

## **Hearing/seeing dread: thought of distortion and transformation in Kafka's *The Burrow* and Odradek**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In Kafka's unfinished story, *The Burrow*, an unidentified subterranean creature struggles while digging in a burrow, constantly engulfed in anxiety for potential intruders. His obsessive anxiety starts to be materialised in his hearing of a noise everywhere and at constant intensity. Incessantly speculating the cause of this noise, his dreadful imagination first finds it as a swarm of small fries, eventually growing into a single gigantic monster threatening his burrow, as if desiring an irresistible entity that goes beyond the idea of the individual. Inspired by this story of a creature suffocating from his lonesome effort of nesting, this paper discusses how an individual sensation of dread could potentially transcend to an ability to imagine social totality, drawing on the philosophical readings of Kafka's other character Odradek by Benjamin and Adorno. I further argue that this process is aesthetic, correlating Freud's idea of the uncanny with Adorno's theory of aesthetic experience which examine the negotiation between individuation and socialisation in an experience of desubjectification. By sketching out the anxious hearing in *The Burrow* in reference to the disturbing seeing of object-creature Odradek, I discuss the feeling of dread that marks the transformation of individual entities into a transcendent social/collective being.

### **Dread for thought**

In Kafka's unfinished short story *The Burrow* (1923), a subterranean creature struggles while digging in its burrow. While working hard on the artifice of its labyrinthine home, the creature, often inferred as a mole, is constantly engulfed in anxiety because of potential intruders to the burrow. This creature's obsessive anxiety culminates when he starts hearing the whistling sound, audible everywhere and always at the same volume, coming from somewhere deep in the ground. Incessantly speculating the cause of this ubiquitous noise, the creature's imagination first finds it as a swarm of small fries, eventually growing into a single gigantic monster that is threatening the burrow from the other side. It seems that the ubiquitousness of the noise, without any particular, drives the creature into dread. The otherness of the unknown intruder is crystallised in

the noise, and the creature is agitated for carving out the single source of the noise that could articulate its anxiety.

Obviously, what fascinates us in this story is the creature's overwhelming obsession with potential intruders to his world. Its meticulous observation and speculation of what is occurring in his interior and exterior terrain is fairly serious and at the same time idiotic; how could one imagine so eagerly all the potential danger which has little factual evidence, and suffer from its own groundless imagination so existentially? In face of the obscure nature of the noise, the creature's imagination driven by an urge for anxiety badly desires a representation to the unintelligible. Serious but idiotic, fantastic but existential; here, the tragicomedy of Kafka's world of allegory can be seen in full swing, throwing us into the endless pondering between significance and absurdity. The first part of the story is fuelled by the creature's obsession to create a perfectly safe hide-out (the Castle Keep) that would serve as his inner-most sanctuary, shielded from all the phenomena in the outside world. Inevitably he pays the utmost attention to the threshold area of the burrow, incessantly thinking of the ways to camouflage the doorways. Once in a while the creature feels so proud of his long-lasting effort of his craftwork, but mostly he is driven by the uncontrollable urge to imagine a disastrous moment of intrusion and the tactic strategies for prevention. The more worried he is, the more complicated the space appears. Despite the precise description of the structure of the burrow brilliantly done by Kafka's observational style, as the creature unfolds his anxiety and use it like a searchlight for his digging, the spatial structure of the burrow seems as intricate as his relentless imagination. While he is so determined and persistent in exploring the practical precision for protecting his burrow, for readers, the burrow appears to be as obscure as a shapeless cloud that is impossible to hold.

The latter half of the story revolves around the creature's desperate spiral of speculations on the source of the faint but disturbing noise. His spiral moves around several different assumptions, initially recognising the nature of the sound that 'goes on always on the same thin note, with regular pauses, now a sort of whistling, but again like a kind of piping' (Kafka, 1923, p. 344). His first assumption identifies its source as a swarm of little burrowers, some fries, who are steadily labouring somewhere near his burrow. They are engaged in their own business, both of which are unknown to him. But soon he withdraws this idea and goes on flowering his suspicion. If the noise was coming from a swarm of little creatures, why have they not appeared? He has never

