

The moving pictures. Brod, Kafka, Brentano and... Arbus

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Am Anfang – so lautet das erste Gesetz in Kafkas Universum – steht das Bild, und nicht wenige seiner Texte lassen sich als Ausfaltungen eines einzigen, denkwürdigen Bildes lesen, als Demonstration dessen, was ein Bild <hergibt>.¹

This paper consists of five sections: (1) introduction; (2) a section about Max Brod's theory of beauty and Kafka's critical reply to it, and the account of his philosophical inspirations as well as the story of Brod's and Kafka's affiliation to the Louvre Circle; (3) a section on Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and the role novelty plays in this story supplemented with an ethical context taken from Brentano; (4) a section in which I analyse this story both as a horror and comedy, and where I introduce a very Kafkaesque photographer – Diane Arbus; finally, (5) a section about the relationship between Kafka and Brod which also serves as closing remarks and summing-up.

1. Introduction

From all the adjectives one could apply to Franz Kafka's prose the word "beautiful" can hardly be our first choice. Dark, complicated, depressing, scary, sad, bewildering – all these attributes suit it fine. Plus, of course, the genuine "Kafkaesque" – as a prime example of how indescribable his work is. But "beautiful"? It is like calling Diane Arbus's disturbing pictures "beautiful". But if we dwell on it, we will realize that they have been called "beautiful" in the end. How did it happen? After we had undergone the initial shock, we familiarized with this puzzling *je-ne-sais-quoi*. The confusion was caused by something new, unknown, incomprehensible, scary, distressing,

¹ R. Stach, *Kafka: Die Jahre der Entscheidungen*, chapter "Aus dem Leben der Metaphern: Die Verwandlung", S. Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 2015, p. 210.

awkward and itchy. What was uncomfortable has become pleasant and can even be called “beautiful”.

There is a reason why I have used pictures (photographs) as my starting point example. In philosophical jargon a picture is a presentation, German *Vorstellung*, *Vor-Stellung*, something that presents itself before our eyes (or our mind’s eye). Max Brod claimed that Franz Kafka “was thinking in pictures” and this viewpoint was a basis for his opinion that his friend was not inspired by any philosophical movement, and especially by the Prague Brentanists, who gathered regularly in Café Louvre, Brod and Kafka being part of this circle. In my opinion – the fact that Kafka was a “picture-thinker” may serve as a proof that he was indeed inspired by philosophy and chiefly by Brentano’s theory of perception and consciousness, pictures being its core and a necessary condition of perceiving and thinking (which stems directly from Aristotle). The expansion of this line of thought will constitute a significant part of this paper. But first of all I will concentrate on Brod’s own theory of pictures, i.e. his juvenile project devoted to aesthetics and his thesis that the terms “new” and “beautiful” overlap. In this light I will inspect and interpret Kafka’s prose and thus try to show what his opinion on the relationship between novelty and beauty was. My starting point will be Brod’s two-part paper from the weekly *Die Gegenwart* (eng. *The Present*) from 17th and 24th of February 1906 and Kafka’s unpublished critical reply edited by Brod years later: *Ungedrucktes von Franz Kafka (Zeit Online, Kultur)*².

I will try to go beyond this explicit response and dig deeper into Kafka’s prose. I will concentrate on the short story “The Metamorphosis”. I will also refer to Kafka’s novel published by Brod after his friend’s death, namely “America or The Man Who Disappeared” and the description of American dream in its first chapters. A useful context for my deliberations will be granted by Brod’s and Kafka’s personal relationship which I will describe in

² I quote: «Es handelt sich um die Ausarbeitung eines polemischen Gedankens gegen mich, um Kafkas Antwort auf zwei Artikel von mir, die in der Berliner Wochenschrift *Gegenwart* (Herausgeber Ernst Heilborn) am 17. und 24. Februar 1906 unter dem Titel „Zur Aesthetik“ erschienen sind. In diesen Artikeln hatte ich schlicht und in jugendlichem Leichtsinn (damals war ich noch nicht zweiundzwanzig Jahre alt) behauptet, die Kategorie „schön“ sei einfach durch die Kategorie „neu“ zu ersetzen».

passing. For now, it will be profitable to stress that Max was a well-off, elegant “golden boy” loved by his family, and an incorrigible optimist, whereas Kafka was rather an unstylish sceptic and pessimist with numerous family issues which he compensated by the heightened powers of observation and a specific but rarely mentioned sense of humour.

