek*, and *A Hunger Artist*) have toured the world with recordings available for a global audience to watch on YouTube. I argue these processes of remediation and (re)staging harness the inherent intermediality of Kafka's prose, embodying – or disarticulating – the literary text through physical performance, music, and moving images. Moreover, performances such as Tony Bonani Miyambo's in *Kafka's Ape*, based on *A Report for an Academy*, not only invite decolonial perspectives on Kafka's writings, but perform them to blistering effect, indicting academy and audience alike. By transforming these fragments to interrogate post-Apartheid South African identity (with striking contemporary resonances from pandemic culture to Black Lives Matter), *A Kafka Moment* provides an instructive example of how and where Kafka finds a home today.

**Nicolas Weisensel** (Goethe University Frankfurt): *Transformed World(s) in the 'New World': Entangled Naturecultures in Franz Kafka's 'The Man Who Disappeared'*

In his America novel *Der Verschollene* (1911-1914), Franz Kafka is—prima facie—showing a techno-capital world, including mass production, exploitation, traffic, megacities around 1900. From the perspective of the Environmental Humanities and through a New Materialist lens, however, Kafka is—paradoxically at the same time—outlining a specific perception that could be described as entangled naturecultures. In this 'other America', glimpses of a non-anthropocentric world become visible: a world where "the credible becomes incredible and the incredible credible", including new forms of temporalities, agencies, intra-actions. This 'New World' emerges especially in border-crossing scenes, e.g., while crossing the Atlantic Ocean, between urban and rural landscapes, or on the train ride towards the unknown land, the phantastic "Oklahoma" [sic] theatre. I have a close look at those entangled landscapes from an eco-aesthetic perspective, using concepts of embodiment, affective ecopoetics, sympoiesis, trans-corporeality, and Zen-Buddhism. As Lee and others have shown, Kafka was highly interested in Taoism and Buddhism, owning and reflecting various early translations of taoist and buddhist texts. McCort illustrates that some of Kafka's parables, e.g., *Before the Law*, can be interpreted as zen-buddhist paradoxical *kōan*, using the concept of *mu* (無) to overcome the subject-object divide and anthropocentric perspectives. Against this background—a non-binary world view as articulated in the "coincidentia oppositorum"—McCort draws a connection line between Romanticism, Zen, and Deconstruction. I will go one step further and extend this connection with a New Materialist concept of naturecultures and entanglement in Kafkas *Der Verschollene: The Man Who Disappeared*.

**Stefanie Populorum** (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign): *The Emergence of Modern Management in Franz Kafka's 'The Man Who Disappeared' (1927)*

Against the backdrop of Antonio Gramsci's definition of "Americanism", Franz Kafka's fragment *The Man Who Disappeared* (1927) emerges as an industrial capitalist novel.



In America, the land of opportunity, Karl Roßmann, the “innocent”, as Kafka describes his protagonist in his diaries, meets characters of different social classes who openly criticize the capitalist social order: the oppression of the worker (the stoker), the miserable life of the poor (Therese), the exuberant wealth of the few (the uncle). In this respect, the text fulfils Kafka’s intention of writing a Dickens novel. However, the extent to which capitalist narratives are woven into the text only becomes apparent when we consult contemporary economic theories. In my talk I will focus on reading Karl’s family ties with management theories from around 1910 to show the novel’s relevance for Economic Humanities.

Through Karl’s eyes and ears Kafka shows how America’s “ultramodern mode of production” and management methods pose a threat to the European lifestyle and how we understand labor. “Americanism” not only eliminated Europe’s last remnants of feudalism but finally heralded the global triumph of capitalism.

#### **PANEL 15: Resonances, Networks, Legacies V**

**Amit Kumar Sharma** (Jawaharlal Nehru University): *Kafka in South Asia: Translating Existentialism into Hindi and Urdu*

This paper explores Franz Kafka's influence in South Asia, focusing on the translation of his existentialist works into Hindi and Urdu. Kafka, a pioneer of existential literature, grapples with themes like alienation, bureaucracy, and the absurd, resonating across various cultural contexts. South Asia, rich in linguistic and literary diversity, has shown a keen interest in translating Kafka's seminal works, notably "The Metamorphosis," into Hindi and Urdu. The translation of Kafka's writings into these languages represents a unique intersection of Western existential philosophy with South Asian cultural nuances. This paper examines the challenges translators face in conveying Kafka's surreal narratives to an audience unfamiliar with German. It investigates the strategies used to preserve the essence of Kafkaesque themes while maintaining cultural relevance for South Asian readers. Additionally, the paper discusses the adaptations necessary for translating Kafka's complex prose into the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of India. It addresses issues of fidelity to the original text and the creative liberties translators take to ensure Kafka's essence is retained. Finally, the paper analyzes the reception and impact of Kafka's translated works within the Hindi and Urdu literary spheres. It explores how readers and critics have responded to Kafka's existential dilemmas and considers the extent to which these translations have contributed to a deeper understanding of existentialism in the region.

**Florian Lippert** (University of Groningen): *The Willing Suspension of Truth. Post-Truth Mentality in the Light of Kafka's Negative Epistemology*

The tension between the apparent inaccessibility of an ontological, monolithic Truth (with a capital T) on the one hand and the human need to permanently “produce” truth on the other hand is a recurring topic in Kafka’s works. This tension is depicted quintessentially in a set of specific elements in Kafka’s stories and aphorisms that can be called “pseudo-truths” or, borrowing a term used by Lacan, “truths of the subject”: epistemological counterparts to what Gerhard Neumann has described as “gliding paradoxes”. I will discuss such “pseudo-truths” in the context of Modernism’s “crisis of knowledge” and then investigate their relations to one of the most controversial socio-political topics of our time: *post-truth*. Revisiting Kafka’s complex and subversive takes on “truth” may, I suggest, enable a better understanding of the radical depreciation of the epistemic standards for truth and knowledge in many contemporary contexts and constellations.

**Alicja Kowalska** (University of West Bohemia)

*‘Until there is no one left who knows the truth...’; or Poland’s PiS Government on Trial*

Krystian Lupa, one of Poland's most distinguished theatre directors, planned to premiere his adaptation of Kafka’s “Trial” in 2016 at the Polish Theatre in Wrocław. His plans were, however, thwarted when the newly established government of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) installed a new

director at the theatre. Lupa protested the decision by leaving and continuing his work on the project in Warsaw within the framework of the city's theatrical institutions and Polish and French financial support. Lupa's "Trial" premiered in November 2017 at the Nowy Teatr in Warsaw.

The experience with an increasingly oppressive government and intensifying political interference into cultural life has changed Lupa's adaptation of Kafka's novel. The director has noted that the political reality had started to trump Kafka's text in terms of the incredible reversal of the meaning of words such as "law" and "justice". In his staging of the text, Lupa introduces Kafka and other figures from Kafka's private life as play characters. Furthermore, the director explored the text's mirroring of Poland's political reality. I discuss this recent engagement with Kafka's text and the ways in which the political climate changed its staging. Furthermore, I give an overview of Kafka's reception in Poland and bring Lupa's "Trial" in connection with the political significance of theatre during state communism.

