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Hans-Ulrich Derlien

**Bureaucracy in Art and Analysis:
Kafka and Weber**

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Foreword

This essay turned out to be lengthier than I had expected. There are two reasons for it: first, I am not an homme de lettre, but (in Max Weber's original meaning of the word) a dilettant when it comes to literature. Second, I had been contemplating for quite a long time to embark on this subject, the workshop merely provided the stimulus to arrange the material I had collected over the years, and I am reluctant to leave out things which occasionally may surpass the confines of the title, but nevertheless appear important to me in trying to arrive at a well-rounded picture of Kafka and Weber and the relationship between both men.

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1. Introduction

Sociology of knowledge works on the assumption that literary fiction, through personal concern of the artist, is reflecting social problems and societal conditions. Yet, surprisingly little work has been done in the German speaking countries to analyze the reflection of bureaucracy as a social phenomenon in literature, although Franz Kafka (1883-1924) is undoubtedly an outstanding author in world literature whose novels owe their grotesk (kafkaesk) appeal to bureaucratic settings. The neglect of the bureaucratic contents of German literary fiction by German linguists and social scientists is the more surprising, as Kafka's older contemporary Max Weber (1864-1920) is commonly regarded the leading sociological theorist on bureaucracy.

This asymmetry between artistic excellence in Kafka's case as well as the theoretical achievement of Max Weber on the one hand, and the lack of meta-theoretical treatment by Germanists¹ and social scientists on the other hand, is the more obvious, when we take into account that the administrative novel as a special genre has been long discussed in the USA (Egger 1959; Kroll 1965; Savage 1965; McCurdy 1973), that anthologies of fiction have been edited to teach "bureaucracy" (Coser 1963, esp. 186-191; Holzer et al. 1979), and that Kafka's and Weber's conception of bureaucracy have even been compared in the US (McDaniel 1971). In Germany, however, social scientists - as far as I can see - have not dealt with the bureaucratic contents of Kafka's work, and among literary experts on Kafka the main currents of interpretation are transcendental or psychological, while the bureaucratic aspects are largely neglected; only recently has the bureaucratic paradigm been applied to Kafka and at that parallels to Weber have been developed by Germanists.

¹ It is indicative that the lexikon of literary motives by Frenzel (1976a; 1976b) does not contain the topics of bureaucracy, administration, civil service, or state.

In this essay I attempt to highlight Kafka as the outstanding German-language novelist on bureaucracy; in drawing attention to his treatment of bureaucracy I shall apply Weberian categories in order to illuminate the inherent conceptual relationship between the artist and the social scientist (Section 3) as well as their common evaluation of bureaucracy (Section 5). Regarding Kafka as a writer on bureaucracy is, though, not quite in line with the main currents of interpretation (Section 4). Section 6 is to transcend the immanent parallels and to point out some explanatory factors by illuminating the intellectual background of Kafka's literary and Weber's theoretical production; furthermore, I shall follow two traces that point even at indirect biographical relationships between Kafka and Weber. Before embarking on these tasks I should, though, like to review briefly 20th Century German literature as to its bureaucratic bearing. Kafka's outstanding fictional contribution will then become more visible.

2. Bureaucracy as a Topic in 20th Century German Literature

Although bureaucracy had developed in the major German states during the 19th C. and the term itself had become accepted in its depreciatory meaning (Albrow 1970; Wunder 1987), the Germans did not breed novelists like Balzac or Gogol², with the exception perhaps of E.T.A. Hoffmann, the Prussian jurist³, and Heinrich von

² Honoré de Balzac, "Les Employées" contained in his "Human Comedy" series (1842-48); see also his satirical journalistic contributions as contained in Drost/Riha (1978); Nicolai Gogol's "The Dead Souls" (1842). Balzac and Gogol had administrative experience. For a comparison between Gogol and Kafka see Karst (1975).

³ E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), cf. Wassermann (1975) and Blomeyer (1978) for Hoffmann's professional work.

Kleist, the Prussian officer⁴. Be it the a-political thinking of German poets, be it the threat of censorship, only during the 20th C. novelists produced notable fiction reflecting the "bureaucratization of the world" (Jacoby 1969). Without claiming to have an exhaustive overview of 20th Century literary fiction, I dare to make some general statements about the kind of literary production that contains bureaucratic elements.

The type of literature⁵ most proliferant on bureaucracy is the critical political novel ranging from Heinrich Mann and Lion Feuchtwanger to the late Heinrich Böll. The sector of bureaucracy most frequently treated is, thus, the juridical and the police apparatus of the state. While Lion Feuchtwanger ("Erfolg", 1927) deals critically with the selective working of the Bavarian juridical system after 1919, Jakob Wassermann ("Der Fall Mauritius", 1928; "Etsel Andergast", 1931) depicts the struggle of a state attorney's son for the revision of a life sentence in favour of a falsely accused murderer, culminating in a fight against his own father. Police terror is treated by Franz Werfel ("Cella oder die Überwinder", 1939/1954) from the - autobiographical - perspective of an emigrant from Austria in 1938. The same topic is dealt with in Siegfried Lenz's "Deutschstunde" (1973), where a painter who was charged with Berufsverbot by the Nazi regime is supervised and persecuted by a village policeman. And the late Heinrich Böll in his "Katharina Blum" (1978) criticizes the ope-

⁴ 1777-1811. Most well-known among his prose is "Michael Kohlhaas" (1810).

