



MODERNITY AND THE EXISTENTIAL METAPHYSICS OF LIFE AND DEATH IN KAFKA'S *METAMORPHOSIS*

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Franz Kafka's story is vividly straightforward and clearly adheres to the primary incident of Gregor's transformation into vermin. The horror, trembling and conflicting emotions that arise in the reader's spirit are due to the insistent enactment of this metaphor—which like life itself—breaks all bounds of predictability, rational certitude and logic. Certainly, the reader cannot but naturally doubt the impossibility of the primary incident. Notwithstanding, against all instincts and inclinations, everything in the story is meticulously constructed to prompt the reader to accept the truth of the primary incident as an irreversible *factum brutum*. Henceforth, the reader seeing the absence of an acceptable cause for the primary cause itself; is, at the same time, searching under the very clarity of the story for an acceptable ground to interpret the hidden mystery of the metamorphosis of the reality of personhood into vermin. But no matter what, prearranged in lucid imagery, the facts of the story corroborate to simulate a fabricated yet real world that is hanging over an incomprehensible abyss, dangling among the vicissitudes of a physical world out of balance and harmony with its surroundings, a world that surely accomplishes a blow and shock to moral identity, mostly seems to render asunder the building of our character with its pretenses to self-sufficient autonomy. Kafka's ingenious story evinces at every turn a fatality that has nothing to do with an incorrigible personal law and ethical countenance; instead, shatters all hope of imbuing life with personal meaning. Gregor Samsa's self-alienation, his humiliating metamorphosis, is reminiscent of the modern predicament of human beings in the technological era of machines brute facts and information systems, points through and through to the reality of material existence and the possibilities of its deterioration, consequently moves toward the complete subversion of an ethical universe. Gregor's metamorphosis from a civilized man into a horrific and monstrous vermin, an instinctual underworld character with an almost automatic nature, and finally to a simple bit of matter, turns him into an antagonist who upsets all the instincts of life. Indeed, Kafka's underworld vermin gives rise to a deep and stifled impulse in modernity, to the gradual spiritual death of the human, a metamorphosis par excellence of the human *substantia* (with no *potentia*: influence, power, might, or sway), that overrides all instinctual and hermeneutical bounds, pointing ever more so to a *reductio ad absurdum*: the untenable yet real reduction of human beings to a piece of matter and information moving toward the inorganic, making them at par with all animals. Henceforth, the humiliated modern human -uprooted beyond bound, stripped of all ethical purposefulness, no longer a moral entity given to thinking and questioning- is, called to *de facto* accept and obey the mastermind of simulated techno capital reality, and, the geophysical enterprise of its vested interests.

Keywords: Metamorphosis, Self-identity, Estrangement, Modernity, Freedom.

On December 4th, 1913, thirty year old Franz Kafka writes in his diary:

To die would mean nothing else than to surrender a nothing to the nothing, but that would be impossible to conceive, for how could a person, even only as a nothing, consciously surrender himself to the nothing, and not merely to an empty nothing but rather to a roaring nothing whose nothingness consists only in its incomprehensibility (1949a).

On August 6, 1914, Kafka's diary entry categorically states:

What will be my fate as a writer is very simple. My talent for portraying my dreamlike inner life has thrust all other matters into the background; my life has dwindled dreadfully, nor will it cease to dwindle. Nothing else will ever satisfy me. But the strength I can muster for that portrayal is not to be counted upon [...] Thus, I waiver, continually fly the summit of the mountain, but then fall back in a moment...I waiver on the heights; it is not death, alas, but the eternal torments of dying (1949b).

Introduction

The diversity of possible hermeneutics in view of the richness of symbolic dream-like imagery that composes the enactment of Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis,' provides a multiplicity of possible avenues of interpretation, none of which can touch the incomprehensible mystery of the metamorphosis, of life itself. With this in mind, one must consider that what is advanced in the following pages constitutes mere possibilities of interpretation, a few among myriads: what else could Kafka expect from his general reader but a deep sense of engagement and participation. Also, in view of the above, it was not deemed necessary to make the many connections, which for sure abound, of the story to Kafka's personal life.

One aspect that seems obvious is that Kafka was not an unrealistic dreamer, nor a mythmaker, a symbolist or a fable writer and, was not an aesthete or a saint. Inevitably, the mystery Kafka really was shall remain concealed from us, however undeniably he was a deep thinker who could plunge himself into the unfathomable depths of the in-between dreamlike unconscious, to discover new passages and alleys to address the split human psyche, the fissure brought forth by countless dualities such as: the inner and the outer world, animalism and humanity, nature and culture, writing and existence, the artist and society, knowledge and life, customary habits and hopelessness, distorted desire and reality, language and nakedness. But either way, the whereabouts of any Kafkaesque duality—as well as paradox, metaphor, or allegory—seems to highlight the philosophical quest for resolution of the body and mind dilemma, persistently points to the rift between material embodiment and the inner self, soul or spirit. And in the final analysis, in Kafka's active imagination, this fissure or split between body and mind is doubly accentuated, never resolved. However, by heightening this seemingly unresolvable rift or duality between body and mind which manifests most obviously in the novella at hand, Kafka appears to discover the healing effects of literature and of his creative act.

The present endeavor constitutes an act of interpretation that hopes to discover between the lines of the 'The Metamorphosis' its deeper meanings so as to better understand Kafka's literary strategies and original intentions. Every section of the paper is both an independent and an interdependent whole, diffused within an overarching greater whole which determines to illumine 'The Metamorphosis,' in relation to Kafka's creative process and its existential relation to the modern predicament of humanity. Further, there is a backward and forward movement and dialogue between the sections, each providing deeper insight into the meanings of Kafka's novella. Mostly, the present interpretation seeks to uncover the many ways Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into vermin may better clarify our understanding of the apparently abysmal rift between humanity's diachronic spiritual situation, and the technological universe we inhabit in this most ambiguous of times.

Gregor's Metamorphosis: Dreaming, Ruins, Dead-in-Life

The first sentence of 'The Metamorphosis' heralds a drastic and irreversible change in bodily appearance that abruptly breaks with all imaginable historical sequence, altering the historicity of Gregor Samsa, unalterably. The opening sentence, boldly undoes normal human agency by introducing pure ambiguity through an absolute fantastic: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect (M:1)." The 'gigantic insect,' *ungeheures Ungeziefer*, best translated as 'monstrous vermin' is often imagined by readers as an enormous beetle or cockroach, but either way, no matter how it is thought of, as Levine (1994:161) points out, a monstrous verminous insect bears "a kind of redoubled negativity [...]" constituting "a doubly negative monstrosity."

Introducing yet more complexity, that dynamically stirs the imagination beyond analogy and graspable bounds, "Kafka himself insisted that published editions of 'The Metamorphosis' contain no actual illustration of the bug (Yaron and Herzog 2003:1093)." Nevertheless, already from the second sentence to the end of the first paragraph, the novella vigorously, ingeniously, and abruptly grounds our imagination with a quick description of Gregor's newly transformed material structure into a monstrous verminous insect. He now embodies something like a hard "armor-plated" back, with a rather small head which when lifted discloses his "dome-like brown belly that is divided into stiff arched segments" and has "numerous legs pitifully thin," when "compared to the rest of his bulk," waving "helplessly before his eyes (M:1)."