2. The new and the beautiful

Let me begin with a recapitulation of Brod’s theory of beauty proposed in his paper “Zur Ästhetik” (*Die Gegenwart*). He begins with a reservation that what he presents is not a dissertation as such, but only an expression of his taste and a result of his deliberations. He also divides it into two parts in order to avoid the dissertation structure. The first part is devoted to perceiving and the second to creating, broadly speaking. I will concentrate on the first one. Still, his paper contains rather solid elements of a dissertation, such as theses or the introduction of newly defined notions, e.g. apperception. Brod also states that this is not a polemic with any of the existing views on the nature of beauty. I will now enumerate and comment on his theses.

Thesis 1: Beauty is a feature of presentations [*Vorstellung*].

Thesis 2: Beautiful is the presentation which is new.

Thesis 3: Apperception is the reception of a new presentation or a presentation group / cluster. New presentations join the older ones and thus enlarge and enrich the existing clusters. Each new presentation somehow disturbs the preceding arrangement. It thus works as an affect; (Volkman, “Grundriß der Psychologie”)³.

Thesis 4: The notion of aesthetic pleasure is the result of the analysis of this affect. Affects differ accordingly to the “intelligences”. By “intelligences” Brod

³ I quote: «Die „neue Apperzeption“ oder „Wahrnehmung plus innerliche Verarbeitung des neuen Eindrucks“, wie ich sie im Anschluß an Herbart und Wundt definierte, stelle das Wesen der Schönheit dar».

means “subjects”, so I will stick to the latter non-ambiguous notion. Pleasure is thus subject – relative.

Thesis 5: Everyone has her own level of novelty she can cope with. There exist “unmoved brains” (again, I will stick to “subjects”) for which new affects that differ from what they know will cause a displeasure [*Unlust*]. They would rather prefer that the new presentations resembled the old ones. Some subjects, on the other hand, dislike when all the presentations are similar and crave for some diversification. Only new and unique presentations give them pleasure [*Lust*].

As a consequence of Thesis 5 Brod introduces the notion of aesthetic zone, which is an individual scope of what we can accept as pleasant and not any objective range. It begins with the lowest level of novelty that can give us pleasure and ends with the highest pleasant point.

Hence **Thesis 6:** Beautiful is the presentation which has such a level of novelty that can be perceived by a specific person as a pleasant affect. Thus: this new presentation has to enter the aesthetic zone painlessly. And such a painless affect is aesthetic pleasure.

At this point it seems as if Brod was rather explaining beauty via pleasure, not novelty.

Thesis 7: Beauty is relative. In practice this shall mean that something should be new, but not too new. A lot depends on what Brod calls *Vorliebe*, which literally means our “earlier love”, something we have loved before. He introduces the term “apperzipierender Complex” which is difficult to translate. It is the amount of presentations we have accumulated. The scope of aesthetic zone is of importance by defining what is beautiful for us.

It all looks like it is possible to practice and regulate our zone via – for instance – training oneself in understanding Dadaism. Brod gives us some examples of how individual preferences can differ depending on the aesthetic

zone and “appercepiender Complex”. They are taken from the realm of music. This reminds me of Kafka’s “America ...”, where the main protagonist Karl Rossmann hears an operetta tune performed by one of his American companions. He knows it from his homeland, only this version is slightly different, it is a variation one would say. He likes it, even more than the version he knew back home. If we apply Brod’s theoretical apparatus to it, it means that something is new, but not too new and thus it is likable. In fact, Karl finds it beautiful. His experience is refreshing: it strikes a familiar note and at the same time gives him a taste of the unknown and therefore thrilling (like America itself, where Rossmann goes through some exciting events like riding with a glass elevator overlooking another elevator carrying his new piano; taking a shower instead of a bath which inspires him to draw some interesting and amusing conclusions about the superiority of American civilization over Central Europe). Kafka thus provides (involuntarily? subconsciously?) a perfect illustration of Brod’s aesthetic theory in the form of a musical variation. Here, I wish to propose a working title for Brod’s project: a variation theory.

Thesis 8: If a presentation is too new it will be treated as an enemy and there is a chance that the existing cluster will try to force it out. If we endure this initial hardship however, this new presentation will probably locate itself on the upper rim of the aesthetic zone. At first, this is hard work [*saure Arbeit*]. Then it goes deeper and deeper into the heart of this zone. And a work of art (or any presentation for that matter⁴) that has relatively little newness will aim at the zone’s center at once. And the greatest pleasure is possible in the center (where else?). Hence: the growing contentment. And this is how we fall in love with a work of art – Brod says. As time goes by, however, we can grow cold towards this object. We get bored and what used to be fiercely loved and praised seems now utmost mediocre. Brod says something a little bit cryptic here, namely that we instinctively shield ourselves [*Man hütet sich instinktiv...*] from the complete apperception of an object. He wants to say

⁴ Brod isn’t very meticulous in moving from one to another. I am not sure if his theory is that of a work of art or maybe presentations that present themselves to us. Maybe at this point I should agree with him that it is not a theory *sensu stricto*. It’s a good draft though.

that it is good to leave something unabsorbed and be able to come back later, and start the apperception all over again. Somehow, we get the impression that Brod tells us not to fall head over heels for a picture but rather to approach it in baby steps. Beauty takes time. Like all good things.