seen any of them and that is what worries him. This makes him leap for another assumption; they must be much tinier than he thought. Initially, he did not feel threatened by this noise because it was apparently too faint to do any harm to him. He assumed that it would go away at some point. After a while, the noise starts to seriously disturb him because of its subtlety, uniformity and invisibility; he can hear it everywhere inside the burrow, always at the same volume, high or low, at the roof or the floor, at the entrance or in the corners. In order to spot the source of the noise, he starts to dig up the burrow blindly and randomly, only to find no clue. At this point, his obsessive hearing, speculation and imagination become a medium 'to give expression to one's inward agitation'. He is merely trying to observe without actually doing anything about this, not really hoping to find anything (Kafka, 1923, p. 349). Now, hearing the noise is a self-referential activity, an activity only for nurturing his imagination; 'the nature of the noise, the piping or whistling, gives me much food for thought' (Kafka, 1923, p. 354). Finally, he reaches the conclusion that one gigantic beast, whose power goes beyond his imagination and whose purpose for its burrowing cannot be deciphered, is encircling him.

As his dread grows, he starts looking for visibility of the source of the noise from the tiniest to the biggest, from the collective to the singular. When he pictures the source of the noise, the scale of the creatures shifts from a swarm of small fries to a countless number of little creatures smaller than fries, to a single big beast. In this shift, we can see an irresistible dread and fascination heading towards the conception of an inescapable monstrosity that is going to totalise and thus annihilate all other possible sources of his dreadful feeling. It seems that he strangely gets relieved when his obsessive speculation finds a place in the idea of one big creature that is so powerful it would be impossible to fight against. What is the significance of this absolutisation of dread in relation to the visualisation of the singular in his auditory imagination? Why couldn't his imagination tolerate the idea of countless numbers of smaller entities collectively moving around? Here in the trajectory of the creature's dreadful hearing, in imagining the singular as an impossible, absolute entity, I detect a call for fabulous yonder, for a transcendental entity or state that goes beyond one's intelligibility. Between minute insect-like creatures and one big animal, between the collectivity and the singularity, it seems that this creature's imagination constantly looks for something 'beyond', something unknown to his world, as if the source of dread was the very urge for transcendence.

### **Odradek; the distortions of existence**

As Angel Flores, one of the pioneering scholars of Kafka, precisely phrased several decades ago, Kafka's body of work has attracted various approaches – 'a schizophrenic Kafka or a God-intoxicated Kafka, an Expressionist Kafka or a Talmudic Kafka, a family-loving Kafka or an Existentialist Kafka' – and more recently, structuralist, poststructuralist, posthumanist perspectives, as well as those of postmodernism and cultural studies (Flores & Swander, 1958, p.2).<sup>1</sup> The burrowing creature in this story, like any characterisation of Kafka's stories, has also been susceptible to various interpretations, particularly due to its allegorical opacity. The creature's obsession to make a safe inner space, underpinned by his fear of the intruder from the outside, could be said to mirror the subject and the Other in psychoanalysis, particularly the idea of uncanny. The spatial division between inside and outside take shape by supposing the potential danger projected in the figure of the Other. The safer it is, the more it is imbued with the Other; the inner safe space eventually turning into the most unhomey place. As Mladen Dolar discusses, the burrow is the paranoia turned into space, illuminating the supplementary relation between inside and outside, subject and object, the uncanny and the homely in Freudian sense (Dolar, 2011, p. 115). For the creature in *The Burrow*, in this place of the Other, any organic entities from minuscule insects to enormous animals can hold up his anxious feeling that contours one's inward agitation, as Kafka precisely phrases it. If this is the case, then why does this inward agitation, which apparently seems to be a matter of individual quest, finds its source of dreadful hearing in collectiveness?