However, to add to the incomprehensible mystery, Kafka in the second paragraph invites us to take yet a deeper plunge into iconoclastic ambiguity, he summons us to imagine yet a deeper unimaginable. The second paragraph begins with Gregor's first thought and realization: "What has happened to me? [...]" It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, only rather too small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls (M:1)." The rest of the paragraph goes on to reveal other familiar details as these relate to Gregor's everyday human self and recent life activity. In spite of his horrifyingly deformed and ghastly body, Gregor himself (along with the reader), is shocked to inadvertently discover that this dreadful and appalling thing which he has now become, retains normal human consciousness and agency. Therefore, at the outset, the catastrophic unraveling of the story discloses the retaining of a human self whose material structure reveals an irrevocably regressive, 'doubly negative monstrosity;' and, above all, the outrageously unknowable beast that Gregor has turned into, as he realizes: is no dream.

Upon a closer look, Gregor discovers that the dream was no dream because one morning after awakening at his home from nightmarish or anxious dreams he witnesses in lucid waking consciousness his metamorphosed monstrous physicality, and the conscious recovering of the familiarity of the walls of his bedroom as well as his furniture and things, corroborate to the evidence that his newly outcast material structure is for real. He really becomes homeless, an outcast in his very home. He realizes in the light of day—upon waking up—that the disturbing night with nightmarish dreams became manifest reality. His metamorphosis into monstrous vermin therefore effectively annuls the distinction between the dreaming and waking states; the transition from dream to waking life is totally or almost totally effaced. Morris (2009:469) puts it well when he points out that in 'The Metamorphosis' dreams are dreams, but "waking" is also a "dreamlike condition." Effectually, 'waking up' is abolished there is only transition from the night dream state to the day dream state. Consequently, even dreamless sleep might be a dream.

Here, reality is outright inconsistent breaking all bounds of self-coherence, logic, certainty, and predictability. In view of radically new evidence, one has to entirely forget all previous knowledge for reality proving to be utterly discontinuous severs the boundaries of the permissible. Hence, the pure reality of an absolute fantastic makes the relativity of all knowledge the only norm. Expressed otherwise, pure ambiguity becomes everyday norm, or the norm of everydayness. The reader cannot but keep wondering as to the difference between the happenings of womb-like deep sleep without dreaming, night sleep dreaming, and dreaming in brought daylight. Above all, the blurred equivocation between night and day dreaming remains utterly ambiguous that one may wonder as to the permissible bounds of day

dreaming. That is, could Gregor have witnessed the night dreaming process of his metamorphosis into monstrous vermin in brought daylight? But the text gives no insight into such matters.

It is left to the reader's interpretive imagination to make sense of Gregor's sudden ontological break and epistemological discontinuity. His regressive metamorphosis into a monstrous verminous bug constitutes the only incomprehensible *factum brutum*, and not by coincidence this unimaginable piece of evidence is announced in the very first sentence of the novella. Yaron and Herzog (2003) are worth quoting at length, for on one hand they illuminate the unimaginable time-space or void in which Gregor's metamorphosis might have transpired; and on the other hand, they elucidate well the shocking and ruinous implications of his horrendous transformation having taken place in the opening sentence of the novella:

The interpretive spectrum of the 'bug' is endless, converging at zero point—the 'ground zero' of meaning, or endless meanings. The 'bug' is first and foremost a 'ruin' in a discourse of representations; no image or illustration can capture its essence. The bug wrote Kafka in the Blue Octavo Notebooks, comes from a void. [...] The process of metamorphosis—the actual transformation of Gregor Samsa's body—is absent from the text. The story begins after the event [...]. The reader must assume the task of tackling the metamorphosis before actually entering the text. [...] One may speak of its outcome, with no insight about its becoming. [...] From the moment of its conception, it [the metamorphosis] is a ruin par excellence (1093-94; my brackets).

Gregor's metamorphosis is an exemplary ruination a paradigmatic and abrupt—literal and existential as well as symbolic—confrontation with the no-thing, with nothingness as such. At the outset of the novella, Gregor (along with the reader) is jarred into the incomprehensible void, point zero: a groundless-ground which—like life and death—conceals infinite meanings and interpretations. Undoubtedly, Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis already carries with it that imageless, absolutely iconoclastic ground which withstands myriad interpretations, at once withstanding no interpretation.

With the exception that "it is a ruin par excellence;" the void bespeaks not the nothingness of a plenum, rather the doubly negative nothing of monstrosity! It is that kind of nothingness devoid of ultimate meaning that nullifies every hope of return to the original material structure and human self. The void here at once literally and metaphorically draws-in-itself all and nothing— becomes the zero point of absolute darkness—equivocates a black whole with no light at the end of the tunnel; it sucks-from-within Gregor all hope of life, jarring him into oblivion and ever recurring meaninglessness. From the opening sentence of the novella onward, Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis becomes an opening to that doubly monstrous incomprehensibility of being sentenced to death whilst alive, and the rest of the story opens the door beyond the threshold of life, not to death as such, but to "the eternal torments of dying (Kafka 1949b)." Indeed, a human self in an insect like physical structure discloses a fragile delicate material form in a kind of limbo, that reflects the very fragmentation of its-self, a wounded body in ruins and in pain ever turning in circles of suffering and greater disintegration, decay, and finally death; a piece of *materia* stamped off as it were by instinctual and/or mechanical spatiotemporal dilapidation and collapse.

Deleuze and Guattari (1986) emphatically claim that the metamorphosis into a verminous monstrosity signifies a voyage that immobilizes Gregor unto the realities of deterioration and death. The irrevocable transformation into vermin forthrightly expresses a reduction to the instinctual realm of beastly visceral physicality and existence; it bespeaks the eclipse of an integral self consequently annuls all possible movement of personal development: "the becoming-animal is an immobile voyage that stays in one place (35)."

In the beginning, even deterioration and death are as incomprehensible to Gregor as is waking up one morning transformed into a gigantic monstrosity. But as the novella progresses his metamorphosis becomes his harsh awakening to the reality of a life which at every turn embodies his death, enabling him

to an insight unavailable to the others around him who live as if they are eternal beings. In other words, he has awakened from a horrific dream to life—whose main ingredient is an awareness of death and dying. In this regard, Gregor Samsa is a true Kafkaesque hero: one in ruins, already standing before his very ruination, dead whilst alive, therefore more insightful than others.

On October 19th, 1921, almost three years before his death, the now thirty eight year old Kafka makes the following diary entry:

Anyone who cannot cope with life while he is alive needs one hand to ward off a little despair over his fate but with his other hand he can jot down what he sees among the ruins, for he sees different and more things than the others; after all, he is dead in his own lifetime and the real survivor. (Benjamin 1968:19; cf. Kafka 1949b).