#### **PANEL 16: Transformations VI**

**Louis Kaplan** (University of Toronto): *Spectres of Kafka: Reflections on Tim Gidal's Photomontage Phantasm, 'Kafka in Prague' (1932)*

In 1932, German-Jewish photojournalist Tim Nahum Gidal (1909-1996) produced a haunting and darkly amusing photomontage *Kafka in Prague* that transposes (and multiplies) an earlier photograph of Franz Kafka and invokes Kafkaesque motifs in a visually creative response. This presentation analyzes this phantasmic image and reviews the socio-historical contexts of its making one year before the Nazi takeover that would send Gidal into political exile. The image features a dark and mysterious alley presumably located in the Prague Jewish ghetto with its buildings looming large above a bearded man looking directly at the camera not noticing that he is surrounded by cut-outs of the writer's head watching over him (and looking out at us) from all sides. Here, Gidal superimposes five faces of this master of the absurd appropriated from the frequently cropped photograph of Kafka sitting next to the wine bar waitress Hansi who was an object of his desire during law school. With this homage in the spectral medium of photography, Gidal's photomontage indexes his passion for -- and his being haunted by -- the ghost of Kafka. This simultaneously paranoiac-humorous image also helps to illuminate Gidal's abiding interest with documenting "the tragi-comedy of human existence" but with a camera rather than a pen as in Kafka's case. This presentation will review how Jacques Derrida's speculations in *Spectres of Marx* on hauntology and "learning to live" (for which it is "necessary to learn spirits") leads to a better understanding of this photomontage and its articulation of Gidal's relationship to Kafka.

**Feroz Hassan** (IIT Kanpur): *K., Chaplin, de Sica: Cinema's Modern Vocation according to André Bazin*

This paper will explore a little-known branching of Kafka's influence on film theory in post-World War II France. It will argue that Kafka was a key author for the seminal French film theorist André Bazin (1918-1958) in the latter's arguments for the social vocation of cinema. It will look at Bazin's deployment of Kafka's K. in his defense of two key postwar films, Charles Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947, USA) and Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948, Italy). The signification of these "canonical" films and filmmakers was far from certain at the time, and Bazin participated in debates, to be outlined in the talk, where the anarchism of these films did not align with (in Chaplin's case) or recuperated into (in the case of de Sica's film) an intellectual climate suffused with the Sartrean imperative of "committed" art. Bazin's use of Kafka will be seen as having two strands. The first was to see Kafka as a writer of a post-transcendental world. The second is Bazin's imagination of Chaplin's and de Sica's characters as the alter egos of K. Verdoux and Ricci, under Bazin's pen, will turn out to be not simply analogical equivalents of K., but an extension of him in the postwar world. Through this deployment of K., Bazin argues for Chaplin and de Sica as representatives of a non-committed cinematic engagement with the configurations of a modernity whose exemplary author was Kafka.

**Evelyn Dueck** (University of Geneva): *'Keep moving': Bodies and Creativity in Contemporary Graphic Novels Based on Kafka's Works*

Franz Kafka is the only German speaking author of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who reached a canonical status worldwide. Visual adaptations of his most iconic texts such as the *Metamorphosis* have largely contributed to this canonization which started in the 1960s and still is ongoing. Most of these adaptations do not choose a realistic or mimetic way of visualization and it is telling to notice the important number of graphic novels, comics and animation films that have been published or released over the last decades. In my paper I want to focus on the graphic novels published in French speaking countries between 2000 and 2023 (five adaptations of stories and four adaptations of the novels). What is most striking in these adaptations is the creative way they put the body of the figures in the foreground – not mainly to confirm the cliché of the suffering and oppressed individual in modern society, for example with dark clothes or a passive, non-expressive posture, but by salient gestures and facial expressions. My paper suggests studying these bodies, their gestures, movement, and expressions as examples of the creativity of contemporary adaptations in the French speaking countries (France, Belgium, Québec). A creativity that presupposes the canonical status of Kafka's works or that has been a feature of visual reception from the outset and must be attributed to the figurative style of the texts (as some scholars argue)?

**PANEL 17:** New Voices VI

**Stanley Corngold** (Princeton University): *Kafka's Rhetorical Unconscious*

My paper deals what I call Kafka's rhetorical unconscious, with the conceptual support of the teachings of Jacques Lacan. For Lacan, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (in German, "Das Unbewusste ist wie eine Sprache strukturiert"), consisting of chains of signifiers, whose meanings, when obtained, "vacillate" (Lacan) with the character of metaphors. It is a truth universally acknowledged that many of Kafka's vital and repeated word-images arrive on the page as if unconsciously expelled, in line with Kafka's diary comment that, in the solitude of writing, "Mein Inneres löst sich [...] und ist bereit Tieferes hervorzulassen." I mean to explore the "vacillating" meanings of several of Kafka's "privileged" metaphors—e.g., "Narbe," "Tasche," "Verkehr," "Schuß,"—as they are linked throughout *Das Urteil*, *Die Verwandlung*, and *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie*, positing that their coherence over time is owed to their enchainment in the unconscious.

**Francesca Goll** (University of Bergamo): *'Realismus ohne Dogmatismus?' Kafka and the Debates about Realist Aesthetics*

This article examines the reception of Kafka in the GDR, with a particular focus on the aesthetic and political debates that Kafka's work sparked in the GDR - and beyond - in the early 1960s. Based on the numerous notes and correspondence from the Alfred Kurella Archive (Akademie der Künste), especially between Alfred Kurella and Roger Garaudy, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Aragon, Carlo Salinari and Ernst Fischer, the different aesthetic positions in relation to the concept of realism will be examined. Against the background of the first academic publications on Kafka in the GDR, especially in the journal *Sinn und Form*, the research of Klaus Hermsdorf, as well as the Kafka conference in Liblice in May 1963, the person of Eduard Goldstücker and the Prague Spring of 1968, the aesthetic, historical and political contexts will be reconstructed.

**Hyang Jo** (Seoul National University): *A Talking Bridge and Bouncing Orbs: Kafka's Works from the Perspective of New Materialisms*

In Kafka's works, stories told from the point of view of objects or stories in which objects are important actors seem to be more difficult to understand than animal narratives. For example, *The Bridge* talks about the life of a bridge from its own point of view. The bridge is at the same time anthropomorphized as a being endowed with senses, emotions, thoughts, its own will and self-

reflection. The 'pain' of this object does not have much of a story that readers can relate to or sympathize with compared to, for example, the pain of Red Peter, raising the question of what the function of narrating the life of this bridge might be. In *Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor*, two bouncing celluloid orbs appear as active agents in the life of the protagonist, who had been interested in a dog-like companion, and they continuously interfere with his domestic life. In Kafka's other works, such as *The Top* and *The Cares of a Family Man*, such objects play an enigmatic role and humans and objects are intertwined with and influence each other. This research paper analyses these works from the perspective of New Materialisms, focusing on the agencies of objects, the entanglement between humans and objects, the narrative from the point of view of objects. How can Kafka's object stories be reinterpreted when read through the theoretical lens of New Materialists like Jane Bennett, Bruno Latour, Karen Barad, and Donna Haraway? What new horizons do Kafka's object stories open up for us? Which formal experiments did Kafka pursue in them? These are the central and guiding questions in this study.