Thesis 9: Immortality of the great works of art boils down to a series of deaths and resurrections. You can get full of something, but then you can (and should) get hungry again. The point is for the thing to become new again, hence: Thesis 10.

Thesis 10: the only positive criterion of beauty in Brod's theory is the relative newness.

Thesis 11: there exists however a negative criterion as well. Beauty never falls into the scope of will, it is independent from our personal interests and ... from what is pleasant and unpleasant (besides the affect accompanying the apperception, of course ...).

Back to Kafka. His reply to Brod was not published during his lifetime. What is funny about this particular text is that it concerned Brod and at the same time was hidden from him. Brod recalls that he encountered this manuscript while going through some old stuff many years later. It was an attempt to critically reply to two papers by Brod from 17th and 24th of February 1906 called "Zur Ästhetik". It is hard to say whether it is a draft of a paper / book or maybe a letter to a friend and Brod himself is not sure, though he would rather go for the first option if I understand him right. Brod, again, makes this curious reservation [*The lady doth protest too much, methinks ...*] that his paper was not supposed to be a dissertation. Moreover, he distances himself from his juvenile opinions. He stresses that he was very young when he defined beauty via novelty. By "young" we should understand "immature", I guess.

In his introduction to Kafka's reply Brod makes a rather specious attempt to undermine the alleged Brentanism of his friend again. He claims that Kafka could not have been a Brentanist, since he was inspired by Arthur Schopenhauer, the latter supposedly being a figure despised by the Prague circle of Brentanists. First of all, Brod was very much indebted to Schopenhauer, so maybe he wanted to see this inspiration in his friend's paper as well. Secondly, arguments of this sort seem superficial and we should rather search for some factual evidence which I will do below. Thirdly, I assume that Kafka would not have been worried even if he had contradicting inspirations.

Kafka's first concern about Brod's project is the following: (a) It is not a new presentation that arouses aesthetic pleasure, but every presentation that does not fall into the realm of will (Brod stresses that this vocabulary is Schopenhauer-inspired). Kafka goes on that not every presentation is aesthetically judged. The question arises: which are? Solving this would also be a medicine for Brod's lack of precision as to whether what we aesthetically judge are presentations or works of art, which are different categories that only sometimes overlap; (b) The term "apperception" – Kafka says – requires clarification. Also, "aesthetic pleasure" resulting from it should be discerned from other pleasures. Its *Eigenart* has to be found. Why is this pleasure different from the one resulting from new scientific discovery or news from foreign countries? (c) The fatigue which Brod describes is not a fact of purely aesthetic nature, but a much broader, fully physiological phenomenon. Moreover, apperception is not a thing, but a movement and like other movements it requires fulfilment. I find (c) particularly Brentanian. What Kafka has in mind here is intentionality (apperception is not a thing, but a mental movement, an act of thought) and actualization as its accomplishment. Therefore, I believe that everyone who claims that Kafka was not into philosophy, must have extra-philosophical reasons and a hidden agenda. (d) What is (if at all) a difference between people of art and people of science? (e) Apperception does not seem to stem from the realm of aesthetics.

In my opinion, (e) looks like a continuation of (b) and (c). Unfortunately, the manuscript ends here. I will leave (d) out, because it does not bring anything crucial to the discussion. All these remarks aren't very strong. Brod could have used them of course for the benefit of his theory, had he known them at that time, but they would have neither destroyed nor saved it. What it required were some thorough-going studies in aesthetics (I will come back to this).

Before I move to Kafka's prose, let me devote some time to intentionality:

Intentionality is the power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties and states of affairs. The puzzles of intentionality lie at the interface between the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language. The word itself, which is of medieval Scholastic origin, was rehabilitated by the philosopher Franz Brentano towards the end of the nineteenth century. 'Intentionality' is a philosopher's word. It derives from the Latin word *intentio*, which in turn derives from the verb *intendere*, which means being directed towards some goal or thing.⁵

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and **what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, relation to a content, direction toward an object** (which is not to be understood here as a reality), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.⁶

When Kafka defines apperception as a movement he shows that he is inspired by Brentano, even if subconsciously. Brentano's thought was the most influential philosophical current of that time, after all. Kafka's idea covers two crucial factors of intentionality, namely directedness [*Richtung*] and content [*Inhalt*]. Stach calls it the only paper by Kafka in which he explicitly (I am not sure about this explicitness, though) engages in Brentanian discourse. In the winter semester of 1904/1905 Kafka went to Anton Marty's lecture "Geschichte der neueren Philosophie" and at that time his interests and taste were way different from the later purism of his prose, as Stach puts it. And this shall explain why he had a *Neigung* towards such type of

⁵ P. Jacob, "Intentionality", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/intentionality/>.