The Raison d'être behind Gregor's Physical Metamorphosis

In accordance to the customs of our world, and according to the laws of habit and self-complacency, it would be beyond the bounds of scientific discovery for us to wake one morning and find ourselves transformed into gigantic insects. But in the unquestioned certainty of the identity of our being and world, there is enough artificiality, enough self-deception and enough fragility so that Gregor's metamorphosis touches a deep, unacknowledged, and anguishing reality, nourished by sources deeper than those of rational reflection and scientific knowledge.

That our body in a certain way is 'ourselves' should be subject to all the vicissitudes of a physical world that follows biological laws which seemingly have nothing to do with our personal law, is an evidence of fatality which is capable of shattering our every hope of giving some meaning to our personal lives. Above all, the fragility of our body and our utter dependence upon it delivers a blow and a shock to the moral identity of our character with its pretense to self-sufficient autonomy. The awakening to the fact of our corporeal existence—and its delicate balances—is perhaps at the same time the most horrifying and most anguishing discovery; it points to the transitory nature of our lives and places an absolute demand on our moral nature to reconcile with its true temporal dimensions.

Kafka's literary strategies serve to accentuate the incongruity between physical manifestation and human agency beyond proportion reason or logic. Much of his writing and this most apparently holds true in 'The Metamorphosis,' exaggerates negatively the rift between body and mind through metaphor paradox and allegory, or else through what has come to be known as the dream narrative. These literary strategies drive home the point of the unqualified fragility of the identity of our character; they indeed bring to the fore its radical dependence on the bodily transformations—and the manifest physical circumstances—we undergo in our sojourn through life. Moreover, the Kafkaesque literary event purposefully accentuates the fragility of the entire human condition cruelly, incongruously, through exhibiting a diachronically wounded body that is constantly victimized by an incoherent despairing self (cf. Goldstein 1966). It is an idling body that constantly ails, lingering around in a labyrinthine existence of moral anguish and guilt, a body that bears the ornamented imprints of alienation and self-abasement, as well as the horrific marks of remorse and self-abnegation, grounded in countless unfulfilled desires.

In 'The Metamorphosis' Kafka's literary strategy reaches its epic climax; for Gregor Samsa is doomed from the start. His sweeping transformation into vermin is primarily physical and irrevocably so; it therefore becomes absolutely impossible for him to reconcile the radical discontinuity between his newly discovered physical structure and his prior human self. The sudden awakening to the shattering discovery of his metamorphosis even brings the miscarrying of his daily expectations with a terrifying inability to re-achieve customary but unconscious continuity. His former self remains qualitatively unchangeable, indeed throughout the story is mostly baffled helplessly trying to adjust to radical change, though ultimately finds it impossible to cope or bridge the gap between an unbridgeable void: his insect-like physical structure and the retaining of meaningful human identity. Paradoxically, although his

physical structure has undergone a humongous metamorphosis the mediocrity of his character, his timid, sweet, and amiable self, remains morally identical with his former self. As such, the plight of Gregor's physical transformation becomes that much more symbolic. And, the genesis of the physical metamorphic phenomenon its *raison d'être* has to be traced in the characteristics of his life and character prior to the horrifying and nightmarish event, symbolic information which Kafka paradoxically provides after the event.

What Gregor essentially awakens to on the morning of his metamorphosis is the reality of his existence; his ordinary consciousness has lied to him about his situation: he has sacrificed his whole youth at the expense of his true self in order to save his family from disgrace. His self-identity is that of an uprooted Jew in a Christian world; by necessity the breadwinner of a dependent family; an unmarried commercial traveller and clerk displaced by time and train travelling irregularities; tolerating a job he hates and a chief clerk he despises. Most dismally, he finds faint hope in the thought that his present ordeal of moral humiliation will last for another five to six years, the time needed to pay off the failures and debts of his disrespectful father. Hence, he is hostage to his economic entrapment in bondage to a detesting job he resents and enslaved to his family's deformed social identity. As such, the regression into an inhuman cockroach-like malformed structural-enclosure literally personifies, symbolizes and discloses his inability to change his routinized shortsightedness, his self-repulsion and disdainful repressive circumstances, his self-worthlessness, his scornful self-exclusion and contemptuous social denunciation.

The overall struggle of his estranged existence simply renders him impotent. Not only is his job derisive terrible degrading and exhausting, but it also alienates him from himself, keeps him on the move and cuts him off from the possibility of any real human relatedness or friends; it is indeed a lonely affair. However, it is only after Gregor finds himself trapped into and by the inhuman world of a verminous entity, that he is actually forced to take a closer look at the truth of his existence. Ultimately, after the horrific event he finds himself immobilized, cannot resume the everyday normality of his past routinized life, for he now sees it from the outside as regarding its intrinsic limitations:

Oh God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked on! Travelling about day in, day out. It's much more irritating work than doing the actual business in the office, and on top of that there's the trouble of constant travelling, of worrying about train connections, the bed and irregular meals, casual acquaintances that are always new and never become friends. The devil take it all! (M:2)

In the beginning pages of the novella, Gregor keeps moving back and forward in time, doubting the reality of his newly transformed material structure; he wonders as to whether he is under the influence of a kind of hallucinatory dream state. Essentially, he sustains the denial of his present metamorphic circumstance the same way he denied the circumstances of his life prior to the catastrophic event. He therefore surrenders to his familiar self-routinized hopeful thinking, futilely clinging to the idea of being the same person as before. Hence, he doubts that after an uneasy night of dreams he witnessed only moments ago in brought daylight his transformed physical structure, and further denies the present moment by pretending not to clearly register that right now he stands naked before the inhuman forces of his verminous appearance; and that this is no dream. Baffled and in dismay, he simply finds everything hard to believe thus assuages himself by focusing on the familiar everyday things of his life, things whose memory might assure him of the continuation of his self-identity: pieces of cloth, newspapers, and a glass picture. And then he finds recourse in unconsciously listening to the linear ticking of the clock on his chest, as if to keep track of himself through a meticulous registering of the homogeneously repetitious flow of mechanical time; only to realize in a jolt-, that it is past 6:30am; he must have already missed the 5:00 o' clock train he had to catch.

At 6:45 his mother's knock on the door breaks his idle lingering; she is asking whether he had a train to catch. And moments later, "at one of the side doors his father was already knocking, gently, yet with his fist. 'Gregor, Gregor!' On the other side of the door his sister was saying in a low plaintive tone:

‘Gregor? Aren’t you well? Are you needing anything? (M:4)’ After managing to cunningly escape these first punitive acts by hiding the twitching squeaks of his other-creaturely voice, the alarm clock chimes at 7:00 o’ clock; and it was 7:15 when the chief clerk paid him a penal visit:

Gregor needed only to hear the first good morning of the visitor to know immediately who it was—the chief clerk himself. What a fate, to be condemned to work for a firm where the smallest omission at once gave the gravest suspicion! (M:7)

Gregor reckons that he failed to report to work once in five years and the chief clerk himself is at his home early in the morning with numerous accusations, threatening his dismissal.