**PANEL 18:** Resonances, Legacies, Networks VI

**Christine Frank** (Free University of Berlin): *'Metamorphosis' or The Struggle for Existence in Postcolonial Times*

The metamorphosis of living beings in nature has served as a metaphor for knowledge production *sui generis* in mythological and religious contexts across the ages. In Modernity, however, under the influence of Goethe's natural philosophy on the one hand and Darwin's Theory of Evolution on the other, the focus shifts from knowledge based on epistemological differences to the radicalization of the concept of progress, aimed at (economic) optimization and superiority in the struggle for existence. It is precisely at this moment that Kafka's seminal narrative comes into play. Samsa's metamorphosis, too, is motivated by and embedded in the same economy. This becomes even more obvious if we consider later adaptations of Kafka's text by non-European writers, who tend to add a new dimension of cultural critique in the postcolonial age. They follow Kafka by drawing on the pleasure and terror of an alternate state of knowledge, which distances the respective protagonists from their surroundings. But they also question the relation of nature and culture from a non-Western Modernist point of view. Example texts include Luis Fernando Verissimo's "The Metamorphosis" (1979), where a cockroach awakens as a female human; Mario Vargas Llosa's novel "El Hablador" (1987), where the narrator Mascarita, programmatically drawing on Kafka's text, demonstrates the alternative of "becoming-primitive"; Yoko Tawada's play "Kafka kaikoku" (2010/11), where the Japanese writer and modernist Izumi Kyōka wakes up as a European; and A. Igoni Barrett's novel "Blackass" (2015), where a Nigerian protagonist finds himself transformed into a white man with a "black ass."

**Vaishnavi Saritha** (NSS College, Pandalam): *Kafka's Resonance in Kerala: Illuminating Kafkaesque Socio-Political Realities in O.V. Vijayan's 'Khasakkinte Itihasam'*

This abstract delves into the enduring universality of Franz Kafka's literary influence within Kerala's vibrant culture and art. Despite cultural disparities, Kafka's themes of existentialism and absurdity find resonance and reinterpretation in the works of O.V. Vijayan's "Khasakkinte Itihasam", transcending geographical and linguistic boundaries. Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" manifests in O.V. Vijayan's narrative where existential dilemmas mirror the complexities of Kerala's socio-political landscape during the sixties. The narrative, set against the backdrop of the Emergency period in India, becomes a site of critical reflection on power structures and societal norms. Ravi, the protagonist, grapples not only with Kafkaesque absurdity but also with the political turmoil of post-independence Kerala. Vijayan's storytelling, infused with magical realism, captures the essence of Kerala's socio-political milieu during a critical juncture in Indian history. Ravi like Gregor Samsa becomes a lens through which the impact of political ideologies on everyday lives is examined. Vijayan's narrative serves as a microcosm, reflecting the political repression and censorship prevalent during this turbulent era. The novel navigates the complexities of caste, class, and religious

dynamics, providing a critique of social injustices during a period of political repression. This narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a rapidly changing Kerala, grappling with the consequences of the agrarian reforms and the radical socio-political movements of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This abstract aims to illuminate the transformative power of Kafka's universality, demonstrating how his ideas continue to inspire and shape the creative landscape of Kerala, fostering a rich and dynamic intersection of global and regional artistic expression.

#### **PANEL 19:** Transformations VII

**Jeongin Ko** (Yonsei University): *Exploring Intermedial Connections: The Intersection of Kafka's Literary Works and Radiohead's Music*

The intermedial connections between Kafka's life and works, and music is not often discussed. However, if the music of the British rock band Radiohead has ever prompted thoughts of Franz Kafka, and his pervasive sense of alienation and self-disintegration, then you've had the incredible experience of having his life and works acoustically resonate with you. This resonance is particularly evident in the 1997 album *OK Computer*. Both Kafka and Radiohead were deeply committed to examining the intricate nature of human experiences, frequently highlighting the unsettling and ominous aspects of modern life through their respective forms of art, and perhaps Haruki Murakami recognized this point of intersection long ago. In his novel *Kafka on the Shore*, the protagonist Kafka listens to Radiohead on a cassette player, and because of this intersection, the image of Franz Kafka listening to the band seems quite familiar rather than a distant fantasy. Therefore, by drawing parallels between Kafkaesque features and the above-mentioned album textually by analyzing lyrics, and structurally by analyzing instrumental arrangements and sheet music, this presentation explores the intermedial connections between Franz Kafka's literary works and the music of Radiohead. Hopefully, this exploration will enhance the understanding of the deep and often unspoken connection between these two forms of art, novella and rock music.

**Dominik Zechner** (Rutgers University): *'The country doctor rambles': Dylan Reads Kafka*

Bob Dylan's 1965 song "Love Minus Zero/No Limit" from the album *Bringing It All Back Home*, presents itself as a love song but carries a deeper, subliminal dialogue with Franz Kafka, particularly his story "A Country Doctor." The clearest nod to Kafka comes in the line "The bridge at midnight trembles / The country doctor rambles" in the song's final stanza. However, Kafkaesque themes subtly permeate the entire piece. The reference to "ideals of violence" early in the lyrics evokes the groom's violation of Rosa, which frames Kafka's narrative. The name "Rosa" is later transformed into the image of "People carry[ing] roses." Dylan's description of his love laughing "like the flowers" subtly echoes the patient's "beautiful wound," which Kafka's doctor likens to a flower. Additionally, the cryptic lines "She knows there's no success like failure / And that failure's no success at all" in the second stanza reflect the paradoxical ending of Kafka's story, where the doctor's actions are set in motion by a "Fehlläuten der Nachtglocke"—the night bell's false ringing that dooms the doctor's efforts to successful wandering. In line with the conference theme of "Kafka Transformed," this paper offers a close reading of Dylan's song to uncover the Kafkan tropes embedded within its sonic landscape.

**Lennart Ritz** (University of Göttingen): *'The Sound from Broken Homes': Kafka's Literary Sound and Joy Division's Music*

Joy Division's singer Ian Curtis liked to draw inspiration for his lyrics from literature and Kafka was among his readings. For instance, the song *Colony*, from which the title quote is taken, can be interpreted as a reminiscence to Kafka's *Strafkolonie*. Furthermore, the last years of Curtis' life show parallels to Kafka's biography; both struggle with the expectations of a bourgeois family, are affected by physical ailments, and articulate the experiences in literature. Beyond lyrical reminiscences, the whole group takes up Kafka's work musically, which is particularly evident in their songwriting as a group and their creative play with noise. While in Kafka's work the noisy city or banal everyday-

noises are primarily disruptive factors, Joy Division play with the aesthetic ambiguity of noise as musical material, inspired by the post-industrial soundscape of Manchester in the 1970s. Kata Gellen's work on the significance of sound in Kafka's work, with its focus on noise and multisensory experience, serves as the starting point for my reflections, which, however, foregrounds the sonification of Kafka's literary sound in Joy Division's music. With the help of the concept of transduction, which allows transmedial analysis of sound, I ask how literary sound in Kafka's work was taken up by Joy Division.

#### **PANEL 20: New Voices VII**

**Conor Brennan** (University of Oxford): *A Bau is a Bau is a Bau: Kafka's Burrow between Ecology and Artifice*

This paper analyses the tension between readings of Kafka's late fragment 'Der Bau' as a self-reflexive authorial statement and the growing body of criticism that considers it as an attempt at true ecocentric narration. This tension is hinted at in the title chosen by Max Brod for the fragment: as Clayton Koelb has pointed out, the German verb 'bauen' 'brings together a set of senses contained in no single English word', meaning both 'to dig or delve in the earth' and, more generally, "'to build, construct, with the extended metaphorical sense of "develop"'. Given the 'special importance' Koelb ascribes to this word in Kafka's late notebooks – and its proximity to the architectural motifs of castles, towers and walls – it is perhaps unsurprising that generations of critics have seen in the fragment an 'allegory of Kafka's literary creation' (Kurz) or 'semi-private game' (Pasley), viewing the indeterminate 'Baumeister' narrator as an iteration of age-old metaphors of artifice. Such readings have invariably tended to nudge the narrative voice into a more-or-less human realm – yet the fragment, as Barry Murnane has noted, also constitutes Kafka's most radical experiment in non-anthropocentric thinking, imagining in vivid detail the instincts and embodied cognition of a creature with a far-from-human sensorium. Delving into recent scientific work on animal creativity and imagination, my talk will probe the limits of each of these interpretive approaches, and consider how they might be brought into dialogue through an expanded conception of artifice as it appears in the more-than-human world.