⁶ F. Brentano, "Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint", p. 68. Emphasis – S.K. This is the famous "intentionality quote" (without the word "intentionality" used even once) from "Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint".

philosophy which he later found repulsive, non interesting and devoid of something truly moving (he loved Friedrich Nietzsche and Meister Eckhart). Nevertheless, he wasn't in his element even then, what Stach also stresses. Brentano's phenomenology was the most important current of Austrian philosophy back then (owing to Christian von Ehrenfels and Anton Marty who established the Prague Brentanism and kept it going) and although both Brod and Kafka had mixed feelings about it, they went to the meetings organised by Berta Fanta and Ida Freund, first at Fanta's home (from 1902), then in Café Louvre (from 1904). Brod fell out of this circle after he had published (in 1905) two caricatures of Brentanists in the very same *Die Gegenwart* in which he published his aesthetic project. And Kafka followed his friend. The papers were called "Warum singt der Vogel?" (Why does a bird sing?) and "Zwillinspaar of Seelen" (Twin Souls). The first one was supposed to depict the sterile discussions at Marty's home, which Brod attended (and Kafka did not) where everybody wanted to flatter Marty and no one aimed at finding the truth. In the "Twin Souls" novella there was an adherent of Brentanism and his name was *Flachkopf* [Flat Head]. This was enough for Emil Utitz and Hugo Bergmann to ask Brod to leave the circle. I am telling this story in such a detail, because I find it possible that Brod was in fact driven by *ressentiment* towards the Brentanists when he claimed that Kafka had nothing in common with them.

Coming back to Kafka's unpublished reply to Brod. Stach claims, and I expressed the same intuition above, that Kafka's charges weren't particularly convincing. He is even a bit malicious when he says that Kafka would have known what apperception was, had he started his education in Munich. Indeed, Kafka had a plan to study in Munich, but he backed out in the end. And Munich was where Theodor Lipps resided (among others, as Munich was THE city to be at that time. Thomas Mann loved it and called it a "glowing city"). In 1883 Lipps defined apperception in a way that really resembles Brentano's evidence of inner perception⁷. Surprisingly, Stach agrees with Brod that the trials to find Brentanian threads in Kafka's literary work are

⁷ I quote Lipps after Stach: «Die ästhetische Apperception ist eine vollkommen sichere, wenn ich das Bewusstsein habe, ein Inhalt sei an einer Stelle ästhetisch absolut notwendig».

vain. I am of the same mind that this is not an explicit manifesto of Brentanism, but I believe to have shown in paper “Franz Kafka’s Story *The Metamorphosis* in Light of the Theory of Intentional Object in Franz Brentano & Anton Marty” that such threads exist. I will repeat and supplement this in the next section.

3. The new and the horrible

It is high time we moved to his prose and see what his attitude towards novelty is and what novelty does to his protagonists. Let us take a closer look at “The Metamorphosis” where “new” is usually ugly and terrifying, and does locate itself neither in the center of our aesthetic zone nor on its rim, but way beyond it. It itches, it hurts, it cannot become boring as it simply is too painful. The emotional response to it is strong.

“The Metamorphosis” is a story of Gregor Samsa, an ordinary hard working man, who wakes up one morning to see himself transformed into a giant beetle. And this is not a metaphor of a bad day or a hangover. He **is** the beetle. Everything about his body is new. Is this still his body or is this a totally new one? Let me quote the opening lines of the story:

As Gregor Samsa awoke from unsettling dreams one morning, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. He lay on his hard armorlike back and when he raised his head a little he saw his vaulted brown belly divided into sections by stiff arches from whose height the coverlet had already slipped and was about to slide off completely. His many legs, which were pathetically thin compared to the rest of his bulk, flickered helplessly before his eyes.⁸

This fragment requires to be read a couple of times at least in order to barely start imagining Gregor’s new looks and his new condition. No wonder, Gregor thinks it is a dream. But soon he realizes he is fully awake and he is terrified. Not only because he has changed entirely, but also because he will disappoint his family for whom he is the sole bread-winner. And how does the family react? First of all, they are frightened and disgusted. They have never seen anything like this before and they are confused. Of course, they have seen a beetle. Who hasn’t? But seeing such a huge beetle and moreover identifying

⁸ F. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. D. Freed, Barnes & Noble Classics, New York 1996, p. 7.