⁵ The most frequent type of fiction playing in a bureaucratic setting is not regarded as serious literature in my country: detective stories and spy novels. Cf. for the English language countries Neuse (1980); Dobel (1988). For West Germany the administrative detective stories by Horst Bosetzky (pseudonym -ky) should not go without mention, as -ky is an administrative scientist; see also Bosetzky (1980).

rations of the political police during anti-terrorist actions of the 1970's.

Within this context the most pertinent perspective is that of the individual citizen suffering from the actions of authoritative state organs. Furthermore, the focus is on implementing agencies.

Only rarely is the bureaucratic setting found in the ministerial or political bureaucracy as in Robert Musil's "Mann ohne Eigenschaften" (1921-42), playing in the pre-1918 Vienna bureaucracy; or in Hans Fallada's "Wolf unter Wölfen" (1937), centering around the preparation of the 1923 Kapp-Putsch in Prussian East-Elbia; to be mentioned is also his "Bauern, Bonzen, Bomben" (1931), telling the story of a social-democrat regional governor under right wing political attack. Furthermore, mention should be made of Franz Werfel's "Eine blaßblaue Frauenschrift" (1941), where an Austrian ministerial section head sees himself in trouble in the 1930's after being confronted with an imaginary illegitimate child from a Jewish girlfriend. In addition, in Carl Zuckmeyer's "Des Teufels General" (1946) the military bureaucracy⁶ under the Nazi regime is critically described as to the limits of internal criticism, resistance and conformity. Klaus Mann's "Mephisto" (1936) treats the career of a politically opportunist theatre actor and later intendant general of the Prussian state theatres after the so-called seizure of power by the Nazis in 1933.

While the reader gains an accurate impression of the personalities of the bureaucratic actors in most of these novels, the bureaucratic personality is the subject matter only in Heinrich Mann's "Der Untertan" (1918) or his "Professor Unrath" (1905), portraying the characters of a subaltern Prussian official and a

⁶ I leave out of consideration novels reflecting on military and war as, for instance, Remarque's "Im Westen nichts Neues" or Arnold Zweig's "Erziehung vor Verdun".

schoolmaster during the Kaiser Reich, respectively. Mann's "Untertan" was censored when it first appeared. Mention should also be made of Joseph Roth's "Radetzky-marsch" (1932) critically illuminating the decline of the Habsburg monarchy and the concomitant social and psychological dissolution. In general, school teachers are the most frequently ridiculed type of civil servant without, however, always being the protagonists in the respective novels.⁷ Structural and functional aspects of bureaucracy interacting with the bureaucratic personality are, though, hardly paid attention to by one of the above mentioned authors.

In historical perspective it can be observed that the most productive period during which administrative fiction was produced in German literature were the 1920's and early 1930's, i.e. the period of the first republic. Before 1919 monarchy and military dictatorship did not provide the intellectual freedom to deal (critically as it basically was) with public bureaucracy and organs of the authoritative state; the same holds true for the Nazi regime. After 1949 during the second republic most novelists belonging to the older generation continued work where they had to stop in 1933 (Mayer 1968). Also younger authors, as far as they wrote historical or political novels like Grass and Böll, basically dealt with war and postwar experiences alleging the hypocrisy of the middle class (Böll) or illuminating individual adaptations to adverse political conditions (Grass; Lenz).

Furthermore, it might not be exaggerated that quite a bit of the relevant literature noted above was produced under Habsburg regime: Musil, Werfel, Roth - not to speak of Franz Kafka! It is indicative that of the "Reich's German" Nobel laureates, neither Thomas Mann nor Hermann Hesse, except to a certain extent Gerhard Hauptmann in his dramas, have produced novels with men-

⁷ See the anthology by Armanski et al. (1977).

tionable bureaucratic topics. The imbalanced treatment of bureaucratic aspects in the literary production of Th. Mann or H. Hesse on the one hand and, e.g. H. Mann and Lion Feuchtwanger on the other hand is obviously rooted in differences in *Weltanschauung* (apolitical, idealist and aestheticist vs. critical and even Marxist thinking) as well as party political commitments before 1933, which extended into the 1950's. It is also indicative that most of the authors who were critical about bureaucratic domination before 1933 emigrated⁸ (H. Mann, L. Feuchtwanger, J. Roth, F. Werfel, Zuckmeyer, K. Mann) or wrote major works during emigration; some of them were not even well received after 1945 in West Germany, but returned (with their works) to East Germany owing to their strong antifascist stand before 1945.

As a matter of course, Kafka's novels, all of which had been posthumously published in the 1920's and were not widely read anyway, were suppressed during the Nazi-era. Being a rather a-political novelist, his works underwent a renaissance in the 1960's - as did Max Weber's.

Politically motivated writers perceived first of all bureaucracy's nature as an instrument of domination and took the perspective of the individual citizen or society at large suffering from suppression. With Kafka, however, this question of legitimacy of bureaucratic domination is not of prime importance, his novels not even refer to a specific place or point in time. The uniqueness of his treatment of bureaucracy comes to the fore, because he deals with structural and functional aspects of bureaucracy and adopts a variety of perspectives on bureaucracy. From the point of view of sociology of knowledge it is the more exiting to investigate, where he took his empirical material from.

⁸ So did, however, others like Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse, too.

3. Kafka's Work in Weberian Perspective

There is hardly any other author in world literature whose work appears so deeply coloured by features of the bureaucratic state apparatus. There is, first of all, the technical nature of the titles of most of his stories and novels: "Report to an Academy", "The Penal Colony", "The Judgement", "The Trial" or "The Castle". Secondly, the setting is regularly an organization or an office; in addition the characters are typically officials in the widest sense of the word. Kafka like no writer before or after him uses core institutions of the modern state as the scenery of his novels: The penal colony, the juridicial court, and the castle exerting political domination - they all would, in a Weberian sense, exercise the monopoly of physical power over civil society.