**Vasilije Ivanovic** (Pennsylvania State University): *Enigmatic Ingenuity: Science and Literature in Kafka's 'Ein Besuch im Bergwerk'*

Among the stories collected in Kafka's volume *Ein Landarzt*, the short "Ein Besuch im Bergwerk" is often given only ancillary attention; such as in J.M.S. Pasley's interpretation of "Elf Söhne" referencing 11 of the 13 other stories in the volume but specifically excluding "Ein Besuch im Bergwerk" despite noting a striking similarity to the story that so occupies his interest. I want to challenge established psychoanalytic readings of the story's half-neurotic engineering 'nerds' and their quirky behaviors and offer a perspective on Kafka's story positions it in a more contemporary discourse of literature and science. Rather than offering simplistic replacements of worker hierarchies with contending knowledge domains, I position "Ein Besuch im Bergwerk" not in opposition to but in concert with "Elf Söhne": as an alternate view on knowledge production whose hermeticity is perceptual rather than structural. Though the unnamed coal-miner narrators remain baffled by the seemingly inexplicable or even irrational behaviors of the engineers who have intruded upon their domain, Kafka nevertheless encourages peculiar validity in the bizarre quirks of those men of science – their patterns and contradictions make sense *to them*, even if the narrator and by extension the reader are left in the dark of the mine that these scientists have come to topographically assess. Such an experience of alterity in knowledge production gives Kafka's story premier importance in understanding modern forms of literary encounters between science and culture – be that through environmental literature, speculative fiction, or simply the popularization of science to wider mainstream audiences.

**Christian Baier** (Seoul National University): *Transforming Like Gregor: Franz Kafka and the Birth of Post-Pandemic Humanity in Bruno Latour's 'After Lockdown'*

Bruno Latour's 2021 book *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis* has two protagonists. One is Latour himself, irrevocably changed by the Corona virus pandemic and the dread of climate change into a *terrestrial*: a new kind of human being, separated from 'regular' humans by an altered conception of himself and his relation to the environment. The other is Gregor Samsa, serving as the literary embodiment of this transformation, and connecting Kafka's work to the most daunting crises of our time.

One of the most influential critics of the anthropocene, Bruno Latour utilizes Gregor Samsa to illustrate the fundamental transformation undergone by humanity, and to explore its implications. In doing so, he combines literary interpretation with critical analysis, offering a unique perspective not only on COVID-19 and climate change, but on Kafka's text as well: as a *terrestrial*, Gregor in his nonhuman form personifies humanity after the pandemic, but for the analogy to hold, Kafka's unspecified *Ungeziefer* is identified as a termite, and Gregor is "suddenly able to *walk through walls*." (10)

In my presentation, I explore the role of Franz Kafka's protagonist in Bruno Latour's philosophical thought: I highlight the insights Latour's approach offers into the state of humanity after the pandemic, describe how Gregor Samsa is transformed once more to suit Latour's argument, and discuss the use of literary references in philosophical discourse on a more fundamental level.

#### **PANEL 21: Resonances, Networks, Legacies VII**

**Changnam Lee** (Kyungpook National University): *Transnational Trajectory of the Freedom of Kafka's Metamorphosis (Achmat Dangor's 'Kafka's Curse')*

This paper reviews the transformative dispersion of Kafka's motive of "metamorphosis" in the novel *Kafka's Curse* (1997). This revives Kafka's motive for metamorphosis in the political and social milieu of South Africa, the main motive being the transformation of the protagonist into a vegetative state.

Achmat Dangor depicts the Jewish South African architect, Oscar Kahn, who disguised his ethnicity and married a British woman. Kahn successfully deleted all records of his identity as an Indian Muslim, Omar Khan, but he fell ill as his body slowly changed into a tree, an illness called "Kafka's curse" in the novel.

The story revolves around the background of apartheid in South Africa after the legal prohibition of interracial marriage and the segregation of living places for whites and others after 1948. Dangor tried to stage, especially, the generally silenced topics in southern Africa, such as transgressive sexuality and the historical hybridity of the nation through the novel.

This paper highlights his narrative of transformative metamorphosis in relation to the long-lasting legacy of colonialism and current international political issues. While Dangor might not have intended to evoke the tension between Palestine and Israel in his novel, the inner conflict of the protagonist as neither Jew nor Muslim, leading finally to his transformation into a tree, can be read as an allegory of the ironic trajectory of the Kafkaesque metamorphosis into "something struggling to be born."

**Unyoung Park** (Kyungpook National University): *Subversion and Resistance: the Kafkaesque and Biopolitics in 'Die Verwandlung' (1915) and 'The Vegetarian' (Han Kang, 2007)*

South Korean writer Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* was awarded the Man Booker International Prize for Fiction in 2016 and is often compared with Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* since both protagonists undergo metamorphosis and violence in their environments. However, there are some differences between *The Vegetarian* and *Die Verwandlung*: Even though *The Vegetarian* depicts the process of metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa in *Die Verwandlung* is already transformed into a massive insect at the novel's beginning. Furthermore, both protagonists act mainly at home, even though Yeong-hye in *The Vegetarian* is female, whereas Gregor is male. These signal complementary characteristics of both

literary works regarding *Kafkaesque* despite cultural and time differences. Given that *Duden* defines *Kafkaesque* (Kafkaesk) as “in the style of Kafka’s descriptions; threatening in an enigmatic way,” it is necessary to understand the power relations of the works, both interior and exterior. Specifically, the body of the protagonists symbolizes the site as well as the borderline where violence can be visible, and both interior and exterior desires collide. This paper aims to elucidate the *Kafkaesque* with Foucault’s and Agamben’s Biopolitics in *The Vegetarian* and *Die Verwandlung*. Focusing on the body of the protagonists, this paper investigates “the style of Kafka’s [as well as Han Kang’s] descriptions” and the violence experienced by the protagonists at home and in society. Above all, this paper explores the metamorphosis of the protagonists regarding the *Kafkaesque* and illustrates its subversive and resistant meaning and role in literature.

**Ilsang Jin** (Ewha Womans University): *Kafkas Welt im Koreanischen. ‚Die Verwandlung‘ in den koreanischen Übersetzungen*

Ist Kafka zu übersetzen? Und zwar ins Koreanische? Diese Frage wäre Unsinn in Anbetracht der Rezeptions- und Übersetzungslage Kafkas in Korea. Kafka ist nicht irgendein deutschsprachiger Autor, er ist einer der wenigen und wichtigen Weltliteraten, die in der koreanischen Literatur tiefe Spuren hinterließen. Nur zu der Erzählung *Die Verwandlung* gibt es laut der Literaturrecherche im OPAC über 50 Übersetzungen. Der Hintergrund der Übersetzer und die Zielgruppe der Publikation sind sehr verschieden, von den Kafka-Spezialisten an der Uni. bis zum Profi-Übersetzer, mal mit den wissenschaftlichen Erläuterungen, mal mit Illustrationen, übersetzt auf Grundlage des Originals aber auch der japanischen und englischen Übersetzungen. Vielleicht ist es der Zeitpunkt, über *Die Verwandlung* zu reflektieren, und dabei die Frage zu stellen, wie sie in Korea verstanden und weiter rezipiert wird. Es wird zwar gesagt, dass Kafka in einer abgekapselten Kleinwelt lebte, auch im Sinne der sprachlichen Ebene, daher sein Text in grammatisch klarem und musterhaftem Deutsch geschrieben wurde. Doch was wäre, wenn die Mehrdeutigkeit seiner Worte durch die Übersetzung blass erschiene und sogar verloren gehen würde?