Even though he has been sacrificing himself going to his job to pay an old debt of his father to his employer, with the truth of his self-betrayal having already been brought to his self-consciousness, along with the more than obvious betrayal of the chief clerk, Gregor is still unable to claim himself for himself and choose a new life: “if I didn’t have to hold my hand because of my parents I’d given notice long ago, I’d have gone to the chief and told him exactly what I think of him (M:3).”

But the mere presence of the chief clerk at his home forces Gregor to swing “himself out of bed with all his strength. [...] Only he had not lifted his head carefully enough and had hit it; he turned and rubbed it on the carpet in pain and irritation (M:7).” This very first wounding of his metamorphosed body, along with the shock of the chief clerk himself standing outside his door, was enough to jolt Gregor out of his idle thinking, jarring him for the first time into the total reality of his metamorphosed configuration and consequently to his irrevocable banishment from the human community. His verminous physical structure undeniably becomes all too apparent after he finally manages—with the gnashing of his teeth, brown liquid flowing out, and after much twitching and turning of his whole body—to unlock the door. But the unlocking once again finds him forever locked-in his irrecoverable beastly condition.

However, Gregor once again stubbornly persists in denial regarding his all too new verminous deformation, even after he encounters his boss face-to-face, and even after he witnesses the chief’s striking reaction to bolt out from a physical horror turned metaphysical. The chief clerk gradually takes his eyes off Gregor, “yet only an inch at a time,” and flees the situation in suddenness making “one believe he had burned the sole of his foot [...] as if some supernatural power were waiting there to deliver him (M:14).” But persisting in his sort of amnesiac dreamlike state the only thing Gregor—the monstrous vermin, perhaps the giant insect or worse the giant cockroach—can now ponder is an impossibility: how to salvage the job he hates, how to convert the mind of the chief clerk he utterly despises, the abhorrent chief clerk who must now by all means be “detained, soothed, persuaded and finally won over; the whole future of Gregor and his family depended upon it (M:15).”

This is the truth of Gregor’s life. He sees through the entrapped limits of his way of life, but finds himself impotent to do anything to change the circumstances of his situation. For once he decides to face the world in its true image, but finds himself trapped in an inhuman instinctual world, alienated from all human relations. Thrown into deep doubt and despair he discovers in dismay that he can no longer obey his conscious will; he therefore has enormous difficulty getting out of bed, opening the door, and he cannot go to work, communicate with others, or speak the human language. It is not that Gregor’s seeks or wants to escape in a subterranean region of instinctual desire. He simply finds himself no longer able to assert his conscious will for it is now servile to his new physical condition which stands at odds with the intentionality of his old self.

As the days pass, he shows less interest in human affairs; he withdraws into himself and becomes an outcast to the world. For the most part, he disappears into his room and when anybody enters he hides under the sofa. Even the clock that used to mark the ever changing passage of time, before his total exclusion from the world of human affairs, disappears from his room; he has truly become oblivious to the time of the world. Space disappears as well as time, or at least it re-orient its appearance. Now the ugly hospital across the street lies beyond his field of vision.

But be as it may, Gregor ‘can neither dare nor know’; he remains totally devoid of courage. He can no longer affirm his old self to which he is attached—powerlessly; he must therefore withstand the inhuman world of universal meaninglessness. It is true that his irrevocable metamorphosis gave him new insight into life. However, it has also uprooted him from the security of being himself which in the past gave him meaning, the strength and impetus to carry on mechanically with his everyday routines. The groundless-ground that the new knowledge of his mortality afforded him, did not and could not bring to light how he was to live, or what choices he was to make in order to regain entrance into the human world, to become a true human being with a renewed humanity. His unbecoming metamorphosis had thrown him into a deep void which showed him the Gregor he is, at once disclosing to him that he can no longer be that, yet it did not and could not show him the Gregor he should be.

Gregor Samsa is physically trapped in the inhuman world of a verminous creature because he was unable prior to the actual event of his metamorphosis into vermin, to reconcile and harmonize his body (the manifest physical circumstances of his life), with his human self. His inability to undergo a transformation of his psychical and moral nature equal to that of his physical nature prior to the event of his metamorphosis into vermin, cripples him and renders him vulnerable to the whims of the external and unfree authorities of the world.

Humanity Locks Him-out: Gregor Already Locked Himself-In

On the other hand of the story, the so-called ‘circle of humanity’ does not make it easy for Gregor simply because they cannot understand him. All the people in his surrounding milieu stand oblivious to his inner conflict thereby instantly pass judgment on the deep struggle he is undergoing-, that to their eyes renders him an impotent, an invalid, and an inhuman monstrosity. He is viewed with the same terror as at the sight of a cockroach, at most, a threatening piece of matter which arouses horror, fear, abhorrence, loathing, disgust, condescending scorn, crude amazement, pity, and lustful curiosity. The exposure of his repugnant verminous situation causes his family grief, pain and embarrassment in “the belief that they had been singled out for a misfortune such as had never happened to any of their relations or acquaintances (M:38).”

Gregor not only had to overcome his own deep inner conflict which trapped him in the inhuman world of meaninglessness, but he also had to overcome the projections imposed upon him externally. In the past he was a dutiful self-sacrificing son, hence on the surface the official sentiments of his parents and sister were of family duty which required the repression of disgust, shame and condemnation. However, mistrust, denial and concealment were the latent sentiments of the Samsa family toward Gregor.

Even his sister Grete who Gregor cherishes the most, and who in the beginning took extra care of his needs is now repulsed at the sight of him. As he later notices, she even avoids touching what he had come into contact with. Finally, his sister grows weary of looking after him, so she passes down this task to the charwoman, “an old widow, whose strong bony frame had enabled her to survive the worst a long life could offer (M:40),” who at first called Gregor “to her, with words she apparently took to be friendly, such as: ‘Come along, then, you old dung beetle! (M:41)’” To make things worse, upon his third and last outbreak from the bedroom in order to hear his sister’s melodic violin play to the house lodgers, Gregor is shocked when he hears his beloved Grete refer to him not as a human being but as a repulsive creature, a thing: “I won’t utter my brother’s name in the presence of this creature, and so all I say is: we must try to get rid of it. We’ve tried to look after it and put up with it as far as is humanly possible (M:47).” Unbeknownst to Grete, it was her traumatic words that actually delivered Gregor his final blow unto death.

As for his mother she does not dare come near him for the first two months, and when she decides that she wants to see him, it takes her another month to do so. In a cry of desperation, she utters: “Do let me in to Gregor, he is my unfortunate son! Can’t you understand I must go to him? (M:27-8)” Finally, when the occasion comes, she is overwhelmed by shame, pity, and horror; she misunderstands his plight

as illness, a temporary ordeal, as she has hopes of his getting better. Regarding the father's feelings and actions towards his son, to say the least, they are ridiculous and comical, but vitally brutal and blustering: from the first day of Gregor's metamorphosis, his father "believed only the severest measures suitable for dealing with him (M:35)." Overall, the father is a direct threat to his son's life; Gregor is afraid that at any time he may strike at him "a fatal blow on the back or on the head (M:17)." In their first encounter during Gregor's first outbreak from his room, he pushed him in with his stick "which was literally deliverance and he flew far into the room, bleeding freely (ibid)." At Gregor's second outbreak from the room, he gave him a fatal wound from which he never really recovered. His father bombarded him with apples, one of which "landed right on his back and sank in; [...] he felt as if nailed to the spot and flattened himself out in a complete derangement of all his senses (M:35)."