In the following paragraphs I shall try to elaborate the bureaucratic contents of Kafka's most famous novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*. After having sketched the stories of both novels, I shall demonstrate that the very bureaucratic elements of these works can be analyzed in terms of Max Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy.

3.1 The Stories and the Characters

The Trial, written between 1914 and 1917, published posthumously by Max Brod in 1925, deals with an incident that initially disturbs and - after a year - finally destroys the life of Josef K., a managing director of a bank. K. is legally charged with something nobody can tell him; the novel starts with the sentence "Somebody must have slandered Josef K." He will never find out who denounced him and what he is accused of, but the case is officially investigated by a lower law court in a secret procedure. Josef K., not being aware of any guilt, initially attacks the authorities in a self-confident, principled way and encounters a court,

whose rules of procedure he cannot find out, by whose members he is disgusted, and the offices of which are shabby.

To help himself in this situation he cannot rationally control, he tries to establish contacts to higher ranking officials through women, who have relations with them; he also engages an attorney (Dr. Huld) whom, however, he sacks after six months because of inactivity. The attorney as well as the official portraitist of the court (Titorelli), from whom the hero also tries to find out informally about his situation, teach him how the juridical system is working and how much depends on personal connections with the officials.

At the same time the social pressure exerted by relatives and engendered by competition in the bank is increasing; virtually everybody knows about the prosecution Josef K. cannot even defend himself against. When his professional activity is endangered, because his involvement in the trial is increasingly time consuming and becomes his central concern, he is confronted with a prison chaplain in a dome he originally had to guide a businessman through. There he is told the parable of the Doorkeeper of the Law⁹, who does not permit a man to enter one of the doors leading to the law. After the man had been waiting for admission to the law for the rest of his life, the custodian, on the visitor's last question, enigmatically replies that the gate had been specifically designed from the beginning on for the visitor's entry. Finally, on his 31st birthday, Josef K. is carried away by two executioners in black dress, whose habit reminds him of hospital warders, and is executed outside the town, a knife stabbed into his heart, without ever having heard a judgement.

In *The Castle*, written 1920-22 and published in 1926, the protagonist "K." does not try to escape the grip of

⁹ The parable does not merely technically remind of Dostojevski's parable of the Grand Inquisitor in "The Brothers Karamasov", as the clue is about spiritual salvation.

an authority, but to get employed in the administration of a castle dominating a village, but he is being rejected. On the evening of K.'s, the land-surveyor's, arrival in the village he is told in the pub that no surveyor were awaited. K. telephones to the castle, but receives contradicting replies and no official confirmation of his employment. The whole story thereafter deals with K.'s attempts to establish himself in the village and to come into touch with a higher official (Klamm) in the castle's administration to settle his terms of employment. As in *The Trial*, his strategy is to contact Klamm through a mistress (Frieda), whom K. even gets engaged with for a while, and through subaltern clerks and messengers, who live in the village. He succeeds in getting a letter from Klamm accepting K. for service without, however, stating precisely the terms of employment. Consequently, K. is given the status of a school clerk by the village mayor. In the course of his attempt to improve his lot, he learns about the functioning of the castle's administration by the mayor, who explains to K. what might have caused contradictory decisions and lost correspondence. By illegally smuggling himself into the residence of the higher officials he can talk to some of them (Bürgel, Erlanger) at night and observes in the morning, how the bureaucratic procedure gets started by the distribution of files. Klamm, however, the high (but by no means the top) official, is only secretly observed by K. through a hole in one of the doors in the pub. The end of the story is not contained, but Max Brod, in the epilogue to the novel, reports that Kafka had told him, K. would die in fatigue, but is informed on the deathbed that the castle had given permission that he stay in the village.

Kafka's characters in general and the protagonists are taken from the professions: country doctor, salesman, soldiers, managing bank director, surveyor and - most prominent in the two novels under consideration - public officials: civil servants of various ranks and

the law professions. The author's imaginary counterpart, although not a proper civil servant, nevertheless belongs to the historically new professional service class (managing director, surveyor), too, who serve in (private) bureaucratic organizations. The protagonists are bachelors and of no possession.

Most of the other figures of Kafka's cast are taken from "normal" society in a peculiar sense:

- Females in *The Trial* and *The Castle* serving as a vehicle to convey biographical information about the author in a relatively straightforward way; they are an assembly of his various acquaintances, like Frieda in *The Castle* (Milena) or Fräulein Bürstner in *The Trial* (Felice) and others. Their relation to the protagonist as well as to other characters including K.'s opponents is predominantly sexual.
- Villagers in *The Castle* are rough and live in poor condition, as Kafka had experienced during his stay on the countryside. They are not much different from the proletarian characters living in the court building on the outskirts of the town where the trial is assumed to take place. As far as they are personally related to the authorities (the family of Barnabas (Castle) or the clerk's wife (Trial)), they are objectively existentially dependent on and exploitable by the officials, but subjectively gain self-esteem by having connections with officials.
- A third group consists of a sort of service class: the landlords of the two pubs in the Castle, where the villagers and K. or the civil servants (in the Herrenhof) gather, correspond to Franz K.'s attorney and the portraitist who live in a sort of symbiosis with the court officials.

