ПИРОН Πυρρων | АКАДЕМИЧНО ЕЛЕКТРОННО СПИСАНИЕ ЗА КУЛТУРА И ИЗКУСТВА

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Interning UnGregor

(short version)

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As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed – into what, actually? What exactly is he transformed into? Indeed, the German text says "er hat sich zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt", and thus seems to identify and categorize the hideous creature – at that, in a typical Kafkaesque – cool and detached – manner. But this coolness is abruptly disrupted by an emotional verbal geyser hidden in this very phrase, *ungeheueren Ungeziefer*. The strange German noun *Ungeziefer* carries little semantic information but an awful lot of performative energy. Combined with the adjective *ungeheuer*, it conveys dismay and outrage – it is much more a gesture of disgust, a vituperative exclamation than a calm categorization. Explicating its meaning, I would risk suggesting the following loose translation: "As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into… OH, WHAT A MONSTROUS, NASTY, CREEPY-CRAWLY BUG!" Kafka, however, does not employ exclamatory tricks and emphases; his narrative remains calm.

Ungeziefer is defined in the dictionaries as "vermin" or "pests", but it is a vague term connoting harmfulness and nastiness rather than denoting a specific animal: the word (which, by the way, appears twice in the Father's discourse in Kafka's famous *Letter to his Father*) denotes harmful insects, parasites, pests (particularly bedbugs, fleas, lice, and other nasty creepy-crawlies, insects, but also mice, rats, and other harmful rodents). As *singulare tantum* it mixes singularity and plurality, suggesting a loathsome lack of clear form: it seems to refer to an indivisible, indefinable mass of nasty, harmful, unbearably loathsome creatures that are so disgusting that they simply beg to be exterminated.

The novella's narrative strategy is such that the reader is kept guessing exactly what creature Gregor Samsa has been transformed into almost until the very last page. There are quite a few clues that he has turned into an insect; furthermore, the word *Ungeziefer* is paronymous with the German word *Käfer*, beetle. But the unemotional term *Insekt*, which would have introduced categorical clarity, never appears in the text. Neutral concepts cannot denote something that is truly unbearable, outrageously problematic to be looked at and endured. In the second part, too, the narrative does not resort to specific terms; it continues to employ various word-gestures when referring to the wretched Gregor – *Untier* (monster), or *seine Schreckgestalt* (which can be translated as "his terrifying figure" but also as "figure of terror"); the whole situation around Gregor is described by the emotional hyperbole *ewige Quälerei*, endless agony.

It is not just in the linguistic world but also in the human world that Gregor's metamorphosis causes unbearable outrage. The behaviour of the characters, their shock and

terror at this *ungeheueres Untier*, supports the linguistic policies of the novella even though between the reactions of the different groups of characters there are important differences and a complex hierarchy (I will discuss this later in this paper).

Here I can finally formulate my thesis. The profound philosophical and social theme explored in the novella is, in a certain sense, archetypal; in another sense, it is modern and even anticipates things that will happen in real life after Kafka's death. To put it in a nutshell, the novella discusses what happens with monsters in the world of humans.

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The monstrous is one of the figures of thought that speaks of what is admissible in the human world – that is, what could have access inside, on this side of the boundary of the thinkable, the imaginable and the bearable. As an abstract classifying category, it encompasses all sorts of extreme beings and creatures whose sole purpose seems to be to constantly invade and cross this line, to interfere into the life of humans in a destructive and unbearable way: from dragons and serpents, godzillas and dinosaurs, from vampires, zombies and demons to all sorts of obnoxious pests, merged into a single, odious mass – such as locusts, rodents, cockroaches, man-eating ants, spiders, venomous flies, worms, jellyfish, rats, viruses; etc., etc.

Here I certainly do not mean to ignore the enormous political, cultural and religious differences among the terrifying creatures – but I must point out that, as symbolic machines, the various monsters still have an abstract invariant function: they guard the boundaries of the human, activating the extreme, unbearable Phantasma: the Terrifying, the Shocking, the Formlessly-Chthonic, the Abominable, the Bestially-Vicious, the Abject, the Infectious, the Polluted, the Disgusting. As symbolic machines, they have to embody into unbearable images the constant endangerment of the human world; their invariant role is that of a constitutive phobia that guards the human world against the constant attacks: a condition for its possibility.