Notwithstanding, Gregor's father, as well as his mother and sister, are peripheral to the ordeal: Gregor is the one at the center. It is true that Mr. Samsa agrees that Gregor is banished from the circle of humanity, but it is Gregor that has sentenced himself to death, even before his first outbreak, more so even before his metamorphosis into a 'doubly negative verminous monstrosity.' His estrangement from himself, his family, his job and the world at large is a direct result of his own sense of defeat and self-condemnation, fear and self-disgust. Gregor's inability to come face to face with himself—his life and death—is what throws him into doubt, despair and meaninglessness. His doubly negative metamorphosis literally originates from a judgment he passes unto himself. He plainly straightforwardly sentences himself to death whilst alive: not only is he now condemned to die, but also condemned to struggle until he dies.

Gregor's family cannot do more for him than he can do for himself. They banish him from the human circle as he has banished himself—he locks them out as they lock him in.

Gregor: The Protagonist of Philosophical Disillusion

More than anything, Gregor Samsa is a protagonist of philosophical disillusion that discloses his metaphysical abyss—without being able to find a way out, an exit from his predicament, or freedom of self and will: the judgment he passes unto himself is too hard to bear, or to overcome. With Shakespeare's Hamlet in and as the height of despair he could have uttered: "O that this too too solid flesh would melt, and resolve itself into a dew! [...] Oh God! God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world! (Act I. Sc. II: 135-42)"

Gregor knows deep inside that he has committed no crime toward anyone except that he was not true to himself and that there was nothing amazing about his metamorphosis: "something like what happened to him today might someday happen to the chief clerk; one could not deny that it was possible (M:7)." He also knows that all people surrounding him are self-deceived. The split he is experiencing in his personality, his deepest struggle, includes everybody around him. However, they do not know it, either they choose to deny it or to ignore it; in effect they are pretending to live as if they are eternal beings.

Gregor out rightly bears no illusion about the metaphysical abyss that encircles him and the isolation it brings from those around him who are his equals but do not know it. This abyss is not alienation from his family and the hypocrisy of his relations to them both prior and after the metamorphosis, but is the isolation where a disillusioned man who awakens to a radical awareness of his own mortality suffers the awful experience of separation from others. His corporeity points to his mortality which makes the inhuman world his master. However, Kafka with convincing clarity indicates that although Gregor's inhuman world is as incomprehensible to human reason and sensibility as is death, it is far more human and humane than the reality of the people surrounding him who have denied their own mortality: his self-righteous, vulgar and sadistic father; his unlikely, two-faced mother; his obstinate, play-acting sister; the self-assured, arrogant and self-assumed chief clerk; and the charwoman whose classic horror is her unimportant personage.

Gregor's struggle against his death is literal but also metaphorical. Kafka's novella is not only about the existential reality of death, which is its finality, but it is also about death in life. Gregor struggles

against the truth of his life, however his life is his death and there is no escape from the ‘eternal torments’ of his dying processes until the very last moment of his final expiration. It is true that Gregor for a moment near the end of his long dying, while listening to his sister play the violin, feels “as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved (M:45).” However, this is just another unrealizable hope, another form of self-deception brought about by the elevation of music, whose musicality here bears yet another message of “the eternal torments of dying (Kafka 1949b).” It is as if the Sirens were calling—and the unknown spiritual nourishment he craved, forever remains unknown. For after his third and unsuccessful outbreak to listen to Greta’s violin play, his final hope of feeling human swiftly vanishes; hence, a forever disillusioned Gregor, locked into his room for the last time: expires.

The climax of Gregor’s philosophical disillusionment occurs in the first sentence of the novella. The rest of the story is a falling away from the high point of life and death which is announced in this unheard of first jolt of astonishment. Hereafter, Gregor’s life expires in one long sigh with three subclimaxes or interruptions—the three eruptions of the cockroach from the bedroom.

The poetic of the Kafka story based on the dream, whereby the dream reveals the reality, requires the literal assertion of metaphor; Gregor is literally vermin. This is no dream to the dreamer for while he is dreaming he takes his dream to be real. However, ironically, it is also true that even from the outside Gregor’s metamorphosis is indeed no dream—unreal or a phantasmagoria—rather establishes a revelation of truth. As previously elucidated his horrendous metamorphosis of literally being vermin bears his awakening to the truth of his life, to the lie of his habitual self-understanding. But the gradual realization of the dreadful irreversibility of the event jolts him into the nightmare of truth—the revelation of his defeat, self-condemnation and self-abasement, which stands for nothing but the enactment of a terrible metaphor: he is actually a monstrous insect, dead whilst alive—destined to be tormented until he dies.

In spite of the fact that the novella’s central enigma is never brought to elucidation the parody of hermeneutics that underlies Kafka’s language (through a diffuse labyrinth impossible to decipher in total) evolves into a metalanguage whereby every object, image or situation speaks of the profanation of life, gathers within it the bearings of death, and it withholds nothing that does not mirror Gregor’s ebbing away: his dying fall.

Gregor’s transformed body is an image of his self-denunciation which bears the message of pollution and defilement. But also, the room, the bed, the alarm clock, the glass picture, the newspapers, the door, the sofa, the furniture, the window, the food, the parents and sister, the chief clerk, the charwoman, the boarding gentlemen—everything and nothing—speaks of death and withdrawal: the silence of isolation is enacting a ritual that sanctifies the less than human and seals the moment not with eternity, but with that which is eternally decaying.

Gregor’s itinerary is completed when, from a piece of ineffectual matter he withers away into a receptacle of the forces of death condemned to disappear into a terrible silence. He is finally reduced to rubbish which the stout charwoman can dispose of with robustness. With comic anguish, Gregor’s tragedy is to pass from an instinctual monstrosity of inhuman proportions to a mere thing among things.

This is not to imply that all that Kafka had to say about the fallen vermin is that he had found spiritual sustenance commensurate to his situation, or that garbage is the only nourishment that is appropriate. Kafka’s dream narrative does not promote a naïve acceptance of one’s life, but a struggle to come to terms with it. This becomes the struggle against one’s death which also brings deeper insight, and becomes the bearer and source of creativity—the hero is elevated.