it with their son must be a lot to come to terms with before breakfast (life-changing scenario in Kafka usually begins before breakfast). This *Vorstellung* is completely new. It is thus beyond what they can painlessly acquire in terms of Brod's aesthetic model. It causes them *Unlust* and this emotional reaction is correct. Speaking of correct: can a hateful reaction be right? What is important here is that Gregor is not only despised by his family, but he is finally sentenced to death. Can this be justified? It seems though, that a hateful reaction can be appropriate, especially according to Franz Brentano's model of ethics, which I believe Kafka followed (even if subconsciously). I will now make use of what I said in my paper on Brentano, Kafka and Marty (2015) and in my conference talk "Intentionality of emotions in Franz Brentano. The influence of Aristotle and structural similarities between Aristotle's and Brentano's ethics" (Aristotle in Phenomenology, Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne, 23 April 2016), and supplement it with my current deliberations on Brod's theory of presentations.

Presentations are the necessary condition of every cognition for Brod, Kafka and Brentano. Actually, it all started with Aristotle whose devoted student Brentano believed he was. For both Aristotle and Brentano, presentations and judgments are the source of moral knowledge and this fact shapes the way we set our moral goals and pursue them. There are structural similarities between Aristotle and Brentano in the field of intentionality and especially the intentionality of emotions and thus in ethics or morality. I will concentrate on the evidence of judgments and thus – emotions, which leads to "inheritance" of the latter. I will give an account of Brentano's theory of evidence and what Arkadiusz Chrudzimski (2009) calls "evidence*", as well as what Kevin Mulligan (2006) describes as "inheritance".

In 1874 he (Brentano – S.K.) thought not only that whenever a psychological phenomenon occurs a judging and so a presenting occurs, but also that an emotion must occur.⁹

Vorstellung is the ground of cognition and the whole mental life. "After" the impression, an existential judgment [*Urteil*] appears which either accepts the

⁹ K. Mulligan, "Brentano on the mind", in D. Jacquette (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Brentano*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 72.

object of impression as existent or rejects it as non-existent. In some cases, this judgment appears with evidence. The emotional correlate of positive or negative judgment will be a positive or negative emotion: love or hate. Brentano did agree with Hume that there was nothing in the world that would determine our emotions – and thus emotion is this ultimate “something” that determines our moral judgments. Contrary to Hume Brentano did not arrive at sceptical or relativist conclusions. He believed instead, that moral judgments should be objective. Judgments and emotions are built upon presentations and so to say take over their objects, they neither add nor produce new intentional objects. A positive emotion accepts an object as a good, pleasant or nice one, whereas negative emotion rejects it emotionally as ugly, bad or unpleasant. An object is valuable if and only if it is a possible aim of a correct love. There exists an emotional equivalent of veridical evidence. Chrudzimski calls it “evidence*”.

Looking at Gregor *die Familie Samsa* does not see their relative but an enormous vermin with vaulted brown belly and many thin legs. This is their *Vorstellung*. Anton Marty, Brentano’s student and Kafka’s teacher, claimed that we instinctively believe that what we perceive exists, exactly like children do¹⁰. It requires special cognitive activities to question the intuitive acceptance: «Rather sensing is an act which contains two mutually inseparable parts, the intuition of the physical phenomenon and assertoric acceptance thereof». Let me also quote Chrudzimski:

The mental acts from which the concepts of existence and non-existence are distilled are acceptances and rejections which are evident, and as such, as Brentano puts this, are “intrinsically characterized as right”. According to Brentano “to exist” thus means roughly “to be an object of a possible right acceptance” and “not to exist” means correlatively “to be an object of a possible right rejection” (...). Marty also accepts this analysis (...).¹¹

¹⁰ This is taken from Mulligan, “Brentano on the mind”, cit.: from an 1895 lecture by Marty quoted by Kraus, “Towards a Phenomenology of Time Consciousness,” in McAlister, *Philosophy of Brentano*, pp. 234–5.

¹¹ A. Chrudzimski, “Brentano, Marty, and Meinong on Emotions and Values”, in B. Centi & W. Huemer (eds.), *Values and Ontology: problems and perspectives*, Ontos-Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 2009, p. 15.

Thus the parents are correct in judging (evident judgment) that they see a worm and everybody hates worms (and is right to do so). When an emotion occurs in relation to the former presentation and judgment, it must be a negative one. Let me stress here that I do not mean to claim that hatred itself is correct in this Brentanian model, but – since emotions occur as a consequence of presentations and judgments – their emotional correctness is “forced” by the correctness of the judgment. This means that it is right that the new Gregor causes *Unlust*, to use Brod’s vocabulary, and is worth hating. Loving the worm would be strange and incorrect.