Here I will claim that, regardless of which nuance of the multiple meanings of the Monstrous is dominant, all others are potentially – but inevitably – present. They are inevitable attributes of the invariant symbolic role and therefore remain as lingering connotations: monsters are always ***simultaneously*** terrifying, revolting and shocking, always also outrageous, morally disgusting. They are, by their very principle, a provocation against the very capacity for imagination and representation. In short, they are ***unbearable***. And they

are more than that. In the ancient interpretations – from Pliny the Younger to the era of the Renaissance and after it, to the pamphlets and Protestant leaflets of the sixteenth century – they exist as signs of God's fury. Monsters are signs, they are messages and gestures of God's rejection of the depraved human world, and thus, they affect terror, but must be deciphered (the noun "monster" comes from "monstrare", which is the root of the verb "to demonstrate").

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My claim is that Kafka evokes those dark and ominous ancient contexts – not in an explicit way, of course. In his novella there are neither quotes nor even distant reminiscences of some clear teratological plots or concrete monstrous tales (with one exception – Beauty and the Beast); nevertheless, the unbearable form of Gregor Samsa is woven precisely within the above-mentioned web of associations, the aura of all possible monsters – the hideous, the disgusting, the formless, the agonizingly ugly and malodourous, the shocking and the terrifying. Like a *basso profundo*, those archetypal, invariant properties of the Monstrous constantly linger around the figure of the strange and disgusting protagonist, awakening unclear archetypal fears, anxieties and deep revulsions at creatures that endanger and outrage every human feeling.

But it is no accident that the novella is called *Die Verwandlung*. The metamorphosis affects not just the concrete Gregor; it also affects his ancient, archetypal aura of associations – and thereby also the cultural status of the Monstrous itself. Under the concrete Samsa-plot, one can read another one that explores the radically new place of monsters in the world of humans.

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But what is this special place that the novella assigns to monsters? In ancient myths monsters appropriately inhabit phobic topoi on the boundaries of the human world – dungeons, dens, caves, sinister hollows, the underworld – from which they come out in the light to sow terror. In Kafka's novella the monster inhabits a narrow room from which it is not allowed to come out. Dostoevsky is credited with suggesting that if hell exists, it may be a little empty room, like a bath house in the country, black and grimy, with spiders in every corner. But in his typical manner, Kafka adds to that dusty hell an ordinary petty-bourgeois hall, a living-room, several doors leading to other rooms, a kitchen, an apartment door, a

staircase, a window looking out at a hospital. He deprives the monstrous scene of all heroic breadth, but also of all demonic depth. The monster is confined to – or, we may say, isolated in – an unremarkable literary-realistic space. This is a little, a very little room of a travelling salesman; it is poor, modest and typical, but at the beginning of the story it is clean, furnished and tidy. With its miniature size, it looks like an isolator even at the beginning – in the course of the novella, this impression will be reinforced step by step. Other human beings still enter it only to bring food and clean up; it will be locked from the outside; the protagonist begins to be afraid of its walls. Furthermore, it is gradually emptied of furniture and of all Gregor's personal belongings – that is to say, of all signs of his life story and belonging to the human world. Gradually, the room stops being reminiscent of Raskolnikov's room; it does not even look like the gloomy abode of the underground man because it is increasingly turned into an ordinary cellar, a dusty storeroom. The hideous creature is locked up amidst useless objects and broken furniture, amidst filth and domestic waste, junk and leftovers of its own food and body fluids.

The very squalor of the place, the miserable "stage", equates the Monster to a shameful, nasty Bug hiding in dirty corners and holes, a common household pest very much alike to cockroaches, fleas and bedbugs. True, it is a much bigger bug; but it is still a monster only on a tiny scale, revolting and anemic – and it is doomed to die without having ever bitten anyone, without the big outside world ever learning of its threat.

Before this happens, however, the realistic look of Samsa's room will change, too, as the story progresses. Its space is increasingly intersected by unrealistic restrictions, invisible rules and prohibitions on movement, gradually turning into something like a system of micro-prisons, a family labyrinth, a trap that is increasingly dominated by a regulated claustrophobia. Slowly and irrevocably, the novella isolates and returns its Monster-Protagonist to his room: the plot consists of a series of scenes in which he is pushed, driven, chased, hounded, locked up back, punished. Although they are a parody (driving the protagonist back by brandishing a walking-stick, reminiscent of a duel; bombarding him with apples), those battles and punishments only demonstrate how helpless Gregor-the-monster really is, how vulnerable his hideous body is as it gradually degenerates and becomes paralyzed. Gregor is not Big and Terrifying;[1] but then, he is extremely Loathsome, Revoltingly-Unbearable and Disgustingly-Wretched, although even that disgusting and

[1] It is no accident that in the novella all archaic aspects of the monstrous related to aggression, physical strength, attack and devouring, are progressively diminished – the dragon-cockroach is bombarded with apples, driven away with a chair, wounded by splinters from a broken flask.

loathsome energy of his decreases in the course of the story. In the second part of the novella the place Gregor is allowed to occupy is gradually limited solely to the space under the sofa, even solely to that under the linen sheet; at the end, he is locked up forever.