That Gregor is doomed to failure from the beginning draws more light to the central message of the story and to the fact that philosophical disillusion is a necessary prerequisite to the success of the enlightening journey and process. Gregor in and as the protagonist of philosophical disillusion is the hero par excellence, an advancing Prometheus heroically doomed in advance, but only in order to show the way to future succeeding heroes. Gregor indeed becomes the real survivor of the void of universal meaninglessness, as he sheds light on the necessity of healing the rift between body and mind; for that is the only true way to succeed in reconciling with the source of life and death. By way of his doubly negative example, Gregor illumines the way to true personhood for anyone wishing to embark on the

unceasing search for the indestructible part of self. He discloses the true spiritual nourishment we crave—our inmost true self—that remains incomprehensible and for the most part concealed from us.

Most importantly, Gregor endlessly reminds us—even after his passing into oblivion, his total ebbing away: that is the magic of good literature to bring to life and immortalize the hero—that we are always before the crossroad of choice. We can either choose the denial of the truth of our lives therefore immobilized, repeat the negative entanglements of regressive instinctual outbreaks with their imaginary engagements, infinite array of estranged virtual relationalities, and machine like space-time alterations of bodily entrapment; thereby, keep filling the abyss with untruth superficial activity and ruinous meaning. Or else, moment by moment we can freely choose to overcome universal meaningless and the recurrent clinging to the illusory things of life, by searching deeper into the ultimate meaning of our actions and selves. Indeed, only thus are we enabled to gain passage: to stand in closeness to the immortal presence of life-itself; hence, embrace the true and indestructible, the authentic and eternal part within us. Any lesser choice than embarking on the journey that embraces the whole truth of our life and death turns into ruins; for it turns out to be the surface affirmation of the love for life that in its bearing has no heart.

In Gregor Samsa, Kafka's condemnation of the living with their deluded instinctual vitality and their vivacious illusions of living forever is raised to religious vision. After all, Gregor's disillusionment paradigmatically clears the pathway to totally embrace our life and death; it opens the way to fully reconcile ourselves with life as such, where illusion and death obstruct no more. Gregor's metamorphosis into vermin also reveals the many ways we the living are perhaps abiding in slumber comfortably masking our fear and guilt; are deluded whilst alive on the march toward our death—but do not quite know it. That we are perhaps at fault (*hubris*) Gregor the monstrous vermin through his life's shortcomings makes apparent and as clear as the light of day.

Kafka's condemnation of the living reaches its climax in the last paragraph of 'The Metamorphosis,' after Gregor's final death:

[...] it struck Mr. and Mrs. Samsa almost at the same moment, as they became aware of their daughter's increasing vivacity, that in spite of all the sorrow of recent times, which had made her cheeks pale, she had bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure. They grew quitter and half unconsciously exchanged glances of complete agreement, having come to the conclusion that it would soon be time to find a good husband for her. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body (M:54).

Above all, Gregor Samsa is the dreamtime philosophical hero, the underground character who reveals to the circle of humanity its pretense to eternality, consequently its denial of death and dying. He clearly witnesses and becomes exceedingly aware of his own dying and ebbing away. He never denies his death and dying though he naturally cannot quite grasp it in total. Nevertheless, his shortcomings remind us that the inhuman and bestial automatic impulses of our humanity must be recognized and transcended, for only then a total acceptance of death and dying becomes possible. The acceptance of our death is perhaps what issues forth the fullness of life, wherein the incomprehensible void blooms in and as the finality of every moment, action and choice. This possibility Gregor does not and cannot know. However, through his life's failure he points the way disclosing to us, that it is possible for the disillusioned human animal to freely choose to be transformed into a true human being.

Kafka's Healing Truth-Process behind 'The Metamorphosis'

Franz Kafka desired with his whole being to be healed. Healing for him signified the process of truth disclosure, it meant to become whole in spite of all adverse influences of father, family, friends, education and surrounding milieu; his was the universal struggle of the self to be, a struggle with himself to be himself in spite of the forces of non-being. Kafka faced within himself all the contradictory tensions and

conflicts of alienation and estrangement that confront our so-called modern situation; his writing therefore reflects the courage of a man to be, his bravery to face death and madness, his confrontation with universal senselessness.

Principally, Kafka transformed his writing process into a healing form of art that takes upon itself the responsibility to face naked the depths of his life-fear and his life-failure, which is the morbid admixture of self-abasement and self-abnegation that dominates our modern era. In this light, the revelatory power of Kafka's writing with its insistence to uphold truth becomes paradoxical work to self-healing: his dominant effort to affirm himself in spite of fear and failure, through his fear and failure. Above all, he was determined to accomplish his healing process without taking refuge to cynicism, idealism, religious creed, or the infinite ways available for masking and escaping.

Milena Jesenská, the well spirited Czech woman that Kafka thought was the only person capable of recognizing his intellectual genius, in a letter to Max Brod says:

[...] He [...] never escaped to any such sheltering refuge [...]. He is absolutely incapable of lying, just as he is incapable of getting drunk. He possesses not the slightest refuge. For that reason he is exposed to all those things against which we are protected. He is like a naked man among the clothed (Brod 1978:230).

Indeed, it was Kafka's inability to lie that enabled him with piercing insight to penetrate the depths of our reality, of which we fail to take notice—as more often than not we are protected by the sheltering force of habit and comfortable self-complacency. However, Kafka's very own self-healing processes seem to creatively open the way to the ultimate self-authority of the individual freely choosing himself and choosing to be free.

But Kafka's writing process is difficult to follow, and one has to get used to it. Allegory paradox and symbol are the paths he chooses to effectually awaken us from our slumber, and to forthrightly warn us that the way to freedom is full of underground demons that invisibly rule the world, they torture and torment; and that the way is barred as well as assailed by the tyranny of unfree bureaucratic automatism—the terror of the authority of automatic political, social, biological and psychological processes—in effect, the automatism of mechanization and industrialization, as well as technological processes of simulated reality, dreamlike simulacra, running at algorithmic speeds pretending to be real! In this regard, Kafka's dream narrative reflects the life of genius that is way ahead of its time.

A paragraph from Milena Jesenská's obituary for Kafka is of interest to our present scope. It reads:

[...] his illness [...] gave him an almost miraculous delicacy and a frighteningly uncompromising intellectual refinement. As a human being, however, he pushed all his fear of life onto his illness. He was shy, timid, gentle, and kind, but he wrote gruesome and painful books. He saw the world as full of invisible demons that tear apart and destroy defenseless people. He was too clear-sighted and too wise to be able to live; he was too weak to fight, he had that weakness of noble, beautiful people who are not able to do battle against the fear of misunderstandings, unkindness, or intellectual lies. Such persons know beforehand that they are powerless and go down in defeat in such a way that they shame the victor. He knew people as only people of great sensitivity are able to know them, as somebody who is alone and sees people almost prophetically, from one flash of a face. He knew the world in a deep and extraordinary manner. He was himself a deep and extraordinary world. He wrote books that belong to the most outstanding works of German literature. [...] *The Metamorphosis*, the most powerful book of modern German literature [...] (Kafka 1990:271-72).