When I was writing my first paper on Kafka and philosophical issues in “The Metamorphosis”, I was wondering whether the whole story wasn’t an implicit way of showing how perverse this theory of correct emotions may seem. Unfortunately, I did not manage to elaborate on this in that paper. What I was thinking while reading and re-reading “The Metamorphosis” was what probably most of us would think: why don’t they love him in spite of his looks? They must know that there is the real Gregor underneath! They should practice to expand their aesthetic zone, they should familiarize with the novelty. They should show some compassion. According to Brod, there’s no objective beauty – so what stops them from loving their son and brother? Well, in my opinion, they were a rather unpleasant bunch of people, but this is a whole different story. Coming back to the pros and cons of the “inheritance theory” – both Aristotle and Brentano believed that this three-partite structure: presentation, judgment, feeling is enough to yield the right emotion because the presentation and judgment guarantee this. In my opinion however this theory does not cover some non-standard cases like when your son turns into a worm One could try to solve the problem by saying that the existential judgment about Gregor being a worm was not an evident one, but a blind one (Brentano distinguishes such a category). But I believe that the whole point of “The Metamorphosis” is for this judgment to be evident. At first, Gregor’s sister Grete seems to expand her aesthetic zone and act against her presentation and judgment, and we are impressed by her demeanor. Unfortunately, she “corrects” her behavior quickly and follows in the parents’ hateful footsteps.

4. *De gustibus non est disputandum, but one can laugh about it*

I am sure that Kafka must have liked the fact that according to Brod there was no objective beauty. But there was surely one more aspect of novelty in his literary work. Something “too new” was also comical. And this aspect is sometimes visible in “The Metamorphosis”. Gregor, who is a scary creature for everybody, seems almost funny to himself. Kafka uses irony skilfully when he creates his caricature. One particularly amusing bit is when Gregor decides he needs a change in his life and ... starts hanging from the ceiling.

He especially liked hanging from the ceiling; it was entirely different from lying on the floor, he could breathe more freely and a mild tingling ran through his body, and in the near joyful oblivion in which Gregor found himself up there he could, to his own surprise, loose hold and plunge to the floor.¹²

The comedy and irony in Kafka are a highly interesting matter, as he is usually depicted as dark and sad only. Nowadays, there finally appear books claiming that there is in fact a comical side to Kafka, e.g. “Kafkas komische Seiten” by Astride Dehre and Achim Engstler. Despite being depressed Kafka was told to be a very witty person. There is no contradiction between being depressed and being auto-ironical towards the illness. “The Metamorphosis” can be read as a metaphor of being depressed and trying to cope with the surrounding world (among other possible readings). Anyway, Kafka can look at Gregor from a perspective and this is the necessary condition for comedy. When we observe Gregor from a safe distance, what do we see? We see a giant bug analyzing its numerous legs. Isn’t that funny? Of course, it is. Or when Gregor desperately tries to get in touch with his family and the father hits him with an apple. This scene is also, or first of all, one of the most tragic and symbolic parts of “The Metamorphosis”. From the inside it all looks terrible, from the outside – there is an amusing aspect to it. This is why this reminds me of black and white silent films with Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy (one could play Gregor and another the Big Bug – why not?) or Charlie Chaplin.

¹² F. Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, cit., p. 29.

Especially Chaplin's films incorporate both: sadness and laughter into one artistic piece. And we must bear in mind that – as Klaus Wagenbach stresses – Kafka loved going to the movies when he was a little boy. He loved the moving pictures. He would watch them incessantly, exactly how he would write in the future. We can wonder what he had seen in the movies and what further inspired him. No doubt, *Vorstellung* was the starting point of his thinking and writing. But I wish to stress once again that I do not agree with Brod that pictures were everything and Kafka simply was thinking in pictures. I gave some reasons for this above and some more can be found below.

For now, let me concentrate on one particular picture – that of a beetle. Why did Kafka choose a worm to be an illustration of Gregor's metamorphosis? Why didn't he choose a dog or a hedgehog? It will be no surprise if I say that most of Kafka's problems and obsessions originated with his father. As Reiner Stach writes (p. 211) the father would often call people names. These names were mostly animal-epithets. From the very beginning Franz associated being an animal with being nobody, or even nothing. Back in the day the concept of animal rights did not exist. No one cared about their well-being or their suffering for that matter. They were considered mute, as they did not speak in human tongue. Max Brod, in Kafka's biography, recalls an amusing story: after Kafka had become a vegetarian, they were admiring an aquarium and Franz suddenly engaged in a conversation with some ... fishes and he is said to be very happy to be able to speak to them at last. He did not do it when he was still a carnivore because it made him feel a hypocrite. Stach continues: animals feel no shame and this is how they remind people of the side of our nature we'd rather neglect. But let me just notice that Gregor did feel ashamed. Stach stresses that insects are one of the worst names you can use to offend someone. I believe this explains why Kafka chose a beetle and not a pig or a giraffe. He wanted the maximum humiliation and insignificance for his protagonist. What is interesting but – to be honest – not very surprising, is that in his letters to his first fiancée, Felice Bauer from Berlin, Kafka was spinning visions of being locked up in a dungeon where he would perpetually write and his food would be delivered at the door.