Of course, in this type of space there is absolutely no transcendent axis of Above/Below, directions that could inscribe the dwelling of the Samsas into some religious architectonics of the Cosmos. But this also holds true for its inscription into some larger-scale social geography. At the beginning, admittedly, it appears to be part of a bigger human – professional, bureaucratic, commercial, educational – world. But as the story progresses, it turns out to be an ever more isolated island. The codes of hierophany, the divine signs and messages, are inherently absent from it; the typifying characteristics of the social gradually disappear, too. Gradually the room is transformed into an abstract and absurd minimalistic space, a self-sufficient claustrophobic and solitary confinement cell. At the end, even the living-room, the other rooms, the apartment door, the staircase, are unreachable; they are as if infinitely far away. By isolating the world he tells of, Kafka cuts off all ties and thereby blocks all traditional associations and connotations, all possible traditional interpretations – both the allegorical semantics of ancient and biblical monsters and the typifying representations of traditional realism. As well as every possible other explanation: Gregor's metamorphosis must remain unexplained and inexplicable.

In this manipulated space the size of the unbearably monstrous body has likewise not been chosen by accident – it is consistent with the scope of the absurd solitary confinement cell. As a household pest insect, the new Gregor looks truly enormous, *ungeheuer* – a giant beetle that is monstrously larger than all households pests and therefore a hundred times more loathsome. But measured on the scale of archetypal fears, his body is small, diminutive, proper for the miniature room. As the novella progresses, the disgustingly monstrous body as if shrinks, becoming ever more emaciated, demeaned and diminished as the plot unfolds; by the time it dies, it is small enough to fit into a dustpan. Under the various realistic motivations, the novella slowly but irrevocably reinforces a hypnotic feeling of weakness and helplessness – the reader feels that this wretched, disgusting creature is ever more vulnerable, wasting away in its room, and that it will never muster the strength to break the locks and leave its miniature, miserable hell; it will increasingly merge with the junk, the dust and the filth until, in the end, even the corpse of its terrifying body – that is, the pure figure of the Abject – will degenerate to the point of turning into garbage.

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The narrative strategy described up to this point may be defined as a multilayered litotes that de-heroizes and travesties the monstrous; as if it is "unmonstered". But litotes is not the sole device employed to transform the archaic semantics of the Terrifying. In addition, the novella employs another transforming semantic machine, the most powerful one. It is the play of human perspectives, the machinery of the different points of view and their dramatic relations. In a typical Kafkaesque manner, it opens or closes the sluice-gates leading to the inner world of the insect-protagonist, modeling – in dramatic and very different ways – the possibilities and impossibilities for compassion for it – compassion on the part of the characters, the narrator, the reader.

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Of all creatures in the culturally hierarchized, symbolic world of animals, insects – in particular, harmful insects – are those which are impossible to identify with. With rare exceptions, they are beyond the limits of empathy. There is almost no literature about them, no one fights for their rights, there are virtually no cultural taboos on killing them; indeed, the very idea of exploring the "inner world" of a bug may sound bizarre to most people.

But not to Kafka, of course. If his novella has a hidden main theme, it is that of Gregor's inner world and the secret of suffering. Actually, *The Metamorphosis* is a text about ultimate compassion, about empathy on and beyond the edge of human understanding and compassion for the suffering *Ungeziefer*. But it is also a text about ultimate coldness and alienation.

The young Gregor Samsa was an ordinary travelling salesman, he had a life and a family, he was a student and then served in the army – this is the typical literary "little man" with his own cares, thoughts, hopes, experiences, plans, similar to the characters of Gogol, Chekhov, and Dickens. But now he is a disgusting bug. And although this absurd metamorphosis will be irreversible, everyone – Gregor, his family, the reader – hopes in the beginning that things will return to normal, that Gregor will recover his small human nature. This agonizing oscillation between the unbearable obviousness of the hideous creature, the hopes and expectations for a normal future, and the fading memories of Gregor, is what drives the fatalistic plot of the novella that will disappoint every hope. Although, of course, not all

the characters react in the same way, and it is in this absurd multiplicity of human reactions to the Unbearable that the subtlety of the novella lies.