The torments of his illness and impending death accentuated his penetrating clarity and insight. At any rate, his creative self-healing process demands that we come face to face with those subterranean demons, those keepers of the law, and its untruth, who literally want to sentence us to death whilst alive; who

relentlessly seek to bring us to face medusa, head on to turn us into stone, entirely banish us from the human circle once and for all. Kafka's insight into death was the most ingenious way to confront those underground keepers of the law, who wanting to keep us in darkness keep subversive secrets to themselves, who wish to enslave our humanity into oblivion and forgetfulness. These are the demons of old that desire we become instinctual robot like monstrosities; who in order to market and sell their ideas products or machines without second thought subvert ethos for profit.

It is not by coincidence that metaphorically speaking, death never happens in a Kafka story; as in our life, it is already present in every moment implicit in every image invoked; the protagonist, as well as the reader, sees more and more clearly—he comes face to face—until he sees his own death. And alas! One has to keep in mind that death is evasive and slides by in the crevices; like life it absolutely resists interpretation. Kafka's ingenious dream narrative ascertains that death bears no object and cannot be objectified it rather is an incomprehensible presence, a presence that cannot be grasped but has to be felt as an ever-present manifest reality. Only thus can it be existentially embraced and accepted. But instead, we relentlessly shield ourselves from its existential reality by objectifying it; hence we push it away—as we lock our aged in sheltered homes, so we shelter ourselves from embracing death, which is an embracing of life-itself: feeling death's presence is feeling deeply alive.

According to Kafka, the human self is sick and direly wounded for it is divided against itself: knowledge and death against life. Our knowledge has become separated from our life—our life separated from our death. Thought becomes the will of an inhuman impulse which we call the deliberating consciousness of human beings, only it has turned against its own humanity for it has lost its creative power, as civilization has lost its creative life.

Kafka's solution is not a degradation of reason but a re-embracing of it through its unification with life as such. He is not an irrationalist seeking liberation from law and reason in a post-ethical universe of pure instinctual impulses. He plainly and simply sees that by the denial of death we have brought about our self-alienation and our estrangement from others, hence our endless instinctual affirmation of overspecialized and technical ways of thinking and being. Although thinking has been divorced from our life, paradoxically, it is only through our thinking that we can recover our life, but it is a creative thinking of a different order, one that heals and does not divide: so that life and reason, life and conscience, life and law are reunited. This unity reconciles life and death in its incomprehensible ultimate meaning, is tantamount to a healing of the split self in a way that integrates and harmonizes knowledge and life. Kafka's healing truth-process therefore requires a standing naked in front of death, so as to be able to freely choose and create life's ultimate meaning face to face with the universal void of meaninglessness.

For Kafka, death was fundamental to the activity of writing, which he felt defined his existence. However, he also felt that literature separated him from his existence. On August 6, 1914, he declared that his writing bears the constant torment of death and dying. To this we shall return in a moment.

Kafka's heightened sensitivity to life, which came from a perpetual awareness of his death, was internally experienced in the process of writing. This made him actually aware of the split between literature and existence, death and life, which in turn pushed him to try and reconcile the two by expressing the power and centrality of death-in-life and life-in-death through the traditions of allegory, paradox, metaphor, and parable, which later were transformed into a new literary genre of dream narrative. The dream narrative art form made it possible for his imagination to plunge depths of the self which were otherwise inaccessible. Through this new modality of expression Kafka hoped to accomplish an unprecedented unity between literature and existence. However, as he soon recognized, this proved impossible.

As previously cited in the opening quotes of this paper, in his diary entry on August 6, 1914, Kafka categorically states:

What will be my fate as a writer is very simple. My talent for portraying my dreamlike inner life has thrust all other matters into the background; my life has dwindled dreadfully, nor will it cease to dwindle. Nothing else will ever satisfy me. But the strength I can muster for that portrayal is not to be counted upon [...]

Thus, I waiver, continually fly the summit of the mountain, but then fall back in a moment...I waiver on the heights; it is not death, alas, the eternal torments of dying (1949b).

For Kafka, literature in itself can never offer the spiritual nourishment we crave it can only portray “the eternal torments of dying.” Literature like thought and art is a representation of life and not life-itself. Therefore, no true freedom can occur in literature; in and though literature all that can be accomplished is the exposure of the inner conflicts, contradictions, struggles and torments—the dialectic of hope and despair—but as for the healing of the split soul, it can only occur in and through life-itself. As a result, Gregor Samsa as well as most of Kafka’s protagonists can never find the spiritual food they seek.

Literature is evidence of having eaten from the ‘Tree of Knowledge,’ it can point the way to healing, but the true way, is the ‘Tree of Life.’ In a sense, Gregor’s alienation and deep estrangement can be seen as the plight of literature which strives for synthesis, integration, and harmony, but ends expressing only “the eternal torments of dying.” But at any rate, literature, as well as thought and art, reveal the inner tensions, point to the knowledge that provides the guiding light of orientation. Knowledge disclosed in and through literature becomes a signpost that points the direction toward the integration and harmony of the split self, to the self which seeks its own recovery. These are the redeeming and healing effects of literature, thought, and art—“the eternal torments of dying.” Through them one can see things which others who are not aware of their ever-present dying cannot see glimpse or fathom. The key to healing the split self, or else unite the split between writing and existence, is to be able to meet death with contentment!

On December 13, 1914, Kafka made the following diary entry:

The best things I have written have their basis in this capacity of mine to die contentedly; all these fine and very convincing passages always deal with the fact that somebody is dying, that it is hard for him to do so, that it seems unjust to him or at least cruel [...]. For me however, who believe that I’ll be able to lie contentedly on my deathbed [...] I positively enjoy my own death in the dying person’s, therefore I calculatingly exploit the attention that the reader concentrates on death, understand it a lot more clearly than he, who I assume will complain on his deathbed, and for these reasons my complaining [lament] is as perfect as can be, doesn’t suddenly break off in the way real complaining is likely to do, but dies away beautifully and purely (1949b; my brackets).

Insight and contentment seem to be the discerning ways to meet the unhappy things of modernity. “Kafka is asking us,” writes Ostovich (2009:62), “to have the courage to stay and look, to see the world as it is and ourselves as we are—and only then to dare to hope.” Further, we are called upon by the spirit of the times to challenge and heal the despair that hovers above modernity by discovering and recovering “the courage to hope nonetheless (63).”

Modernity in Kafka’s Metamorphosis

Today we live in the ‘age of globalization’ founded upon the consumer/producer society and its massive mercantilist organizational structure. Globalization essentially establishes its basis in technology and its information systems. Modernity then is also rightly called the ‘age of technology’ or else the ‘information age;’ but it could very well have been called the ‘age of disinformation.’ *Téchne* in ancient Greek means ‘knowledge,’ albeit a sacred form of knowledge that emerges through a participatory engagement with others and with life as such. However, in modernity the meaning of *téchne* has been transformed into that of technique—indeed a malformed metamorphosis. As such, today technology essentially informs knowledge through the *logos* of technique; and of course with technique arise the infinite possibilities of knowledge disinformation, or else malformation and deformation. The difference

between the ancient and modern meanings of *téchne* becomes all the more apparent, when we contradistinguish the calculative scope of technical knowledge with the existential knowledge gained from experience and reflection on life's purposefulness.