In order to illuminate the contradictory nature of a sense of anxiety and uncanny in the form of the Other as seen in the creature in *The Burrow*, I would like to refer to Kafka's another obscure character Odradek (a strange animated object who resides on the threshold of the household) who appears in his short story *The Cares of the Family Man* (1919/1993). This object-creature, which looks like a flat star-shaped spool for thread, appears in front of the family man sometimes in the doorway, the corridor or the attic. It sometimes speaks and answers to his questions in a quite infantile manner but mostly it stays in silence, without asking anything, yet evoking an existential question to the family man. The idea that Odradek might outlive him and continue to appear in front of his decedents makes him anxious. Odradek is not an inorganic object but is also not quite a creature, content with a queer form of its own – homeless but not nomadic, fragile but persistent, harmless but disturbing. Odradek is neither a solid entity nor a

phantasmagoric ephemeron, belonging to nowhere but with a persistent, almost faithful, presence in the threshold area of the household. He comfortably inhabits the threshold, which makes the family man quite uncomfortable. Odradek apparently looks innocent and fragile but also shows a naughty nature as if playing with the family man's perplexity. Here, you might see the relation between the existence of Odradek and the burrowing creature's hearing – the apparent subtleness and harmlessness that would eventually grow into an obsessive feeling of anxiety. In Odradek, the anxiety is objectified, being given a shape as a singular visible entity which has an articulated character. In the burrower's hearing, no single clue but his inner voice of 'giving expression to one's inward agitation' is provided. It seems as if Odradek is a possible representation of the invisible dreadful hearing in *The Burrow*.

Odradek has been variously discussed as a prototype of distortion, the remnant of an entity produced at a tangent to itself by the anthropocentric forces at work in forming the subject as well as history. The persistent recurrence in the allegory of the idea of home and family can be understood in relation to a psychoanalytical notion of unconscious desire.<sup>2</sup> Equally, it could be a critique of paternal power from a psychoanalytic-feminist view.<sup>3</sup> Odradek's uselessness is sometimes discussed as a countering, revolutionary force in response to the biopolitical instrumentalisation of life under capitalism.<sup>4</sup> In a sense, what the surrealists explored with the notion of the found object as a site transgressing the boundary between the subject and the object, the conscious and the unconscious, is prefigured in Odradek, where the humanisation of the object and objectification of human being occurs in the place of commodity fetishism.<sup>5</sup> The anxiety about the inhuman dimension that Odradek evokes can be explored as an experience of the Other which decentres a notion of selfhood constructed under the ideology of the 'human being'. Odradek's estranged form as a non-human hybrid entity may further inform the posthumanist critique of anthropocentrism, which is a critique of the notion of free will that is embedded in individualism.<sup>6</sup> The possible interpretations of Odradek seem endlessly and hopelessly open.

The argument holding these various interpretations on Odradek together can be expressed in the debate between Benjamin and Adorno. They question; if we read something slippery or ungraspable in the figure of Odradek, then how can it be described/theorised without resummoning another urge for transcendence – an urge for the beyond? If Odradek is a symbolic remnant of what has dropped off from or been left behind by some sort of unitary system, then it is always on the verge of overturning

binary thinking – the beyond/ the below, the whole/the remnant, inside/outside – which underpins the dialectical passion and the urge to transcend.<sup>7</sup> The brief argument about Odradek between the two writers asks how to think about Odradek not as a dialectical representation of the Other as a supplemental and subordinate entity to us, the human; nor is it a necessary sacrificial dimension of the ‘non-human’ through which the ‘human’ can be constructed. The challenge is identical thinking itself, and the way it maintains itself by manipulating something it defines as other, and that emerges at the limit of the norm, of intelligibility, at a limit where identification can still be secured.

Particularly, Adorno writes of a disquieting potential of reading a reversed call for transcendence to be gathered from the remnants that are Odradek. Adorno warns Benjamin that responding to Odradek as a sign of distortion can subtly fall into another urge for transcendence (Adorno & Benjamin, 1934/1999, p. 69). For in the light of distortion Odradek could be seen as an escape from the mortal life, or an expression of hope to overcome our creaturely state of life, the promise of reaching the ultimate limit where the organic and the inorganic, life and death, will be reconciled in a strangely animated form of an inhuman object. Odradek could be a perverted expression of the desire to transcend organic life. As Judith Butler points out, behind Adorno’s caution, lies his attempt to see the inhuman aspect of Odradek a sign of survival of life that is particularly violated and normalised in a social system constructed on the idea of the ‘human’ (Butler, 2005, p. 106). Butler’s explication of Adorno’s sombre warning of the danger of looking for something hopeful in Odradek succinctly expresses what his concerns are in his practice of social criticism. Odradek, representing the survival of the inhuman, offers an immanent critique of a notion of the human based on free will, making explicit the uncontrollable aspect of life. The unvoiced organic guilt that Benjamin attributes to Odradek can be re-cast by Butler as amoral challenge to thinking of the inhuman in terms of what is distorted and subjugated in the production of the human, making the limits explicit of which a current social system consists, and thus carries the promise of rethinking and changing that situation.