Their behaviour is markedly different from that of the authoritative personnel; while the latter is often inaccessible (both in a social and in a spatial sense of the word), members of civil society have social intercourse with K. and display even a life history (Gardena in the Castle), while the civil servants and the protagonists are exclusively shown

as functionaries without individual traits.

Josef K. and K. are mostly confronted with members of civil society and with subordinate officials of the lowest status: messengers, the usher, clerks, K.'s two undisciplined assistants, and the schoolmaster in *The Castle*, servants in the bank, an official thrasher, and warders. As the protagonist in both novels has at least initially no personal experience with the higher strata of the officials, it is through these subaltern characters and civil figures, who have been subjected to the officials' domination, that he forms his image of the officials and of court and castle bureaucracies.

3.2 Structural Elements of Bureaucracy

Utterly unusual for an artist, Kafka, in both of the novels under consideration, gives the reader insights into the internal technical functioning of bureaucracies in a manner, which is partly highly analytical; the author achieves the necessary degree of detachment by deviating from his typical approach of viewing the world through the protagonist's subjective perspective; instead he has other characters (the village mayor, the attorney, and the portraitist) give K. lectures on hierarchical communication, departmental specification of jurisdictions or the decision-making process.¹⁰ Only occasionally, the protagonist observes technical procedures himself like the early morning circulation of files¹¹. In addition, there is the experience K. himself has of the social life of the bureaucrats and his assessment of their characters.

In order to convey to the reader of this essay the richness of Kafka's observation of bureaucracy I shall systematize the material by applying the characteri-

¹⁰ Most impressively in ch. 5 of *The Castle* and ch. 7 and 8 of *The Trial*

¹¹ Ch. 19 of *The Castle*

stics of Max Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy¹² (Max Weber 1976, 124 ff.; 551-79).

- The separation of private household and public office, which is important in Weber's historical account of the emergence of European states and bureaucracies, has not yet fully developed in Kafka's bureaucracy. Even higher civil servants have beds in their offices (at least in the Castle), and on the subaltern level the private living room is often used for official purposes; indeed officials receive clients while lying in bed: so do the village mayor and officials in the castle (Erlanger, Bürgel) when working at night; K. and his fiancée are still asleep in the classroom, which serves as their bedroom, when the children and the teacher enter; the official portraitist has a bed in his room in the court, too (Josef K. has even to climb over it). When Josef K. visits the court, he is disoriented, because he finds the court room hidden in a storey house and has to enter it through a private flat; offices are situated under the roof, where the laundry is drying. Closely related to the separation of office from household is

- monetary payment of officials; only under this condition can political control over the "staff of domination" be fully exercised in Weber's view. Again, Kafka's bureaucracy does not measure up to the "fully developed" Weberian type; in particular the lowest ranks depend on natural goods as remuneration and, thus, often live in the office building like K. after his degradation to a school clerk. On the other hand, monetary payment is so low that officials turn corrupt in *The Trial* - an aspect which fills the principled and explicitly incorruptable bank-director Josef K. with disgust. It is also this factor that exposes the female characters to the sexual greed of the officials: they cannot afford to attract the hate

¹² Without reducing their range by cutting out the historically important features, as organization sociologists usually do.

of the officials if denying themselves; the consequences are fatal, as the case of the Barnabas family (Amalia) demonstrates. In turn,

- full time employment is not the rule; only the higher echelons can devote themselves fully to office work, while the servicemen often still have a private basis of subsistence (Barnabas as a shoemaker); and the (honorary) mayor does his official paperwork merely during evening hours. On the other hand, the higher officials, in order to relax from their paperwork, retreat to woodwork¹³.

One could even go so far and maintain that the typical layman administration ("Dilettantenverwaltung"), which Weber likes to contrast with the professional bureaucracy, is accurately depicted with the mayor in *The Castle*, his sloppy file keeping and irregular work on incoming proceedings; he also needs the village teacher for communication and draws on his wife's advice.

Professional training is implied for the higher officials in the novels; they are obviously jurists. In *The Trial* there is a law student helping the investigative judge and envisioning a future career as a state attorney. As the higher social strata, the officials, are generally not individually characterized but are displayed as examples of the functionary type without a biography, there is no room nor need for Kafka to elaborate on this feature.

- Striving for career advancement, however, is a more visible topic in Kafka's. Josef K. is afraid of the competition by the deputy director of his bank, when his professional attention is increasingly distracted by the trial. The thrasher, who punishes the warders, as well as the warders themselves are afraid to forego promotion, unless Josef K. succeeds in stop-

¹³ Kafka himself reportedly did gardening in order to relax from office work.

ping the punishment, which in turn the thrasher is reluctant to do for the same reason.

In general, however, the concern is less with advancement in an established career, but with entering a career or a job. Be it K.'s unsuccessful attempt to be employed as a surveyor, be it Barnabas', the messenger's, hope to become elevated to a fulltime servant.

- **Hierarchy** appears in the novels in various meanings. First, there is the hierarchy of bureaus: in the court system as well as between village administration and the castle. The working of the higher offices is normally intransparent to lower officials and the protagonist; they seem to follow different rules and decision criteria, too.

Second, the characters of the stories act in hierarchical interpersonal official relationships with the higher officials not being directly accessible for lower members of the system. K. needs some time and advice to find out the hierarchical order. For instance, in *The Castle* the hierarchy runs from K's servicemen through K. (school clerk), the teacher, the mayor, the village secretary in the castle (Bürgerel), Erlanger, and finally Klamm.