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Some of the characters do not remember or do not know Gregor's human past and that is why they are not too particularly shocked by his metamorphosis. But for his closest circle, his family members who knew, love and remember Gregor, the terrifying, unresolved duality is maintained for a long and torturing narrative time. Before they see him in his new form, Gregor's family used to worry even about such trivial matters as his having overslept and possibly missing the train. But the encounter with his new appearance causes a shock after which the signs of understanding and empathy begin to disappear quickly and irrevocably, in a process of hopeless decline. In this respect, the Father – who is the embodiment of the incomprehensible, sinister and primeval, guilt-invoking Law in all of Kafka's work – is the quickest: he never makes a serious attempt to understand the new, monstrous situation of the Son; he reacts solely according to the imperative of his authority. After the initial shock, he immediately identifies Gregor as an invader and, in righteous paternal and lawful anger, begins to persecute him mercilessly – to hit, drive away, strike him, and almost attempts to kill him. The other key character, the mother, is, so to speak, "given short shrift" by Kafka and turned into a figure with no plot functions. Upon each of her several encounters with her unbearable son, she simply faints, thus disappearing from the realm of human actions, mutuality, understanding and empathy: when you are unconscious because of compassion, you can no longer feel compassion for anyone. This narrative trick blocks a whole range of traditional associations related to maternal love – to the idea that mothers are all-forgiving and will accept even criminals, freaks and monsters if they are their own children. For her part, the sister is still almost a child – and, probably in a child-like way, does not feel such strong disgust and revulsion at spiders, flies, cockroaches and other insects. That is why she seems to be closer to Gregor maybe simply because she does not understand how serious the situation really is. At the beginning, her love for him is still alive – she thinks about what food is right for him, she cares about whether he has eaten, she cleans his room, etc. But even she who has to care for him and enter his room every day has bouts of insurmountable revulsion, she airs the room to get rid of the stench, she never gets accustomed to his unbearable appearance. As the story progresses, the sister makes fewer and fewer attempts to understand his strange behavioural gestures and messages, she communicates less and less with him and increasingly

attempts to tame him; in the end, her love seems to be over, she gives up on him in despair and abandons him to the care of the charwoman.

Thus, the understanding of the closest family members for the insect-man steadily and irreversibly declines. They less and less communicate with him, help him, keep him within the sphere of understandable creatures – in other words, they less and less support him in his effort to remain human. Actually, instead of pity for Gregor, they increasingly indulge in self-pity, as the father frankly admits, habitually saying: "What a life! So this is the peace of my old age!" In the end, the family break off all contact with the transformed Son and stop making attempts to understand the new Gregor.

But Gregor himself, the novella claims, understands everything and everybody all the time: on the hermeneutic plane, the Metamorphosis remains asymmetric. Even when he loses his speech and can only produce animal sounds and hisses, the unbearable Son does not stop hearing, comprehending and experiencing the meaning of human words; he keeps making sense of everything and mentally discussing what the others say, understanding their motives, suffering with them, loving, being compassionate, sometimes being angry and insulted: he even justifies their disgust and revulsion at him. The monstrous *Ungeziefer* suffers when they speak quietly and he cannot hear them. It turns out that he understands the people in the novella much more and in a much better, deeper, mutual and dramatic way than they understand him.

Step by step, the novella inverts the perspective – the non-human has remained much more capable of remembering, imagining and experiencing sympathy than the rest of the human world. The effect of this growing hermeneutic cleavage is intensified as the plot progresses, increasing the tragic irony to the extreme. In the end, the all-understanding Gregor is driven by his family's heartlessness to an excess of self-destructive mutuality – he hears all too well his sister's words: "If this [*Untier*] were Gregor, he would have understood long ago that it's not possible for human beings to live with a beast like that, and he would have left of his own free will." He understands quite clearly that this is a judgment, an *Urteil* – his beloved sister condemns him to be *Untier*, calling on him to leave the sphere of the human. At that, her strongest argument is that he *does not understand* – not just what people say but also the suffering of his family. After this unjust verdict, the one who understands has no choice but to do what is expected of him, demonstrating understanding. So after thinking back on his family with affection and love, says the novella, Gregor wishes to disappear. The monster makes the ultimate human gesture – it wishes its own death because it has understood that its death is wished by the beloved others who are not monsters.