In dieser Studie wird zuerst die Übersetzungslage in Korea dargestellt, danach werden einige Übersetzungen verglichen und kritisch betrachtet, wie die symbolischen Worte und Szenen Kafkas ins Koreanische übersetzt wurden. Dieser Betrachtung schließt sich der Fragestellung an, wie das Dilemma zwischen dem Übersetzer und zugleich dem Wissenschaftler gelöst wird. Der Gegenstand der Untersuchung sind hauptsächlich die Übersetzungen von Germanisten, die z. T. nach dem Studium in Deutschland langjährige Erfahrung im akademischen Umfeld haben.

## **PANEL 22: Transformations VIII**

**Gabriele von Bassermann-Jordan** (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich): *‚Heilige Natur‘ und Künstlertum. Zwei Bühnenadaptionen von Kafkas ‚Ein Bericht für eine Akademie‘ (1917)*

Ich werde Ihnen zwei Theateradaptionen von Franz Kafkas *Bericht für eine Akademie* vorstellen, die 56 Jahre auseinander liegen und die Bandbreite der Theater-Interpretationen exemplarisch zeigen. Die erste wurde 1963 in der Berliner Akademie der Künste erstmals aufgeführt. Die zweite ist eine Schweizerische Produktion, die 2019 in der Kulturgarage Solothurn gezeigt wurde.

Die Aufführung von 1963 folgt Rotpeters Selbstdeutung seiner Lebensgeschichte: Er legt Wert darauf, im Käfig eine freiwillige Wandlung vom Affen zum Menschen und zum Varietékünstler vollzogen zu haben. Die Aufführung von 2019 dagegen setzt einen anderen Akzent: Sie macht deutlich, dass Rotpeters Leben in Übereinstimmung mit der „heiligen Natur“ unwiederbringlich verloren ist, nachdem er an der Goldküste eingefangen und im Käfig nach Europa transportiert worden ist. Diese beiden Thesen werde ich an ausgewählten Szenen der beiden Bühnenadaptionen belegen.

**Salman Abbas** (Aligarh Muslim University): *Naiyar Masud Translating Franz Kafka: Finding Kins in the Processes of Minoritisation*



This article undertakes an examination of the concept of Minor Literature as delineated by Deleuze and Guattari within the context of their interpretation of the oeuvre of Franz Kafka. Furthermore, it extends this concept to the specific arena of the 1978 Urdu translations of Kafka's literary corpus, executed by the esteemed Urdu writer and literary critic Naiyar Masud. By analysing the translation of Kafka's "Der Landarzt" (Country Doctor) into Urdu, the paper explores the notions of deterritorialised language and minoritisation in translation. It further explores how these processes manifest not only in the translated text but also in the literary output of the translator.

The study also explores the idea of the "after-life" of the original work, as proposed by Walter Benjamin, in the context of Minor Literature. This sheds light on the formation of connections between distant places through the minoritisation of language and identity. In this process, a comparison is drawn between Franz Kafka and Naiyar Masud. The latter part of the paper delves into an analysis of Masud's short story "Janasheen" and its relationship with Kafka's "Country Doctor" and its translation. It highlights a cultural rebirth or "afterlife" resulting from the earlier translation and engagement with Kafka's work. Additionally, the paper explores the choice of words in Masud's translations, emphasising the expansion of the semantic horizons of Kafka's language and the enrichment that occurs through translation.

**Tanya Silverman** (University of Michigan): *'Reconstruction' After Kafka's Rehabilitation: Considering the 1960s Czechoslovak Contexts of an Unrealized Film*

During the Thaw in Czechoslovakia, the relative relaxation of the Communist regime allowed for the revival of taboo literature along with the flourishing of culture by a new generation of artists. Two results of this zeitgeist were the local rehabilitation of the writer Franz Kafka and the emergence of the Czech New Wave film movement. While several New Wave films exhibit thematic influence from Kafka's works, there is a curious case of one such film that never came to fruition: *Reconstruction*. An unrealized 1960s collaboration between playwright Václav Havel and filmmakers Miloš Forman, Ivan Passer, and Jaroslav Papoušek, *Reconstruction* aimed to recall Kafka's *The Castle* by taking place in Siřem, the small Bohemian village that supposedly inspired the novel. *Reconstruction* would have followed the coming-of-age of a young architect whose naïve ideals are undermined by a series of bureaucratic hurdles that complicate his first building assignment. This paper explores the Czechoslovak contexts of *Reconstruction* and how it embodies facets of Kafka's legacy amid the climate of cultural production that encompassed the New Wave. The discussion examines how *Reconstruction* sought to transpose to the screen the atmosphere and motifs from Kafka's literature. It foregrounds how the film would have reflected the author's image as shaped by local aspirations of intellectualization and internationalization as well as commercial and touristic interests. In addition, the analysis covers elements of *Reconstruction* that reverberated in the creative approaches of Forman and Passer as they transitioned to making movies in America after the 1960s.

**PANEL 23:** New Voices VIII

**Ruth Gross** (North Carolina State University): *Franz Kafka and the Age of Artificial Intelligence: From Allegories to Algorithm*

Our current confrontations with artificial intelligence remind us that Franz Kafka, living over a century ago in a world without AI, seems to herald our reactions. Do we not find ourselves in a Kafkaesque moment of confusion and helplessness because no one really knows what AI is capable of or how far anyone can control it?

This paper explores the enduring relevance of Franz Kafka's work in the context of contemporary anxieties surrounding artificial intelligence (AI). Drawing parallels between Kafka's themes of social alienation, bureaucratic victimization, and irrational terror with the current discourse on AI, I will argue that Kafka's literature offers valuable insights into the human condition in an increasingly automated world. Through an analysis of Kafka's texts, such as "The Neighbor," "Poseidon," "A Report to the Academy," and "In the Penal Colony," the paper highlights the

recurring fears of losing control to technology and the struggle to maintain humanity amidst rapid technological advancements. The paper also discusses the potential benefits and dangers of AI, emphasizing the need for regulation and ethical considerations. By examining Kafka's perspectives on modern inventions and their impact on human life, the paper underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the psychological and societal implications of AI. Ultimately, the paper concludes that Kafka's work serves as a cautionary tale, urging us to approach AI with irony, optimism, and caution.

**Lena Siebels** (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich): *Kafka's Communities without Foundation*

The aim of this paper is to explore the transdisciplinary connection between Kafka's literary work and the field of political philosophy, or more precisely: the contemporary discourse of radical democratic theory. From Hannah Arendt to Giorgio Agamben and Gilles Deleuze to the present day, Kafka is a central reference in (political) philosophy. One of the reasons for this is that, according to Friedrich Balke, no literature in this century has provoked political thought and its theories more than the literature of Franz Kafka. Nevertheless, there has been no systematic examination of the political of Kafka's works to date. Although Kafka does not develop his own concept of the political, the general question of the possibility and refusal of interpretation of Kafka's texts already provides the opportunity to utilise and 'test' various dimensions of the political for the examination of the work. In this paper I will explore the political through the theme of community in 'Das Schloß' and 'Der Proceß'. All radical democratic theorists assume that ultimate justifications such as 'state' and 'nation' must be rejected. In Kafka's works, the place of power remains empty, just as the imagined communities remain groundless and must be founded again and again. Here lies the potential for a new political reading.