Third, the social order corresponds to the hierarchy of offices: subordinate officials are poor and hardly distinguishable from K. as to their social conduct. Only when they are on official mission, they are distinct: Barnabas, having brought a letter, drops his fine coat and displays a dirty shirt. Even subordinate servants in the court distinguish themselves only by wearing signs on their collars and bright buttons, while they are indistinguishable from the clients in other respects.

The state/castle officials socially gather in a par-

ticular pub (Herrenhof)¹⁴, while the villagers drink beer in the "Brückenhof", the only place K. is permitted to. Klamm is even separated in a room of his own in the Herrenhof. As K. initially does not understand the function of higher civil servants and the private-public-role distinction, he starts observing Klamm secretly and tries to establish contact by using personal relations. In *The Trial* Josef K. complains, that the officials lack contact to the citizens and have no sense for human relations: the judges therefore have to rely on the attorney asking his advice how to assess a case.

- Discipline, in Weber's perspective the product of increasingly methodical conduct of life (and rationalization in general) culminating in devotion to one's calling, is a dimension which distinguishes the higher officials from their servants, who are still integrated with the rest of society. Subalterns are characterized by inactivity, both in the sense of completely depending on orders, and of sluggishness in executing the orders; they also do not sufficiently concentrate on their jobs but are easily distracted and follow private objectives: while K. himself does not get up in time from his bed in the classroom, his two assistants are permanently fooling around¹⁵. Indicatively, they have not undergone the professional training to assist the surveyor. Even the investigative judge in *The Trial* is covering pornography in his dirtied manual. Contrariwise, the higher officials are featured as being completely ab-

¹⁴ Germanists contend that the Herrenhof is an analogy to the Kaffeehaus in Vienna which Pollack, the husband of Milena, one of Kafka's affairs, used to attend.

¹⁵ Here I should subscribe to the psychological interpretation, that K's assistants symbolize irrational aspects of Kafka's personality and two uncontrollable hands; in ch. 2 of *The Castle* K. declares that he will be calling both of them "Arthur" and treat them like one person, because he cannot keep them distinct.

sorbed in their office work: they handle cases in a principled manner, interpret the law from a higher perspective than the subordinate courts, observe their departmental boundaries, exert themselves by working even through the night¹⁶ (and therefore have to sleep in their bureaus). This work ethic corresponds to the peculiar existential circumstance that higher officials are removed from the "real life" in a spatial as well as in an intellectual respect: in their offices they do not know what is going on in the world, what motivates people and what are the particularities of an individual case like K.'s. What is not represented in the records, does not exist for them; in order to understand they have to ask boundary personnel, e.g. the private attorneys, to provide them with additional information and advice. Office routines appear to have shaped the personalities of the higher civil servants; they dislike appearing in public, abhor light, and are easily irritable by the slightest changes of exterior arrangement of the work place¹⁷. K. and Josef K. suspect them to hide and to avoid contact with them, the more so as they are socially separated and not only are inaccessible in the castle or in superior offices outside town, but also gather in their own pub.

The protagonists have also to learn from people familiar with Klamm or Sortini that these higher officials are subjectively suffering from the burden of their duty: they are nervous and permanently tired owing to a chronic lack of sleep.

These dysfunctional consequences of excessive office work strangely contrast with the protagonists perception of the masters' social behaviour: they turn angry and even vengeful, when clients disturb their administrative work; they appear "like children", e.g.

¹⁶ Much of Kafka's literary production took place during night hours.

¹⁷ As Kafka himself (and many an intellectual); cf. Binder (1976, 409)

when struggling for their share of the files in the morning. An equivalent to the monetary corruption of subalterns can be seen in their sexual greed and reckless personal exploitation of female service personnel, when they are out of office and no longer bound by discipline.

- Division of labour, demarcation of jurisdictions and specialization within an office and between horizontally and vertically arranged authorities are well described in both of the novels, between lower and higher courts as well as within the castle and between various reviewing agencies. These functional aspects, which the protagonists are told by "expert observers", deserve the entry into textbooks of organization theory¹⁸. Here we come across phenomena like departmental identification and selective perception, as observed by Herbert Simon, instances of structurally filtering information, and deadlocks in the decisionmaking process when K.'s record gets lost (and he is consoled that it is bound to turn up one indefinite day) or when contradictory decisions arrive as to his employment.
- Communication and decision-making, the processes structured by hierarchy and areas of jurisdiction, are the central focus of the novelist. Between hierarchical offices written communication is predominant and confusion arises when the mayor cannot find a letter concerning K.'s case. Higher courts will receive the records of lower courts and review the cases on the basis of the records without entering the stage of information gathering¹⁹, but are likely to arrive at completely different decisions without informing the lower courts about these decisions and their reasons. Another feature of vertical communica-

¹⁸ Ch. 5 of *The Castle* has been selected by Lewis A. Coser (1963, 186-191).

¹⁹ This is the practice of revision as opposed to appeal procedure.

tion is the system of written reports to higher echelons and offices. In *The Castle* K. is asked by Klamm's village secretary (Momus) to give account of his activities for a report to the castle, without being able to specify the purpose; Momus even has to admit that the report will probably never be read by the superiors; nevertheless, the procedure has to be carried through. Communication is, furthermore, described as pathological in the relationship between client and authority: the letter K. intermediately receives from Klamm praises the surveying work he has never done, is missing the point and arbitrarily interpreted by the mayor; stating his point in a written form would not help Josef K. with the court, he is advised by his attorney. Generally, the reader gets the impression that in contrast to interagency communication the client-office relationship decisively depends on face-to-face contacts and informal networks, which engender uncertainty for the protagonist in both novels on the one hand and at the same time induce him to manipulate the social fabric at the price of becoming dependent on boundary persons like Frieda and Barnabas or Dr. Huld and Titorelli.