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I will claim here, however, that in the novella there is a human instance that inherently, by definition, understands Gregor and remains with him until his death. Its understanding is – or is supposed to be – total. This is the omniscient narrator, a typical figure of nineteenth-century literary realism. As a pure narrative function, his task is to transpose the character's inner subjective monologue into a third-person objective narrative, or, in other words, to translate the subjective phenomenal life of a closed consciousness into an objective story that is understandable to everyone. And in Kafka's novella it seems as if this hidden narrator's voice does nothing other than narrate instead of Gregor, reaching into the darkest corners of his mind, understanding him and making the reader understand him, too. With this ability, the narrative voice seems to embody the perfect hermeneutic instance – it concentrates in itself the total understanding, almost to the point of understanding monsters, that is, to the point of coinciding with Gregor's inner life.

This seeming lack of distance, however, is an illusion of course, a traditional characteristic of realistic fictional narrative. Actually, the narrative function, the act of narration, in principle cannot coincide with the content of the narrative; the third-person narrator's voice always keeps a distance from the first-person inner monologue of consciousness; it always keeps its principled external position, Bakhtin's *vnenakhodimost'*. In *The Metamorphosis*, the distance of the narration from Gregor's inner world is delicate, but indestructible – it is simultaneously linguistic, intellectual, psychological and spatial; and the narrator offers many clues that his understanding and assessment of what is happening is different from Gregor's. This is done by means of various narrative techniques: by unemotional cold narration (when the characters scream, exclaim and curse), by narrative interventions laconically announcing the objective truth (such as "It was not a dream"), by catching the sense of Gregor's situation in a better, more dramatic and profound way than the protagonist himself understands it. The culmination of this external position of the narrative voice is, of course, in the continuing act of narration after the protagonist's death. Gregor is already dead and the endless human monologue hidden in the monster's closed mind and heart has stopped: there is nothing left to understand. But the narrative does not stop – and now it tells of things the dead Gregor could not possibly see or know; the dead protagonist is no longer of interest, those who are interesting are the living. The narrative voice seems to forget its beloved Gregor at the end of the novella – exactly as his sister did. This happens

gradually and imperceptibly. At the beginning, Gregor's inner monologue is followed instant-by-instant, detail-by-detail, thought-by-thought; the narrative perspective coincides with the continuous and sophisticated life of his hidden consciousness. At the end this is not so. Throughout the second part of the novella, the narrative pulls back from the protagonist like a movie camera, gradually zooming out and representing him in sketchy, not particularly detailed – large-scale, long and generalized – shots. The narrative statements and comments about the protagonist become quite laconic, moving towards broad generalizations that ignore the ceaseless continuous life of his mind. Its linguistic style imperceptibly changes, too, and some of the narrative generalizations sound already highly sententious: for example, "He thought back on his family with affection and love". And at the moment of his death, as if once again penetrating into his soul, the narrator describes Gregor as being in a "state of empty and peaceful reflection". Yet, this is a narration about thinking without thinking, inner life without content, sinking into peaceful nothingness and emptiness – a liminal non-human state that cannot be understood. Thus, in the end the very instance and paradigm of understanding, the narrative voice, takes the side of those who claim the protagonist has become impossible to understand. It abandons its protagonist – both literally and hermeneutically, it stops narrating about him and affecting understanding.

Abandoned by everyone, the memory of and pity for Gregor, the understanding of and empathy for him, are left to an even more distant and external, and thus, helpless final instance – the reader. This makes them optional, depending on the reader's capacity for empathy, even on his or her provisional mood. Furthermore, this isolates the modality of compassion from the fictional world, where the reader has no access to action. Still, the reader is offered the possibility of moving emotionally in an opposite direction – as the plot evolves, the reader may experience the absurdity of the Metamorphosis in an ever more profound and disturbing way, increasingly despairing at the hopelessness of Gregor's situation and his self-sacrifice; in the end the reader may weep in helpless pity for the paralyzed, emaciated, but enlightened and peaceful travelling salesman. This last instance of understanding and compassion could also remember and grieve for him after his death, even after his chitinous corpse has merged with the garbage.