Let us assume that Odradek is the *Doppelgänger* of the norm, an allegory of remnant entity that oozes out of the system of normalisation, out of socialisation. Even then, what is significant in the story of Odradek is that this whole process of normalisation and socialisation is accompanied by individual awakening of anxiety and pain. The pain that entraps the family man is anyone’s; the pain that remains in our thinking, long after our entities are subordinated to the normative power which defines

all aspects of life. The affinity and difference between the burrowing creature's dreadful hearing and the anxious presence of Odradek in front of the family man is quite intriguing in terms of the anxiety in its dual roles of individuation and socialisation, of the individuals connected to the higher collectiveness.

The anxiety permeating Kafka's world is discussed by both Benjamin and Adorno as a signal of distortion that illuminates the limit of what comprises a system, and that this anxiety thus carries a potential for social change. For Benjamin, anxiety is a sign of disruption in thinking, which 'messes a situation up, yet it is the only hopeful thing about it' (Benjamin, 1934/1999, p. 810). These distortions of existence signify something other than themselves, they evoke the higher orders that one is unable to recognise as such, and which are manifested as a feeling of anxiety, 'a fear of an unknown guilt', most typical of which is seen in Kafka's protagonist K (Benjamin, 1931/1999, p. 498). Everyone in this society bears the signs of this guilt in relation to inexplicable system strange to the individual life, and to which we are unknowingly subdued.

On another front, Adorno emphasises that anxiety is the wound inscribed in a process of individuation that reflects 'the social untruth' (Adorno, 1955/1967, p. 252). Referring to Freud's psychoanalysis as an attempt to capture the distortions of life that surface in individuals as physical and psychological symptoms, Adorno compares Freud and Kafka in their understanding of the world through what is excreted in the present in the form of appearance. For Adorno, just as Freud conceives the 'dregs of the world of appearance', in various symptoms that surface on the human psyche and the body, Kafka makes 'a montage composed of waste-products' (Adorno, 1955/1967, p. 251). Whereas psychoanalysis seeks a cure for the symptoms of the damaged psyche in individuals, Kafka, from the distortion manifested in individual beings, draws the contours of an indistinct social system which generates the process of individuation.

In an individual experience of anxiety in which we are directed to the subjectivity, we are simultaneously connected to the higher, unknown scheme of the world – society. This contradictory nature of the feeling of anxiety illuminates the complex relation between individuation and socialisation. Adorno's mentioning of Freud in relation to Kafka's work is significant in examining an aesthetic nature of an experience of anxiety that marks the transformation of individual entities into a transcendent social/collective being. This can be further developed through Freud's analysis of the uncanny that discusses anxiety as an aesthetic experience through which

the human develops the activity of self-reflection thus the capacity to think about others, entering into the socialising process. In the following sections, examining Freud's analysis of the uncanny with Adorno's theory of aesthetic experience, I discuss anxiety as an aesthetic experience of desubjectification, which underlies the anxious hearing in *The Burrow* and the disturbing seeing of Odradek.

### **Freud's uncanny; anxiety as aesthetic experience**

Freud's analysis of the uncanny is dedicated to the 'dregs of the world of appearance' that surface in the individual psyche as a feeling of fright, and his analysis forces us to recognise these dregs as an organic part of reality. It is one of the illuminating thoughts on the issue that a sense of anxiety is one category of aesthetic experience that deals with qualities of feeling. Freud discusses the uncanny as something that is brought back to the conscious mind as a feeling of fear and dread. He analyses what causes the uncanny feeling and essentially reduces them into two elements; the return of the repressed, and the omnipotence of thoughts. The omnipotence of thoughts refers to an animistic psychic process by which the self is connected to the world outside by objectifying the inner. It is fundamentally related to the human power of self-observation/criticism that evolves in the psychic process of doubling the self in order to treat the ego as an object. The generation of the double in the human psyche corresponds to the rise of self-observation, which is related to 'the primordial narcissism that dominates the mental life of both the child and primitive man' (Freud, 1919/2003, p. 142). Freud elucidates the contradictory nature of self-love of narcissism, in which the self-enclosed within the inner world is transported to the outside world in the very process of self-objectification.

