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Trauma, Hysteria, and Simulation in the Late Kafka

Although readers have related many biographical factors to Kafka's writing, none has noticed the importance of his long-standing interest in the deleterious effect of modernization on people. Beginning with the train-transported characters of his early writing and moving to the nervously symptomatic bodies of his later work, I argue that we must understand Kafka's well-known poetics of indeterminacy within this framework. I analyze Kafka's writings as an accident-insurance clerk, where he sometimes handled cases of "traumatic neurosis" and "hysteria," together with his short fiction in order to understand how his aesthetics developed in concert with contemporary medical-legal theories. Kafka's "literary" suspicion of these theories emerged especially in his later years, when his characters showed hysterical symptoms fully decapitated from apparent causes at the same time that he "despaired" of language's inability to refer to anything beyond itself. The relation of these "simulating" characters to Kafka's famous anti-mimetic poetic skepticism gives his writing a surprising social-political

significance. In both form and content, it outlines the inability to represent in a medical-legal context that demands nothing less. (JZ)

Thomas Wegmann

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The Human as Resident Animal: Kafka's *Der Bau* in the Context of His Later Notebooks and Letters

Kafka first read Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety* in 1922. One can read Kierkegaard's text as a central element in the poetology of "Der Bau," which reenacts the relationship between construction, habitation, and thinking against a background of anxiety. "Der Bau" in fact reveals the practice of habitation as a reflection of a state of anxiety. This is the paradox of Kafka's story: habitation is something that cannot be thought; the more one attempts to ponder the subject, the less one can actually reside. Kafka, as author, is shown to be no more master of his writing than the animal builder is master of his burrow. Creation in this sense is not ruled by the classic opposition of subject and object: the author does not govern his writing but is transformed into what he writes. And this is precisely what *Der Bau* demonstrates *in extenso*. Telling about the burrow means postponing the finality of the burrow as well as that of its safety-anxiety-complex. What Kafka cultivated in his late writings is the dystopia of an eternal writing as an equivalent of living and as an alternative to the artistic finality, the rational concept, and the apparent wholeness of works and buildings. (TW)

Christiane Frey

372

Kafka's Test

This essay offers a reading of Kafka's long-ignored short narrative piece "Die Prüfung" (1920), uncovering the paradoxes of testing that the curious ending of the text exposes. Confronting the parable first with Brod's *Heidentum, Christentum, Judentum* and second with one of the most widely discussed of Kafka's parables, namely "Vor dem Gesetz," the essay explores Kafka's reconfigurations of the intricate relationship between grace and sin, calling and serving, the law and the examination. The essay concludes by showing how the pedagogical and psychological discourse of "testing" circa 1920 was concerned with an epistemic problematic that is very much in evidence in Kafka's parable. (CF)

Ritchie Robertson

385

Myth vs. Enlightenment in Kafka's *Das Schloß*

Das Schloß shows many of the features commonly considered characteristic of "late style," such as a distance from conventional narrative methods, a reliance on enigmatic forms of expression, and a prominence given to symbolic objects such as the castle of the title. However, the kind of myth-criticism that flourished in North America from roughly the 1940s to the 1960s has not produced very convincing results when applied to this text. Myth is present in *Das Schloß* rather as the mythic consciousness possessed by the villagers but questioned by the aggressively rational K. The novel as a whole, however, is not a rationalistic attack on religion: rather, it shows the villagers engaging in a range of reli-

gious practices and acknowledges a lingering desire for transcendence which, however, has now to be satisfied within, not beyond, everyday life. (RR)

Christian Jany

396

Schriftkerben // Kerfs of Writing. A Phenomenology of Kafka's Stylus

This essay investigates a specific notion and practice of writing that may explain and make sense of: a) certain graphic features of Kafka's handwriting (Part 1); b) several „conceptual" remarks about his "intransitive" way of writing (Part 2); c) some narrative texts, most notably "Ein Traum" and the Hunter Gracchus fragments (Part 3). Considering the connection of these three elements, which intertwine in an exemplary way in Kafka, the essay proposes a new perspective on the aesthetics of Kafka's "style"—namely, the practice of what will be described as "fetishistic inscription" and subsequently explored in its poetological relevance. The attempt to excavate a moment of identity, that is to say, an essential belonging-together of the threefold nexus, marks the phenomenological method of the investigation. Finally, the exemplary relationship between graphics and notions of selfhood in Kafka may enable us to glimpse a fundamental modality in which subjects relate to their script (Part 4). (CJ)

Malte Kleinwort

416

Incidental and Preliminary – Features of the Late Kafka

This article points towards a connection between two research areas conventionally separated from each other: on the one hand, an interest in the social problems and ideas with which Kafka was familiar in his job at the Prague Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute and, on the other hand, an interest in Kafka's writing process. The world of Kafka's late texts looks like one seen through the eyes of an insurance expert, shaped by flexible, only preliminary norms and calculations in which the behavior of a single individual is incidental and insignificant. A closer look at late manuscripts by Kafka demonstrates that he struggled hard against the merely preliminary character of his writing and experienced difficulties deciding what was merely incidental and what was significant in his own texts. The difficulties of the writing process are also difficulties that the figures in his texts have to deal with: hence, the incidental and the preliminary are seen here as features of Kafka's late writing and writings. (MK)

REVIEW ARTICLE

Sabine Wilke

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Zwanzig Jahre Germanistik postkolonial

(Lubrich, Oliver, *Das Schwinden der Differenz. Postkoloniale Poetiken. Alexander von Humboldt – Bram Stoker – Ernst Jünger – Jean Genet.*—Hermes, Stefan, "Fahrten nach Südwest." *Die Kolonialkriege gegen die Herero und Nama in der deutschen Literatur (1904–2004).*—Albrecht, Monika, "Europa ist nicht

die Welt." (Post)Kolonialismus in Literatur und Geschichte der westdeutschen Nachkriegszeit.—Lillge, Claudia und Anne-Rose Meyer, Hrsg., *Interkulturelle Mahlzeiten. Kulinarische Begegnungen und Kommunikation in der Literatur.*—Schmitz, Helmut, Hrsg., *Von der nationalen zur internationalen Literatur. Transkulturelle deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur im Zeitalter globaler Migration.*—Struck, Wolfgang, *Die Eroberung der Phantasie. Kolonialismus, Literatur und Film zwischen deutschem Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik.*)

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