To summarize, the second semantic machine is a play of perspectives whose stake is hermeneutic, that is, human. It is constructed as a contrapuntal structure from three narrative perspectives, which simultaneously function as mutually related, resonating and dramatically developing compositional lines. The first line is that of the characters who love and remember Gregor initially, but quickly lose their understanding and empathy. The second line is that of

the detached unemotional objective narrator who does not empathize with his protagonist but nevertheless understands him completely during most of the novella, keeping the human sense of his internal life. We have seen, however, that the narrator, too, is destined by the novella to imperceptibly distance himself from the protagonist, to abandon him – as life of the mind and as a theme. Against those two lines, the reader is left in dramatic solitude. And the responsibility for preserving the human in Gregor increasingly falls upon the reader's shoulders: the reader is invited to decide whether to abandon the monster-human or not, whether to remember and understand him or not. Those are questions which all of the rest of the human world of the novella has failed to cope with.

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Perhaps it is time for us to realize that the traditional close reading of novellas cannot be something self-sufficient? Radically conducted, it can suddenly lead to distant insights into key historical processes that preceded Kafka or continued for decades after his death. We discussed the semantic "machines" in the novella that transform the ancient motif of the monstrous and change its cultural status: but could they be historical, real machines?

If not Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*, then Foucault's *History of Madness* could remind us of this entirely real possibility. For example, it could remind us that isolation did not begin in the Samsa family but much longer ago – in 1656, when the Hôpital Général in Paris was founded by royal decree as a house of confinement and prison for all disgusting and disturbing semi-human creatures: the poor, the insane and vagabonds. According to Foucault, this date marks a new regime for all possible "monsters": Confinement. After 1656, they would no longer be expelled from the city and the civilized world by sword and fire; they would be subjected to internment, to forced confinement behind the walls of countless prisons, asylums, solitary confinement cells and isolators, combining care and punishment with attempts at their moral correction. They would be normalized, disciplined and tamed in isolation: thus, in Modernity monsters were locked up and became invisible, simply disappearing from the sight of the normal.

A few centuries later, this policy would reach its racist climax, supported by another – vast, bureaucratic, logistic and exterminating one. For those incorrigible and unbearable *Untiere*, for the worst parasites, degenerates, vermin and non-humans for which correction proved impossible in principle – for example, for the Gypsies, the homosexuals and the Jews – the Law of the Father merged with the Law of the Führer. And it would find a final,

scientific solution for all parasites, *Schmarotzer*, *Untermenschen*, *Untiere* – the Final Solution, *Endlösung*. Deported en masse, crammed into freight and cattle cars, they would end up behind the fences of concentration camps, far from the sight of the average *Bürger*, where they would be expelled from the order of humans and reduced to the bare life of their wretched shells, transformed into *Muselmänner* deprived of all will and hope. In its profound organizational principle and aesthetics, the scene at Auschwitz, Treblinka or Buchenwald was Kafkaesque – a claustrophobic, filthy, dark, narrow and exitless world, with a wretched, stinking everyday life, without a way out, behind barbed wire, and without a transcendent dimension; a world as if non-existent both in the cosmological order and in the social geography, completely realistic yet completely fantastic, unthinkable. A world operated by machines – trains, statistics, bureaucratic structures, crematoria: all industrial concentrating, isolating and killing machines indifferent to understanding and empathy. Their final product – the dead, emaciated corpses of the exterminated racial *Ungeziefer* merged into a common rotting, stinking mass – was simply returned to the waste dump – buried in common pits with disinfectants, later industrially gassed and burned in modern crematoriums.

I have no doubt that such connections between Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Hitler's Auschwitz, between Herr Samsa and Rudolf Eichmann, will seem like an exaggeration to many. We must admit that the novella does not make them: it produces no prophecies, it only confines itself to the claustrophobia of the impossible to understand. But it builds a system within this claustrophobia, revealing its principle – the novella demonstrates the scheme of the meaning-destroying machines designed to isolate and confine monster-humans and equipped with special, additional devices for blocking every understanding and empathy. It is precisely them that Kafka reveals in *The Metamorphosis*; furthermore, he demonstrates how all these killing machines are in their essence *Familiensache*, *Altagsroutine*, *Dienst- und Geschäftsangelegenheit*, how they logically follow from the Law of the Father and official regulations. The novella demonstrates the hidden birth of the Banality of Evil which appears one morning after the uneasy dreams of a most banal family, yet not in Gregor's small dusty room but around it – in the living-room, the hall and the staircase, somewhere in a crumbling empire, on the eve of the Great War. It tells of how monsters and humans have changed places.