The massive hegemonic rule of technology/technique invades the privacy of our homes and cities, governmental agencies and businesses, mostly projects itself in every corner of the world and every culture. Technology has indeed become an autonomous and complex organizational structure of beliefs, values, standardized knowledges and systems of simulation that modify nature and manipulate information and humans at the beck and call of economic forces and the burgeoning homogeneity of thought and culture. Technology's system necessity continuously bombards us through globalized media networks, television, satellite, and internet creating a surface knowledge economy that masks truth and transforms all life processes into spectacle and imagery, pathologically accentuating a frenzy of novelties and innovations, unnecessary needs and desires. Most ironically, technology's metamorphosed reign has turned into an uncontrollable instinctual monstrosity that masquerades as the originator of *téchne*—in its ancient meaning—the initiator of all that is good and beautiful; self-generating within its system necessity the unbecoming illusion that it is an original substitute for nature as source of all life and creativity. Undoubtedly, the modern technological revolution reveals its sweeping dominance in a way that is completely inimical to life.

Michaelides (2011) appropriately points out that in modernity “the conscious human lives and thinks at the boundaries of the modern technological conglomerate.” Continuing, he elaborates that having “taken a life of its own,” today's technological enterprise:

Aside from organizing [...] up raw materials, resources, bureaucratic processes, technologies, and in measure scientific inquiry itself, it has also organized human thinking and humans as such in its organizing activity. As last and ultimate resource, the human is turned into ‘consumable mass’ a mere pond invoked by the indefinite systematisation and circulation of information and energy; it is flattened in existence left drained and dehumanized. In fact, the labyrinthine ways of unbridled technological dispensation no longer seem to belong to the human rather belong to the age of the ‘post-human’ and to technology's own system necessity. As for the human, already in abysmal ground stripped of all agency and resource, it tends to passively accept its numbness and powerlessness against the darkening processes of spiritual decay, fragmentation, disintegration, the general loss of all faith and sense of direction [...].

Already in mid-twentieth century, Jacques Ellul (1964:128) observes that “Technique has taken over the whole of civilization. Death, procreation, birth, all must submit to technical efficiency and systematization.” He further ascertains that technique has developed into an independent power and energy that “strives...for mechanization of everything it encounters (12)” that proceeds to possess and contain the human in its organizing scheme and encompassing systematization. It assimilates a social world independent of persons making the individual “a servant...completely unconscious of himself (138).” Thus humans seek “an absolute distraction” or else, “the simultaneous fusion of consciousness with an omnipresent technical diversion (380).” He aptly discerns that “television [the same could be said today for the computer and internet], because of its power of fascination and its capacity of visual and auditory penetration, is probably the technical instrument which is most destructive of personality and of human relations (378; my brackets).” Accordingly, humans have “become accustomed to listening to machines and talking to machines” there is “no more face to face encounters, no more dialogue (379).”

Likewise, Heidegger (1977) defines the *logos* of technology as enframing (*Gestell*); for technique enframes everything compelling it to yield its pool of knowledge and energy; everything is on standing-reserve to be exploited; all resource finds its place in a reservoir of stock for instantaneous availability—to be supplied upon demand:

Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve (*Bestand*). The word expresses here something more, and something more essential, than mere “stock.” The name “standing-reserve” assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric (17).

As such, the massive and rapacious bidding of the modern technological conglomerate absorbs everything into itself. It secures and exploits an ever-widening array of commercialized resources, which it commands at will in accordance to the biddings of its nihilistic rubric or circuitry. Modern technology, Heidegger (1977) tells us, “unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching about...reveals to itself its own manifoldly interlocking paths, through regulating their course. This regulating itself...is everywhere secured (16),” securing in advance the elimination of anything that may impede or encumber the reign of its prearranged organizational body or rubric. Hence, technology’s unrestrained and nightmarish dispensation nihilistically wipes out freedom of choice, insight and creativity, self and other, body as well as mind. Mostly, the modern reign of technological dominance tends to abolish our natural sense of place or space, including the earth and its inhabitants, genuine relationships, and above all humans, friendship, and the sacred.

Nicolae (2015) insightfully discerns the connections of Kafka’s novella to the modern situation. ‘The Metamorphosis,’ she says

foregrounds the condition of the individual in the modern society, an individual who is weighed down by the awareness of his own insignificance in relation to the others and his own dreams. By means of memory he tries to resist his new identity in an alienated and alienating world/space in which the others gradually turn from passive witnesses into mighty ‘victimizers’ whose indifference proves too much for the weakened self (143).

Gregor Samsa’s self-alienation, his humiliating metamorphosis, is indeed reminiscent of the modern predicament of human beings in the technological era of machines brute facts and information systems, points through and through to the reality of material existence and the possibilities of its deterioration, consequently moves toward the complete subversion of an ethical universe. Gregor’s metamorphosis from a civilized man into a horrific and monstrous vermin, an instinctual underworld character with an almost automatic nature, and finally to a simple bit of matter, turns him into an antagonist who upsets all the instincts of life. Indeed, Kafka’s underworld vermin gives rise to a deep and stifled impulse in modernity, to the gradual spiritual death of the human, a metamorphosis par excellence of the human *substantia* (with no *potentia*: influence, power, might, or sway), that overrides all instinctual and hermeneutical bounds, pointing ever more so to a *reductio ad absurdum*: the untenable yet real reduction of human beings to a piece of matter and information moving toward the inorganic, making them at par with all animals. Henceforth, the humiliated modern human -uprooted beyond bound, stripped of all ethical purposefulness, no longer a moral entity given to thinking and questioning- is, called to *de facto* accept and obey the mastermind of simulated techno capital reality, and, the geophysical enterprise of its vested interests.

Gregor Samsa’s literal verminous monstrosity metaphorically expresses our modern spiritual trials to come to terms with the torments of our literal ebbing away, both as individuals and as a collective; whilst our numerous underworld wounds of subterranean psychological import, point to the spiritual sickness of this seemingly most ‘unhappy of ages,’ wounds which no doctor seems to be able to heal.

Indeed, our times reserve nightmarish dreams and thus present a great challenge for the disillusioned human who undertakes the deep inquiry into the alleys and byways of the eclipse of ethos today. For undeniably in modernity everything is leveled to pure productive outcomes of speed and efficiency so humans are reduced to automatons, mere things, dead whilst alive; that is the ruination of self, of culture and of hope. But there is a catch, the thoughtful and creative human is called upon the task to become

exceedingly aware of the modern ruins and “eternal torments of dying” brought about by the cloistering of self, and the cold blooded predilection of the unbridled technological life-world. To this end, the person with an advancing consciousness must rise up to heal the wounded heart, to heal self and earth, at once safeguarding what is humane good and beautiful. The key lies in the individual heart that enlivens the unceasing search for the enlightened compassionate spirit.

Abbreviations

M - “The Metamorphosis.”

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