The uncanny feeling of fear and dread reveals how humans acquire the capacity of self-criticism through a doubling of the self, in an experience of mortality arising in the evolution of the ego. This self-objectification, observation, thus self-criticism, is potentially a pathological phenomenon that transforms a part of the self into an inanimate object. The part of the ego that takes shape as an object starts searching for a correspondence in objects in the outside world, eventually animating the inanimate and repeatedly inducing certain troubling psychic phenomena. Thus, a primordial narcissism functions to narrate a seamless connection between one's psychic processes and the world outside comprising unknown objects, other people and creatures, by transforming a part of the self into an object. The self, reproduced as an object, becomes a space for



mediation and for identifying with the strange unknown world of objects, perpetually re-enacting internal psychic forces through phenomena in the outside world. The uncanny is a remnant of this animistic nature of the human psyche.

Paradoxically enough, in the initiation of the human constructed as a rational being with a conscience, there lies the primordial narcissism of extending the limit of the self even identifying with something else than oneself, the pathological expansion of the omnipotence of thought. In the experience of the uncanny, the self opens up to the space of the Other, of self-observation. This self-referential force of the uncanny underpins the human activity of reflection and criticism, the capacity to think about others. It gives a basic understanding of anxiety as a critical force for observing and reflecting the current situation outside the self, the unknown world beyond his/her intelligibility. What underlies Adorno's interpretation of Kafka, his theory of aesthetic experience, will nurture Freud's idea of the uncanny as an aesthetic process of desubjectification that brings about a temporary collapse of the empirical self. In this regard, I will discuss further the way in which this unknown world, to which we are directed in the experience of anxiety, is the very society in which we are living.

### **Adorno's aesthetic experience; transcendence/transformation of the social**

In his theory of aesthetic experience, Adorno attempts to reconcile an aesthetic experience as a transcendental loss of the empirical self with the idea that the work's essence is a social truth. Negotiation between social criticism and transcendental nature of aesthetic experience is at stake in his theory (Adorno, 1970/2013a, p. 7).<sup>8</sup> In the aesthetic experience, Adorno explores how the individual is opened up to social awareness through an experience of desubjectification. Artworks including literature can become a source of attention and fascination, they double the subject's position as the centre of experience precisely because artworks and the experience of reality are equally structured by the spells – various dis- courses, ideologies, expectations and speculations – which organises an experience of reality. This brings the subject a temporary break from the empirical world. This is why aesthetic experience can displace the subject that is loaded socially and historically, opening it up to a space for self-reflection and observation. It is a power to measure the distance of the self from life constituted by multiple narrations. Aesthetic experience generates a reflective space where a layer of fictitious narratives is stripped off by re-enacting and repeating what constitutes reality: 'the spell with which art through its unity encompasses the membra

disjuncta of reality is borrowed from reality and transforms art into the negative appearance of utopia' (Adorno, 1970/2013b, p. 178). However, the transcendental movement that takes place here is not a leap into the divine, or into purity, where the empirical experience of everyday concern should be emptied out. This is not an actual break or release from anything at all. The place into which we are diving is the very social. The effect of aesthetic experience is a transformation, or transcendence, of the individual being into the social, where the self is resituated in the intricate web of various spells and enchantments. Here, the society itself appears to us a transcendental phenomenon.

Going through Freud's idea of the uncanny and Adorno's theory of aesthetic experience, now anxiety marks the very process of individuation, the transcendental awareness of its own otherness as a social creature inevitably intertwined with the world of other entities. It is the paradoxical process of human beings acquiring the capacity to be 'the human', the social creature, inescapably tied up with what does not correspond to the individual her/ himself. The human is capable of thinking of other entities in the extension of the self, in the empathetic identification with others beyond the limit of the individual, with other people, other creatures, communities, with the environment experienced as the multiple layers of relation between various entities. But this socialising process of the individual is paradoxical. It shows that socialisation takes the form of distortion and deficiency, the only route through which the potentiality of becoming can be made actual.