He also described himself as an animal lying on the floor or licking Felice's hand. He explicitly doubted his humanity. I think that it is a common thread in all Kafka's works, that one's humanity has to be recognized by an outer tribunal (parents, officers, the law) before it is accepted by the protagonist. Coming back to Reiner Stach. He tells an anecdote how Kafka spent a whole weekend in bed, locked up in his bedroom in his parents' flat (where else?) after Felice had abandoned him (scil. he did not get any letter from her in 48 hours) and after a rather minor quarrel with Max Brod. He "was hiding" from the family. And the family? They were used to living a normal life with Franz / Gregor in his room. Stach emphasizes that the vision of the beetle was not a *deus ex machina* case, but rather that it was hatching in Kafka's troubled mind from the early childhood. Stach uses the words "ein Gedankenspiel / ein Scherz" (a game of thoughts or a joke) to describe how Kafka was toying with this idea. Finally, a metaphor of an animal (= nothingness) became a central metaphor of his life. Let me come up with a couple of examples then. When K. tries to reach the castle (in "The Castle") he feels he is literally nothing. The other illustration I thought of is even more powerful for me. Namely, when Franz was a little boy he was accompanied on his way to school by a cook who would call him "Ravachol" (a beast) for no particular reason. Kafka had internalized this name before he could even understand it in the same way like he accepted that the cook wasn't nice to him. And, please notice, that in "The Metamorphosis" it is the charwoman who gets rid of Gregor's mortal remains (animal corpse).

All this sounds really terrifying and I agree with Stach when he calls "The Metamorphosis" a horror story and enumerates Kafka's horror inspirations (E. T. A. Hoffmann, E. A. Poe, G. Meyrink, A. Kubin) to make his claim stronger. When a human-sized beetle appears the shock can hardly be intensified – no doubt about this. Let me just remind here that according to Brod's theory this would be the kind of novelty that is way beyond our aesthetic zone, that is too new to be painlessly accepted. Thus I wish to reinforce my claim that what was too new, was also funny for Kafka. Many horror movies are at the same time hilarious and their authors skilfully play this convention.

Stach compares the relationship between Gregor Samsa and his younger sister Grete to “Beauty and the Beast”. I am sure he means the early days of their relationship when Grete was still friendly towards her brother (displaying the obviously incorrect emotional reaction). He also mentions “Hunchback of Notre Dame” and “Phantom of the Opera”. I would rather stick to the abovementioned photographs of Diane Arbus as an illustration of Gregor’s fate. This is of course “time-travelling” as Diane Arbus was a one-year-old when Kafka died. Nevertheless, her pictures are as Kafkaesque as it gets. Especially “A Jewish Giant at Home with His Parents in The Bronx”, N.Y. 1970 (see below). Just look at their faces! The parents seem both terrified and confused and their son is embarrassed and although he is twice bigger than they are – he seems to be afraid of them. The story behind the picture is Kafkaesque as well. Eddie Carmel, the “Gregor”, suffered from gigantism and acromegaly that resulted from a pituitary adenoma. Medical jargon aside, he was 268 cm tall and slowly dying. Due to his condition he worked as an entertainer in carnival sideshows. He died at the age of 36, just two years after this picture had been taken.



Diane Arbus boldly trespassed the aesthetic zone defined by Brod, although I do not think she read his paper. But before she became the Diane Arbus we know, she had been a model mother and wife, as well as half of family

photographic business “Diane & Allan Arbus”. The married couple contributed to Glamour, Vogue, Harper’s Bazaar, Seventeen, to mention just a few journal titles that can easily be located in the center of Max Brod’s aesthetic zone (it hasn’t changed much today). She had to become a metaphorical beetle herself to find her own way and means of expression for which she is now appraised. Before this recognition came however, she had been rejected as strange and incomprehensible. At some point of her life Arbus left the family business and became a freelance photographer. She did not want to photograph impeccable models and housewives any more. Her subject became “Gregors” of all kind, if I may say so. Many were shocked with her decision and the subsequent metamorphosis. She started taking eerie portraits of New Yorkers that wouldn’t have been photographed by anybody else back in the day and surely wouldn’t have been on the cover of Glamour. Those people were not “pretty” or “normal”. They were “weird”, “different”, “excluded”, like Eddie Carmel. Finally, Arbus’s documentary photography found its way to the center of the generation’s aesthetic zone. Ironically, it happened after her suicidal death in 1971. Nowadays she is both a star and authority in photography, mentioned alongside artists like Richard Avedon, Marvin Israel or Weegee. She is one of the most influential photographers of the XXth century just as Kafka is one of its most influential writers. And neither of them did live to their fame. (She is also said to be a wonderful writer and Kafka loved pictures! Coincidence?).