**Leah Tomkins** (Cranfield University): *Why Kafka and Leadership?*

Showcasing Kafka's phenomenal relevance for the dynamics of power and institution, this paper offers four answers to the question of why we should turn to Kafka if we want to understand leadership. This has relevance whether we are (or aspire to be) leaders ourselves, or we want to hone our ability to resist the leading and misleading that others would do to us. Within leadership and management studies, Kafka has usually been invoked as the patron-saint of the under-dog, and his insights have thus been limited to experiences of impotence and victimhood, especially in relation to the supposedly damaging effects of bureaucracy on the individual human soul. This paper takes a radically different approach, positioning Kafka as a brilliant forerunner of post-modern understandings that 'power is exercised rather than possessed' (Foucault, 1979). It sees language and discourse as Kafka's weapons of direction and misdirection in all relations of authority, including familial, institutional and political. Drawing on research with the original Kafka manuscripts held in the Bodleian, it highlights Kafkan narrative techniques of 'version-control' through which his protagonists and his readers both wield and yield to power. It argues that Kafka anticipates many of the discursive tactics of leaders (and their spin-doctors) today, especially those of a populist, 'post-truth' variety, where facts are often overpowered by fictions, fantasies and indeed 'alternative facts'.

**PANEL 24:** New Voices IX

**Thomas Pekar** (Gakushuin University): *Kafka and the Question of Nutrition* Food and nutrition play a prominent role in Kafka's life and literature. My presentation attempts to connect Kafka's themes related to food with current discussions on nutrition. The analysis is based on one central statement by Kafka regarding food: "Alles ist eßbar" (Letter, KKAB4, p. 339) / "It is all edible."

This statement points to the extensive semanticization of food, rooted primarily in human socialization and the education around eating. Kafka illustrates the detrimental effects of these father-mediated 'table lessons' in his *Letter to His Father* and attempts to overcome the

consequences of these lessons by decoupling food from meaning. The undoubtedly utopian goal is a form of eating liberated from meaning—an 'eat everything' approach.

Kafka's statement serves as a point of inspiration to explore a central aspect of current discussions on nutrition: the challenge of the future expansion of the human nutritional basis under desemanticized, purely functional aspects.

**Haneul Lee** (Yonsei University): *Franz Kafka, Japanese Kafka, and Korean Kafka: Playing with Death in Kafka's, Ryunosuke's and Yisang's Literature*

Japanese author Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892-1927) and Korean writer Yi Sang (1910-1937), who lived under Japanese colonial rule, were contemporaries of Franz Kafka (1883-1924). Despite the fact that neither Ryunosuke nor Yi Sang is likely to have read Kafka's works, as Borges argues in his essay "Kafka and His Precursors," this does not prevent us from describing their work as 'Kafkaesque.' Although Kafka and these two Eastern authors were separated by vast geographical distances, their lives share striking parallels within the context of Modernity. Each died young — Kafka at 40, Ryunosuke at 35, and Yi Sang at 26 — leading to their recognition as geniuses who died prematurely. This presentation will explore a recurring theme in their literary worlds: a curious attitude toward death, specifically, "playing with death." Contrary to the dark and tragic images often associated with these authors and their deaths, their engagement with death in their works is not always somber or despairing. Instead, they often approached death with a sense of playfulness, enjoying their lives as authors. By delving into the rich comparative literary possibilities their works offer, this presentation seeks to ignite interest not only in Kafka but also in the broader Kafkaesque dimensions of world literature.

**Natalie Perman** (University of Oxford): *K is for Kindlichkeit: On Reading Kafka Childishly*

Children are not often aligned with Kafka. In his works, children seem to play at the margins or the periphery — we might think of the hordes of girls poking straws into Titorelli's studio in *Der Proceß* or the collective chorus of 'Kinder auf der Landstraße'. Yet, throughout Kafka's oeuvre, we see a pervasive and repeated childishness in adult figures — from the court officials of *Der Proceß* who are 'wie Kinder' to the childish castle officials and locals, characterised by a 'Kindlichkeit, die hier zuhause zu sein schien' (*Das Schloß*). In attending to the element of childishness in Kafka's writings, I aim to show not only Kafka's model of childish adulthood, but how his texts guide us towards a mode of childish reading.

First taking a little-researched fragment from the Octavo notebooks, 'Auf dem Dachboden', I sketch a (childish) transformation of how we might read Kafka, and with it a transformation of ourselves as readers. Touching on Adorno's 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka' and Gustav Janouch's *Gespräche mit Kafka*, I outline a return to a childish way of seeing or hearing in Kafka, akin to Deleuze's and Guattari's 'becoming-child'. I locate three key aspects of this childishness, epitomised in *Das Schloß*: size, or diminution; sound, or noises without communicative function; and a farcical play. This reveals the castle as child's drawing, full of Chaplinesque gags and games. I aim to show that if we treat the text not as ritual object, but as a toy we can play with, we can discover Kafka's writings anew with childish inquisitiveness.

**PANEL 25:** Transformations IX

**Nadine Scharfetter** (University for Continuing Education Krems): *Körpererfahrungen in Uwe Raschs 'Kafka-Trilogie'*

Das Leben und Werk Franz Kafkas erfahren in der Musik spätestens seit den 1950er-Jahren eine beachtliche Rezeption. Diese spiegelt sich international in unzähligen Werken unterschiedlicher Gattungen wider und reicht von kürzeren Vokal- und Instrumentalstücken bis hin zu umfangreichen Bühnenwerken. Kafkas literarische Texte, seine Briefe und Tagebücher werden hierbei entweder direkt vertont, finden als Vorlage für Opernlibretti Verwendung oder dienen in freierer Form als Inspirationsquelle für eine Komposition.

Ein Beispiel für die Rezeption Kafkas in der Musik stellt Uwe Raschs Kafka-Trilogie (Teil 1 „Sich als etwas Fremdes ansehen, den Anblick vergessen, den Blick behalten“, Teil 2 „Korridor“, Teil 3 „Hammer“) dar. Sie entstand zwischen 1990 und 1994 in einer Zeit, in der sich der Komponist intensiv mit Kafkas Leben und Werk auseinandersetzte. Außergewöhnlich ist hierbei der Zugang von Rasch, denn ihm geht es um Körpererfahrungen bei Kafka bzw. um die Frage, wie sich das Kafkaeske in körperliche Empfindungen und Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten überführen lässt. In den drei Kompositionen äußert sich das u. a., indem Rasch durch die Spielanweisungen Überforderung, Fremdheitserfahrungen mit dem eigenen Körper und Überanstrengung provoziert oder der Körper selbst als Instrument verwendet wird. Zudem verwendet Rasch Zitate aus Erzählungen oder Textfragmenten Kafkas, die auf unterschiedliche Weise zum Einsatz kommen (stimmlich oder instrumental umgesetzt, als Thema vorangestellt etc.). Im Vortrag soll dieser Verbindung zwischen Kafka und Körpererfahrungen in Raschs Trilogie nachgegangen werden.