Last but not least, there is one thing that the burrowing creature in *The Burrow* is not aware of, or persistently ignoring; he himself is making noise by incessantly digging in his burrow, which might be a threat and a source of disturbing noise for other subterranean entities. Hearing is ubiquitous and omnipotent; we cannot close our ears. Precisely because of this, he becomes mindfully but naively dominated by the inner agitation emerging as a voice in his head which constantly asks for yielding stories, one after another. Probably he is not a lonely agonising victim suffering from his obsessive inner voice with dreadful hearing of the noise. Instead, he might be the one that is disturbing the other's terrain by imagining and materialising his groundless anxiety to his environment through his constant digging. In this unknown noise that he himself is making, in this unknown guilt, he is exposed to the collectiveness, to the impossibility of isolating himself from a chain of living, that marks the helplessly transcendental nature of our existence.

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<sup>1</sup> Flores edited the notable selection of criticism, *The Kafka Problem* in 1946, later *The Kafka Debate: New Perspectives for Our Times* in 1977, in which he compiles a range of critical approaches from literary criticism, Jewish studies, psychoanalysis, theology to philosophy. Among more recent approaches to Kafka's works, particularly focusing on Kafka's Jewish identity in the social/historical context of his era, see: Robertson, R. (1985). *Kafka: Judaism, politics, and literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Gilman, S. (1995). *Franz Kafka, the Jewish patient*. New York, NY: Routledge; Boa, E. (1996). *Kafka: Gender, class, and race in the letters and fictions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. For comprehensive studies covering wide range of scholarly fields since Flores's publications, see: Preece, J. (Ed.). (2002). *The Cambridge companion to Kafka*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Corngold, S., & Gross, R. V. (Eds.), (2011). *Kafka for the twenty-first century*. Rochester: Camden House.

<sup>2</sup> Esther K. Bauer discusses the Odradek as a site of 'looking' that deals with the issue of the Other through which the self is constructed and preserved but also displaced, in an experience of the world beyond sociocultural constraints, and in a productive engagement with memory and the unconscious. Bauer links Freud's idea of the 'superego' to Foucault's panoptic eyes of internalised self-discipline and surveillance, and with Silverman's interpretation of Lacan's idea of anamorphosis as an experience of reversing the position of subject and object in loss of the conventional subject position at the centre of visual experience. Her discussion further incorporates Barthes's idea of the *punctum* as a form of looking that lies beyond sociocultural constraints, as opposed to the *studium* as a socially and culturally conditioned form of looking. Bauer's discussion explores an aesthetic dimension of looking that contributes to decentring the position of the subject, a decentring which is embodied in the reflexive interaction between the narrator and Odradek (Bauer, 2010, pp. 157–173).

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Boa discusses the deformity of male bodies, which consistently permeates Kafka's stories, as a sign of crisis of patriarchal authority, of family-based father-power, in face of liberal modernisation. Male subjectivity is 'the site of a painful contradiction between symbolic phallus and the material body, the idealized sign and fleshly desires' (Boa, 1996, p. 108). This dilemma is manifested as male power over women, households and the young, and 'the archetypal clash between the sacred and the forbidden [that] takes the form of the generational clash between the father as possessor of the phallus and the rebellious, lustful son' (Boa, 1996, p. 108). Considering Kafka's own difficult relationship with his father as seen in his famous *Letter to His Father*, in which he confesses his long-lasting suffering from his father's suspicion and his own resulting self-restriction, Odradek could well support this psychoanalytic-feminist interpretation of the deformation of male body.

<sup>4</sup> In a section titled 'In the world of Odradek: The work of art confronted with the commodity'

in his early work *Stanzas*, Agamben discusses the question of commodity fetishism in relation to Benjamin's interpretation of it: the potential to enjoy the commodity as a useless thing freed from its market/practical value. However, Agamben does not mention Odradek in this text, its relation to commodity fetishism is only implied in the title of the section (Agamben, 1977/1993, pp. 31–62). Miguel Vatter explicates Agamben's implicit idea of the dialectic of the commodity in the characterisation of Odradek, while demonstrating a comparative analysis of the understanding of Marx's historical materialism and the messianic in Agamben and Benjamin. Vatter argues that at the heart of Agamben's idea of bare life, there lies the Odradek, in his discussion of how bare life that is completely subjected to sovereign power can nevertheless be the form in which human subjectivity can escape from the captivity of the law (Vatter, 2008, p. 46).