What was first ugly has become nice. People got used to it, especially because besides the quality of her work, Arbus’s pictures had a huge ethical load and were an incentive to the equal rights discourse, although Arbus is said to have been driven by fascination rather than compassion.

There is a biographical (fictional) film about Diane Arbus by Steven Shainberg called “Fur: an imaginary portrait of Diane Arbus” starring Nicole Kidman (Arbus) and Robert Downey Jr. (Lionel – a fictional a character with hypertrichosis a.k.a. werewolf syndrome, a disease that causes excessive body hair). Diane and Lionel become friends and he is her inspiration to take a trip to the other world she does not know (yet). Lionel and his companions are a huge shock for everyone: Diane’s husband, parents and friends. Everyone,

besides her daughters. Kids do not have prejudices. Their aesthetic zone is so flexible that it would even fit in Gregor Samsa and Eddie Carmel. Unfortunately, there are no kids in “The Metamorphosis” and it is a kid that usually says that the king is naked or, in this case, that the worm is Gregor.

5. Best Friends Forever

In this final section I want to cover the relationship between Kafka and Brod. It is of course quite a mouthful to undertake the endeavor to “cover” this topic in detail. I will thus concentrate on what is useful to understand all the issues I considered above.

Max Brod was an optimist, whereas Kafka didn’t live his life to the fullest. He would-force himself to live from time to time in order to convert it into literature. He had many fears and phobias, and was really bad at making any decisions concerning his private life. Kafka would always hesitate, where Brod would act. And this is thanks to this feature of his character that we can read Kafka now. Kafka made Brod the executor of his will which was a rather short document that said: burn it all. Brod didn’t listen. Although some believe that Kafka was probably well aware that Brod wouldn’t listen. Brod is often criticized as an editor of Kafka for being “distanzlos” (W. Benjamin), for “not leaving the reader alone with Kafka” (L. Hardt) and more. But should we really be criticizing him for this? He managed to publish all Kafka’s novels: “The Trial”, “The Castle” and “America ...”. We should rather be grateful for that. I do not want to go deeper into this discussion. Reiner Stach describes it in detail in his three-volume biography of Kafka. One should also read Brod’s “Franz Kafka, a Biography” (1937) to form an opinion about this.

Instead, I want to concentrate on one particular story from Brod’s childhood. It can be found in Stach’s book as well. Brod was a rather weak child and – as Stach says – one of the Darwinist professors who examined him claimed that he lacked the so called *Lebensfähigkeit*. When Brod was 6-7 years old he had to wear a medical corset due to some severe problems with his spine. My first association [*Vorstellung!*] was that of a worm. Max was a Gregor. Although it can really be a trauma for such a young boy, it didn’t break little Max. On the contrary, it made him stronger and helped him build

his identity as an extraordinary person. Arbus would have loved to take a picture of him. Brod, who suffered this muc

h as a child had a very positive attitude towards his body, looks and sexuality when he grew up – all the things Kafka lacked. Kafka's attitude towards his own physicality was that of a revulsion, although he wasn't in any way disfigured. And his tuberculosis had an existential dimension for him. It became his hideout from the world, his excuse not to get married, his pretext not to get involved into anything besides writing. Brod got a lot of compassion and love from his parents during his illness and beyond, the things that Kafka was always jealous of. Maybe Gregor Samsa would have recovered from his beetle-hood if his parents had loved him? Or maybe, if that hadn't been the case, he would have revolted against them if only he had had some inner strength like Diane Arbus (good girl gone bad)? Why did he die so willingly? Why didn't Josef K. (in "The Trial") go through the door that was awaiting him?

Instead of writing alternative endings here I wish to concentrate on the word "moving" that accompanies "pictures" in my paper's title. "Moving pictures" is of course another name for "cinema" where Kafka loved to spend time. Moving pictures are also the pictures we perceive in real life or imagine, all of them being played before our mind's eye and – according to Kafka – all of them being equally important and credible (a truly Brentanian intuition of inner perception). But I also wished to express another intuition here, namely that the presentations can be moving in an emotional way, they can be beautiful, ugly, touching, repulsive, unforgettable and truly life changing. This is why they have the capacity to shape our moral goals and influence our actions. It all starts with the picture. And the protagonists of my paper: Brod, Brentano, Kafka and Arbus would subscribe to this Aristotelian point of view.

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