**Jiin Ko** (Yonsei University): *Movement in 'The Metamorphosis' and Its Sonification*

Humans use their two feet for locomotion. Bipedalism, from a human perspective, is one of the indications of having the ability to earn one's living and losing this ability can mean the termination of a functioning adult. *The Metamorphosis* begins with Gregor Samsa lying on his back not being able to stand up or move the way he used to and the lack of locomotion separates him from other humans. Gregor's vertical position and the range of activity epitomise his physical and social status. The weaker and more useless he gets the more inactive and closer to the ground he is. In music and sound, movement plays a similar role. Notes that move up and down form the melody line, and the vertical motion of a waveform determines pitch and amplitude. The faster the waveform oscillates the higher the pitch is, and the higher the waveform goes up the louder the volume is, shaping the dynamic and vitality of the piece. When the mark on the volume level meter hits the bottom, silence follows signifying the end of sound as Gregor's immobility indicates his passing. Sonifying Gregor's vertical movement in a digital art form by analysing the text will demonstrate the protagonist's condensed life after the transformation. A sound map drawn based on the coordinates of Gregor with corresponding musical elements will enable us to hear and trace his struggle to exist, and if lucky, that of Kafka's as well.

**Samantha Heinle** (Case Western Reserve University): *Bugs in the Sonic System*

This paper examines Kafkaesque compositions in which musical distortions are both glitch and feature. To immerse oneself in these soundscapes is to experience a world that you no longer recognize, or that no longer recognizes you—the terror of Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis. Yet heard through a different aural paradigm, the world shifts into new focus.

Kafka's retelling of an episode from *The Odyssey*, "The Silence of the Sirens," frames my study. In Kafka's version, silence, not song, is the sirens' deadliest weapon. In my paper, I examine two compositions that are likewise meditations on the apparent paradox of silent music: Unsuik Chin's *Le Silence des Sirènes* (2014) and Christine Sun Kim's *Face Opera II* (2015).

Kafka's eponymous text is central to Chin's composition for soprano and orchestra. Chin's siren struggles to entrance her audience through song, and as her voice fails, only her gestures remain. The classical Homeric siren is rendered mute, supplanted by a modernist siren empowered by silence. Kim's *Face Opera II* demonstrates what it might mean to be empowered by silence. In it, nine Deaf performers respond to an ASL gloss displayed on a screen, but without using their hands. Instead, they rely solely on facial gestures and body movements to convey "tone," rather than semantic content. In her gestural, inaudible opera, Kim explores the music of ASL.

These compositions ask what it means to see music. As we rewire one of the major senses, we follow Kafka towards a minor listening practice that no longer remains unheard.

## PANEL 26: Transformations X

**Gaia Cristinziano** (University of Bergamo): *From Castle to Console: Kafka's Enduring Resonance in Gaming*

This paper focuses on the synergy between Franz Kafka's literary techniques and the distinctive characteristics of video games as a form of "minor literature" (Mukherjee, 2016), highlighting their profound potential in translating Kafka's intricate world.

Using the game *Metamorphosis* (Ovid Works, 2020) as a case study, its immersive qualities, whose interweaving of references and spaces may be reminiscent of Steven Soderbergh's narration in *Kafka*, are revealed. While not overtly inspired by Soderbergh, the game mirrors his approach, assembling, as a tribute, elements from Kafka's biography and several of his literary works to create a unique and seemingly linear narrative, in which players, gradually transformed into insects, take on the role of Gregor Samsa in Josef K.'s room, navigating a disorienting maze of interconnected spaces and upturned furniture, aiming to reach the "Tower" to get a job and gain human form in return.

Short excerpts show the game's setting, with a commentary emphasizing the transformative role of plot and perspective. Unlike cinema, the 360-degree exploration and first-person perspective induce hyper-immersion, causing occasional discomfort for players, whereas multiple endings and ethical choices further engage players in complex moral dilemmas. The gaming experience is therefore individually as well as collectively constructed through shared interpretations and problem-solving in online communities.

The study thus argues that video games have a unique potential to faithfully render Kafka's literary universe, underlining its enduring relevance in visual media and contributing to ongoing discussions on video games in literary studies.

**Verena Kick** (Georgetown University) & **Carsten Strathausen** (University of Missouri): *Kafka Core: An Adaptation Network*

*Adapting Kafka*, a collaborative digital project by Carsten Strathausen (University of Missouri) and Verena Kick (Georgetown University), focuses on Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial* (1925). Its many editions, translations, and adaptations that appeared in the last 100 years offer an opportunity for a quantitative and qualitative analysis in the digital realm that goes beyond a simple bibliographical collection. In building a database that catalogs the novel's various transformations, we offer detailed information about these works including excerpts, commentaries, and critical analyses. We use Dublin Core as a metadata standard for our database, though we have come to realize that its elements, such as "dc.format," "dc.type," or "dc.relation," are too coarse and must be defined more precisely to account for the specificity of our dataset. Informed by Adaptation Studies, we created new metadata elements based on analytical questions such as "What chapters of *The Trial* are included in this adaptation?" as well as hermeneutic questions: "Is K. portrayed as guilty or not?" or "Is the author Kafka fused with the protagonist K.?" This extended metadata standard, which we call "Kafka Core," reflects these critical relations among editions, translations, and adaptations of *The Trial*. In our presentation, we use tools for qualitative data analysis to visualize and interpret these relationships based on the new metadata we created.

## PANEL 27: New Voices X

**Yael Almog** (Durham University): *Kafka's Transient Jewishness*

In his *Broken German* (2016), Israeli novelist Tomer Gardi depicts a scenario that is astonishing as much as it is plausible. The novel details the transformation of Germany's seminal cultural centre the Goethe Institut into 'the Kafka Institut' in an attempt to promote the inclusion of migrant authors in Germany's cultural scene. What unfolds is a blunt critique of the instrumentalization of authors' ethnic, religious, and national identities to enhance both their marketability and that of the cultural institutions that endorse them. Gardi alerts to his own Jewishness and Israeliness as selling points through an elaborate intertextual correspondence with Kafka's 'A Report to An Academy'. An Israeli

Jew who writes in broken German parallels the figure of a civilised ape. As is the case for Kafka's narrator, Gardi's public performances are celebrated by his cultured audience. I will examine this novel in light of the reception of Kafka's Jewishness as a political token in contemporary discussions of Jewish identity. I shall demonstrate that a critique of Kafka's appropriation by the progressive left has become ever more charged in the aftermath of October 7 and of Israel's retaliatory war. In a volatile and fraught context, Kafka's Jewishness has become a platform for discussions of Jewish ethics and the political values of diasporic Judaism.

**Clemens Dirmhirm** (University of Jena): *Durchschnitt und Kollektiv: Zu Franz Kafkas 'Eine Gemeinschaft von Schurken'*

Kafka's text *A Community of rogues* (1917) raises questions about cohesion within a community. Due to special techniques of literary representation the nature of this collective remains unclear. The way the narrator presents this group creates ambiguous perceptions as he oscillates constantly between irreconcilable perspectives. Allusions to the concept of "the average man" embed a stochastic-'normalistic' point of view in the sense of Jürgen Link, whereas references to religious and juridical practices of determining, integrating and resolving guilt imply a 'normativistic' setting the narrator repeatedly tends to adopt.

Kafka's text demonstrates that the allusions to stochastic-'normalistic' discourses raise expectations that the cohesion between the group members might be based on description rather than prescription and can dispense with transcendent references. But those anti-metaphysic hopes are then disenthralled as this collective nevertheless aims at eternalising itself.