<sup>5</sup> In the surrealist movement, the object plays a significant role as a dialectical space of theory and practice, art and politics, and a place for revolutionary thought in which the individual inner psyche meets the outside world. The object marked both psychologically and historically becomes a site where Marxist and Freudian views cross over one another: the economic/political dimension of the object theorised in the idea of commodity fetishism, and the psychic dimension of the object theorised in the light of the fetish and the uncanny. André Breton combines both these sets of elements in the ideas of 'objective chance', 'the marvellous' or 'Poem- Object', through which he attempts to theorise the political significance of transformation of the inner psyche and its resonance with the social revolution. The surrealist 'found' object carries the subversive content precisely because it contests the social/economic function and value of object as commodity and the subsequent reification of individual desire and of the unconscious. On the political significance of the object in the surrealist movement, Johanna Malt, in her book *Obscure objects of desire: Surrealism, fetishism, and politic*, discusses it taking after 'zone' scholars (Krauss, Foster, Mary Ann Caws and others) who reconstructed the scholarship on surrealism by way of Bataille's 'Documents' group, which explored the ideas of base materialism and the formless as representing a dissident, deviant, marginalised strain of surrealism as against the orthodoxy of Breton's group. Regarding the place of object in Bataille's thought in differentiating 'the ethnographical' and 'surreal' object, see: Hollier, D., & Ollman, L. The use-value of the impossible. *October*, 60, 3–24. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/> Regarding the significance of object in the representational and literary space from the avant-gardes movements to postmodern culture, as discussed in relation to the Lacanian idea of 'objet petit a', see: Slobodanka, V.-G. The representation of the object as the other in modernism-postmodernism: A psychoanalytic perspective. *Facta Universitatis*, 2, 173–194. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Comprehensive studies on the nonhuman creatures in Kafka's writing, which attempt to illuminate Kafka's critique to humanism can be seen in: Lucht, M. & Yarri, D. (Eds.). (2010). *Kafka's creatures: Animals, hybrids, and other fantastic beings*. Plymouth: Lexington Books. and Hanssen, B. (2000). *Walter Benjamin's other history: Of stones, animal, human beings, and angels*, California, CA: University of California Press. For a discussion of Odradek focusing on the issue of the grotesque representing otherness in terms of a dialectical tension, see: Powell, M. T. (2008). Bestial representations of otherness: Kafka's animal stories. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32, 129–142. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Adorno and Benjamin's argument here derives from their broader concerns over the issue of theology in relation to social criticism, i.e. how to interpret the theological notion of the messianic in the context of social criticism. Analysing the significance of theology in Adorno's thought, Christopher Craig Brittain explicates how Adorno's 'inverse theology' aims to develop a form of critical thinking that maintains a ground for counter-cultural social action and thought derived from the brokenness of life, and challenge identity-thinking. He points out that Adorno's exchange with Benjamin on the works of Kafka plays an important role in his development of the idea of inverse theology (Brittain, 2010, pp. 98–102).

<sup>8</sup> Regarding Adorno's idea of aesthetic experience particularly in relation to the act of reading Kafka, Roger Foster points out that Adorno's theorisation of aesthetic experience is primarily drawn from his reinterpretation of Plato's notion of *enthousiasmos* (or divine madness), the idea of beauty in *Phaedrus*, and the Kantian theory of the sublime. According to Foster, Adorno

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rearticulates Plato's *enthousiasmos* as a dissolution of the empirical self, and the idea of beauty in *Phaedrus* as the act of raising oneself beyond the conditioned world of everyday life and suspending the subject's capacity to assimilate experience. This is combined with Kant's idea of the sublime as a convulsive movement of decentering the self in face of the inner power of the artworks to resist being consumed as an object of pleasure (Foster, 2013a, p. 188–190).