My impression is that Kafka, in reflecting on his situation as an artistic writer, wants to draw attention to the basic problem of inadequacy of written communication²⁰ compared to information conveyed in face-to-face interaction. Written reports and statements are necessarily a selective mirror of real life or would be endless and infinitely detailed. This consideration is explicitly outlined in *The Trial* and makes Josef K. abstain from the necessarily "endless accurate description of all deeds and events of the entire life"²¹, which could be of relevance for the court to recognize his innocence. K. refuses

20 Bernheimer's (1977) interpretation elaborates on this almost epistemological problem.

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to give Momus, too, a "detailed account of today's afternoon"²², because he does not see which purpose it is to serve other than to disappear in the registry. As Josef K. does not know what he is accused of, he is lacking criteria of relevance for a statement, and as K. is not given an explanation relating the purpose of the report to his case, he refuses to cooperate.

- The typically bureaucratic impersonality of official-client relations, deriving from written communication, formal decision programme, status differences, specialization, and internal controls, is almost completely missing in Kafka's novels. Momus, the village secretary of the castle, of course, emphasizes that claiming the report be his duty, but seemingly understands K.'s resistance and is trying to persuade K. (with the help of the pub's landlady). In general, too much of Josef K.'s and K.'s aimed at success depends on personal relations occasionally backed by bribery, than one could talk of impersonality in Weber's sense. What at a first glance could appear as impersonal conduct of the higher officials is simply lack of interest in the case and the person behind the case.

The explanation of this difference between the picture Kafka draws and the Weberian model can be found in the fact that Kafka's bureaucracy is not of the legal-rational type shaped by the concept of Rechtsstaat, but obviously the type of a patrimonial bureaucracy. The lack of formal decision making rules (including external juridical controls of the bureaucracy) has been noted above; it should be added that impersonality, i.e. literally: treatment of a client without respect to his (in particular ascribed) social status, presupposes juridically the principle of equal rights for all citizens. Precisely this aspect of Rechtsstaat is mis-

²² p. 98, ch. 9

sing. As the absence of external controls accounts for the disinterested manner in which K.'s case is handled and ultimately for his employment being a matter of patrimonial grace, the missing standard of equal treatment is causing the very personal way the protagonists try to promote their cases and their existential dependency on good will of the officials even in procedural matters of the castle administration and the court. Equally, secrecy of operation and ambiguity of decision-making standards are properties not contained in the Weberian ideal type of legal-rational domination. In both novels the protagonists do not manage to look through the system, not even after insider instructions. Their subjective individual rationality grounded in common sense and experience of their own professions in banking and as a geographer, respectively, is confronted with the rationality of a system they do not understand. The more so as the decision premises of court and castle, the charge or the seriousness of the need to employ a surveyor, respectively, are kept in the dark. Aggravating the individual case, to Josef K. and K. rules and regulations of the "machine" - a metaphor used in the Penal Colony - are unknown and, thus, render bureaucracy intransparent and unreckonable.

Undoubtedly, the features of bureaucracy displayed in Kafka's novels can be related to all of the Weberian dimensions of bureaucracy. At present this proves not more than the heuristic value of Weber's model even in analyzing the text of an artist. It should also have become evident that Kafka's bureaucracy deviates from the historically "fully developed" model of bureaucracy and from its commonly normative interpretation. To a certain extent this is a reflection of bureaucratic reality during the Habsburg monarchy (Fischer 1962); the deviation from the rational model is, however, also an artistic device to express a fictional meaning.

4. Interpreting Kafka

How does this wealth of sociological and in particular bureaucratic observation combine with the main currents of Kafka interpretations, that almost completely neglect this aspect of the work? Before I turn to this point and offer an additional, not an alternative interpretation, some observations on Kafka's style should be recollected before one tries to come to grips with the novels' meaning.

4.1 Kafka's Style

The Kafkaesk and surrealistic in the novels (as in other pieces by the author) is grounded in a combination of different artistic techniques. First, there is the persistent application of the protagonist's subjective perspective, the technique of collapsing the author's and the protagonist's perception.²³ At best other actors shed some light on the scenery to enhance K.'s understanding of his situation and the bureaucratic system he is struggling with. This broadens his frame of reference, but the author's fictional counterpart remains in a state of undercomplexity vis à vis the system and permanently provokes the clash of individual and systems rationality.

Second, the actors behave like subjectively rational players of a game; there are no descriptions of emotions like despair, hate, rage, love²⁴ and, as I have pointed out above, the bureaucratic cast is conceptualized as a lot of functionaries without individual characteristics; when personal traits are reported, they more or less refer to the entire caste of bureaucrats. Third, the deviations from the ideal type I have just illustrated, are typical of Kafka's technique of running counter to the reader's expectations (e.g. the of-

²³ This "Einsinnigkeit" is emphasized by all of the literary critics; for Kafka's artistic style and technique in general see the comprehensive treatment in Binder (1979).

²⁴ The contrast between the absent notion of love and the scenes where sex plays a role (typically for Kafka: something dirty) is most obvious.

fice ecology of the court) and remind of the technique of estrangement (Verfremdung) Bert Brecht was later to employ. Kafka's phantasmagoric imagination causes frictions in the reader's view of the world and makes things appear irrational.