**Stijn De Cauwer** (Leiden University): *On Both Sides of the Wall: The Work of Franz Kafka and Problematic Discourse about Communities*

Various scholars have interpreted Kafka's work as an intervention in problematic discourse about communities. Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner have argued that Kafka's work contains 'discursive calculations,' juxtaposing conflicting viewpoints, and hence functions as a 'cultural insurance' against problematic rhetoric (2011). Joseph Vogl has argued that Kafka's narratives contain a process he calls 'tarrying' which causes a 'decision problem,' undermining the certainty of a specific discourse (2007). Other scholars, such as Johannes Türk, have interpreted Kafka's work as a personal 'immunological technique' (2011). Several authors, such as Roberto Esposito, Donna Haraway and Jacques Derrida, have argued that the protective mechanisms developed by communities in times in which communal and personal life feels threatened (or 'immunity mechanisms,' as they call them) can become problematic and even self-destructive when they aim to create closed communities with a hostile disposition towards what is considered to be 'foreign.' Specific stylistic aspects of Kafka's work make the foreign familiar, question presumed social bonds and destabilize rhetoric about closed communities and belonging. This will be illustrated by means of *The Great Wall of China*, in which two contrasting perspectives are presented on the construction of a large wall: protecting the empire against the nomads from the North or not protecting at all but cementing a feeling of communal unity instead. The contrasting perspectives in the story question the rhetoric about communities and thus undermine the problematic aspects of such rhetoric.

**PANEL 28:** Transformations XI

**Warren Buckland** (Oxford Brookes University): *The Hypnagogic Labyrinths of 'The Trial' and 'Inland Empire'*

J. G. Ballard once described David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet* (1986) as "The Wizard of Oz reshot with a script by Kafka and décor by Francis Bacon." Kafka's influence on Lynch is not limited to *Blue Velvet* but extends across all his film and television work. In this presentation I adopt a comparative approach to map out the influence of Kafka's late works *The Trial* (1925) and his short story "The Burrow" (1924) on Lynch's film *Inland Empire* (2006) by identifying narratological techniques shared by both. These include complex labyrinthine narratives, episodic structures, spatio-temporal

fragmentation (created by the absence of causal links between incomplete events), montage (unorthodox juxtapositions), plus an uncommunicative narration that restricts access to both the story world and to the characters (including anthropomorphic animals) who inhabit that world. I argue that these narratological techniques are combined in similar ways in both Kafka and Lynch, creating alternative (open-ended and ambiguous) worlds. I frame my discussion by comparing Kafka's and Lynch's creative working practices – writing at night deprived of sleep (Kafka) and meditation (Lynch). Both practices induce a trance-like state of mind by reducing outside stimulation and rational thinking, which suggests that the alternative worlds of Kafka and Lynch are generated from a hypnagogic mind – a creative mind located between wakefulness and sleep.

**Adam Lowenstein** (University of Pittsburgh): *Cronenberg, Kafka, and Jewish Horror*

The pioneering Jewish Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg has always insisted that his breakthrough horror film *The Fly* (1986) represents his own version of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915). Indeed, as recently as 2014 Cronenberg reiterated this connection in his introduction to Susan Bernofsky's new English translation of *The Metamorphosis*. I will argue that a concept of Jewish horror, as central as it is unspoken in Cronenberg's films as well as in Kafka's writings, is a lens that sheds light on both artists when they are considered together. How do Cronenberg's well-known contributions to the horror film subgenre of "body horror," where spectacles of anguished physical transformation dominate, change anew when we juxtapose them with Kafka's own human-animal metamorphoses? And how does our understanding of Kafka's Jewishness, especially as it uncovers issues of the body and the (im)possibilities of physical transformation under anti-Semitic duress, help to illuminate Cronenberg's "body horror" as a form of Jewish horror?

Even though Cronenberg's films are almost never discussed in relation to Jewishness and Kafka's writings are rarely framed with regard to genre-linked notions of horror, a concept of Jewish horror promises to flesh out (sometimes quite literally) the connections between their artistic projects. In this paper, *The Fly* and *The Metamorphosis* will anchor this analysis.

#### **PANEL 29: New Voices XI**

**Eva Haude** (Leipzig University): *Rotpeter's 'Hallo!': Kafka's Words between Languages*

Kafka writes that the Jewish-German authors of his time "lived between three impossibilities [...] : the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing differently, one could almost add a fourth impossibility, the impossibility of writing [...], thus it was an impossible literature from all sides".

Against the background of the historical discourse on matters of nationality and language, this paper examines those elements of the language system that resist the constraint of belonging to a single national language. It focuses on two word types: (1) Proper names and (2) Interjections. Translations where many of these occur untransformed show that these word types seem to stand between languages in several respects. The paper examines their special literary status, guided by the hypothesis that these word types can be understood as inner-linguistic refuges of a linguistic experience of uprooting and thus serve to create a special space of making writing possible. The primary textual basis of the paper is Kafka's "Report to an Academy".

**Dylan James Peterson** (Northern Illinois University): *'The Bounds of Ordinary Squeaking': Post-liminal Translation in Franz Kafka's 'Josefine, the Singer or The Mouse People'*

Franz Kafka's last completed work, "Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse," was published in German shortly after he moved back from Berlin to Prague and less than two months before his death in 1924. Differing English translations of the noise that Josefine makes when she performs have encouraged diverse critical readings of the story's central allegory. Beyond such readings, the fields of sound studies, memory studies, postcolonial theory, and migration studies suggest a new

approach to the fundamentally trans-linguistic “Josefine.” Specifically, Kafka’s story—as a direct consequence of its multiple different translations—is a post-liminal text, in that it anticipates the relational incommensurability of a defined (written) sound that cannot be translated through an undefined subject, but is elevated by the necessarily complicating translation(s) into another language which thus retrospectively highlights the inherent ambiguity of rhetorical meaning. “Josefine, the Singer or The Mouse People” is a post-liminal text in two ways: first, extra-textually, because it followed Kafka’s liminal experience as an impermanent resident of Berlin, and, textually, through the subjective instability in the structure and content of the narrative. Post-liminality incurs retrospection in the form of mimesis, or remembering the sameness of a thing after it occurs, as a reflection of a type of remembered reality, which is precisely what the story’s narrator ponders about Josefine.

**Seong-Sook Mok** (Incheon National University): *Kafkas ‘Ritornello’*

Ein Ritornell ist eine Musikform, die ähnlich einem Rondo durch die Wiederholung eines Themas gekennzeichnet ist, aber auch in Variationen gespielt wird. In diesem Beitrag soll die Funktion des Gesangs in der Erzählung „Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse“ im Zusammenhang mit dem Ritornell im deleuzschen Sinne untersucht werden.

Deleuze übernimmt das Ritornell aus der Musik und verwendet es auf seine Weise. Sein Ritornell ist ein Konzept, das geschaffen wurde, um über Wiederholung und Differenz innerhalb eines Gefüges nachzudenken. Wie ein Ritornell löst sich Josefines Gesang vom Code des traditionellen Gesangs und drückt Variationen aus, die Unterschiede erzeugen. Demzufolge fühlt das Volk der Mäuse in ihrem Gesang sowohl etwas Außerordentliches als auch nichts Außerordentliches.

Josefines Gesang führt bis zum Schweigen. Da sie schließlich verschwindet, wird ihr Gesang nur noch in lautloser Stille erinnert. Singen in Stille ist eine Musik, die sich allen musikalischen Formen entzieht, und ein mitschwingender Klang, der sich allen akustischen Komponenten entzieht. Außerdem ist es ein Gesang, der zum Leben wird, und die Stimme des Lebens, die zum Gesang wird.

Nach Deleuze bewegt sich das Musik-Werden zwischen Musik und Nicht-Musik, sodass es sich auf Dinge bezieht, die nichts mit Musik zu tun haben. Ebenso beginnt die Geschichte über die Sängerin Josefine mit der Musik, aber sie entwickelt sich zu etwas Anderem als Musik. Josefine scheint durch ihren Gesang über ihr Leben als Künstlerin und das Leben des Volkes bzw. der Gemeinschaft zu sprechen. Darin liegt die Macht ihres Gesangs.