Equally prominent in literary science is the discussion about the use Kafka makes of metaphors and parables. Undoubtedly, already in the opening of *The Castle*, when the land-surveyor approaches the village and observes crows circumflying the castle, this might be a metaphor, as the name Kafka means "crow" in the Tchek language²⁵; Klamm, K.'s inaccessible opponent, later on is - in an analogy - perceived by K. as a lonely eagle drawing his majestic circles. Normally, however, the interpretation is not as easy as in this case, but strongly depends on the overall interpretation of the author's intentions. Furthermore, K.'s habit of taking metaphors literally produces grotesk situations; on the other hand, Kafka's precision of language contrasts to his ambivalence of syntax in as he displays a preference for the conditional clause. Then there is his obsession with details in painstaking descriptions of seemingly paraphernalical elements, symptomatic for the "bureaucratic impersonality of Kafka's style" (McDaniel 1971, 23). Furthermore, beginning and end of the novels are obscure; Josef K. all of a sudden is accused of something he does not find out all through the novel, and K. arrives in the village on the assumption of being employed without ever managing to clarify this point. All the same, Josef K. does not gain justice for his case, is executed without a proper trial and even accepts his fate; and K. finally dies without having achieved anything (except being allowed to stay in the

²⁵ Very often the names of the protagonists, also in Kafka's published novellas, obviously refer to the author's name, like the acronym "K.", Samsa in "Metamorphosis" is composed of five letters and contains two "a".

village, as Max Brod reports).²⁶ Finally, his stories happen in a setting, which does not refer to a specific time or space, and, thus, appear so enigmatic.

These artistic peculiarities of style and composition, which make him a forerunner of expressionism as well as surrealism, were bound to induce competing interpretations as to the meaning of his works and the message Kafka wanted to convey.

"The typical Kafka text derives much of its powerful effect from the intensity with which it simultaneously invites and frustrates interpretation" (Bernheimer 1977, 367).

4.2 Main Currents of Interpretation

There are basically two not mutually exclusive main currents of interpretation. The first, owing to Max Brod's early suggestion²⁷ put forward with the authority of Kafka's friend and posthumous editor, is a metaphysical interpretation. In this view, the hero's struggle for justice in front of god; thus, *The Trial* would be a metaphor for Kafka's attempt to justify his life, because in his opinion he did not suffice the rules (the Laws) of a decent life owing to his failure to get married.

This interpretation is backed by the strange differentiation Titorelli explains to Josef K. in *The Trial*: the court never declares a definite judgement of innocence, at best an ostensible acquittal (but the case can be taken up again at any time); only the Supreme Court could give absolution, therefore he advises Josef K. to try to delay the procedure.²⁸

All the same, the metaphysical interpretation argues, in *The Castle* K. were ultimately striving for god's

²⁶ Although Kafka did not want the novels to be published and did not give them the final touch, this does not mean that the plot had not been finished.

²⁷ In the postscript to the first edition of *The Castle* Brod is referring also to *The Trial*; see also Max Brod (1962, 214).

²⁸ Chapter 7

grace - in vain. For Brod "since the book of Hiob there has not been such a wild quarrel with god"²⁹ as in the novels by Kafka.

The second strand of interpretation is biographical and psychological focussing on Kafka's conflict with his father, who formed his super-ego. The supreme court or Klamm, therefore, would designate his father whose approval and acceptance he is longing for, but does not achieve due to his failure to live up to his father's standards of physical, professional, and marital success.

In fact, Kafka's second biographical problem stressed in the literature is his unwillingness or inability to establish a marital status.

The trial, thus, were reflecting the process of getting engaged to Felice Bauer and his dual dissolution of the engagement (Canetti 1969; Binder 1983, 138-148). In general, the female characters in the novels can fairly easily be decoded. Like the protagonists they are, as a rule, bachelors.

Furthermore, Sokel (1977) convincingly argues that The Trial as well as The Castle and other pieces deal with Kafka's attempt to come to terms with his role as fiction writer. The well established issue of the relationship between artist and society is turned into an existential and moral issue by Kafka. The artist is sentenced to death because he withdraws from real life symbolized by female characters.

Besides these three key issues in Kafka's life the biographical interpretations focus on, there are the common-sense psychologists, who stress the metaphorical character of the various persons and events in the novels.

K.'s undisciplined attendants, for instance, could be an allusion to instinctive reactions which cannot be rationally controlled. The overlapping jurisdictions in the castle symbolize the interdependence between parts of Kafka's mind (Binder 1976, 406 f.). In general, in this view it is "inevitable to interpret the work style

²⁹ Max Brod (1962, 204)

of the castle as a far reaching metaphor for Kafka's internal world".³⁰

4.3 Projection of Professional Experience

While other biographical aspects are recognized as simple transpositions in the novels, surprisingly the bureaucratic contents are not taken at face value reflecting Kafka's personal experience in the semi-state Bohemian Labourer Insurance Agency. At least Max Brod had conceded:

"It is clear that Kafka received a great deal of his knowledge of the world and of life as well as his skeptical pessimism from his office experience, from his contact with the labourers suffering from injustice, from the dragging official routine, and the stagnating life of the records. Entire chapters of the (two) novels take their shell, their realistic cover from the milieu experienced in theInsurance."³¹

It were, though, writers like Musil, Döblin, Tucholsky, and Brecht who appreciated the bureaucratic contents of Kafka's works as early as the 1930's, when Brecht even drew a parallel between Kafka's institutional allegories and the coming of the Nazi system with its legal insecurity, absolutist and terrorist state apparatus (Bück 1978, 223). In addition, it is remarkable that in the Soviet Union Kafka is read as an author depicting the bureaucratic universe of that society (Etkind 1978) and illuminating the individual's exposure to bureaucratic powers.³² Obviously, the patterns of interpretation are shaped by the socio-political situation of the reader and his intellectual background. Furthermore, as no serious fiction writer allows for one-

³⁰ Binder 1976, 408; ch. 5 on "Kafka and the bureaucratic apparatus", my translation

³¹ Max Brod (1962, 104 f.); my translation

³² By the way, Kafka had read Tolstoi's last novel "Resurrection" (1905), devoted to the subject of the juridical system and the practice of deportation (a novel that is therefore judged of inferior quality as a blatant purpose novel in Western literary circles; Dornemann 1984). "In the Penal Colony" could have been influenced by it as well as by other sources, cf. fn. 63. Dornemann (1984) even contends that *The Castle* be almost a plagiat of *Resurrection*.

dimensional interpretations, why shouldn't we add a third level of interpretation to the orthodox reading of Kafka's and treat the obvious bureaucratic contents as reflections of Kafka's bureau experience?³³

Hermsdorf has edited the official documents Kafka produced during his short career³⁴ in the semi-stately insurance agency. Several of the points I have made in paragraph 3.2 in relation to the Weberian model are underpinned by Hermsdorf (1984, 67-87).

For instance, that reports were not read, is immediately taken from Kafka's office experience: not all annual reports about accidents and risks could be read³⁵, Kafka complained. Decisions of the agency were based on incomplete information without contact to the firms and inspection of the sites.³⁶ Not only are the titles of the officials in the novels the same that were used in the agency,³⁷ Kafka also projected his physical symptoms (sleeplessness, irritability) onto his characters. Kafka suffered from the alienation stemming from the division of labour; thus, writing about the work conditions was a way of distancing himself from the office; after all, he had already left the agency, when he finished *The Castle* in 1922.

Weeks (1981) has convincingly argued that K.'s struggle to establish his terms of employment in *The Castle* and the general poverty of the subaltern officials are reflecting the claims of the lower civil ser-

³³ I want to emphasize that this is not an alternative, but an additional approach to understanding Kafka.

³⁴ 1908-1922, on a part-time job in order to enable him to devote himself to literary production; in 1922 K. retired due to his illness (throat cancer or tuberculosis) and received a pension; however, he had already been on leave for recovery several times since 1918.

³⁵ It should be mentioned here that even the complicated execution machine described in the Penal Colony had its real counterpart in the risky machines K. tried to improve (Wagenbach 1975).

³⁶ Hermsdorf (1984, 71) draws attention to the fact that Kafka's communication with women was basically through correspondence, too.

³⁷ Even the Italian names of some of the characters: Titorelli, Sortini, Sordini point at K.'s life experience; he had worked as a substitute in the private Assicurazioni Generali in 1907!

vants' movement in the Habsburg monarchy (1909-13) to improve their salary and to secure a fixed place within the civil service order. Kafka was still untenured apprentice in the agency (1908-10), when a new code regulated the status of public employees³⁸, a stratum kept apart from the civil servants, prohibited the provision of room and board, and required that the salary be decided on only after a probationary period. Kafka, thus, was strongly depending on the approval of his superiors, had to apply several times for salary increases and in 1913 became an active member of the recently founded professional organization of Jewish officials.

Kafka not only adopted the perspective of the subaltern stratum in the office, but was also capable of illustrating the situation of the higher echelons, in particular in his last novel "The Castle", since he had advanced in the hierarchy. In 1913 he was superior to 30 clerks and was promoted in 1920 secretary of the agency (section head), a rather responsible position which involved conceptual work and representation of the agency in the law courts. Therefore, his picture of e.g. Klamm in *The Castle* could well mirror his own role understanding (Binder 1979, 354 f.).

Furthermore, problems of gaining a position in *The Castle* could reflect the situation of the Jews in the Habsburg empire (as in imperial Germany) to be admitted

³⁸ Weeks (1981, FN 3) notes that Emil Lederer commented on the new code in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, whose co-editor was Max Weber. In fact, Emil Lederer, before becoming editorial assistant to the *Archiv*, regularly reported about trade union affairs from Vienna. With respect to section 6.2 below I am still searching for evidence that he is a relative of Eugen Lederer, the first secretary general of the Bohemian Accident Insurance.

to state service.³⁹ Jews were only accepted in semi-state agencies of a non-authoritative nature like the Labourer Insurance Agency. But even there it was difficult to get a job. Kafka managed to be accepted, because the father of a school mate was in a leading position. Among several hundred employees there were, however, only two Jews (Binder 1983, 244 ff.).

Weeks (1981) not only elaborates the danger of proletarianization threatening Kafka and reflected in the fate of inferior characters, he also gives the parable of the gatekeeper of the law (Trial), the statement that the guarded door had been made specifically for Josef K., a meaning that derives from the (still existant) distinctiveness of civil employees as opposed to civil servants: while the latter, according to the interpretation at that time, followed a calling and entered a vocation or profession with a career, public employees in Germany even today are merely hired for one specific position, a job.

In this line of reasoning the metaphysical interpretation of The Trial would collapse; not only would the deep intellectual influence of Nietzsche on Kafka support a materialist interpretation, The Castle, too, lends itself to such a meaning, when K. at the end of his confrontation with the village mayor (ch. 5) insists: "I do not want a gift of grace from the castle, but my right."

Beside his experience in the Labourer Insurance Agency, Kafka was also reflecting on his entrepreneurial activity, which is seldom commented on. Between 1911 and 1917 he had functioned as a sleeping partner (with his father's capital) in an asbestos firm, an enterprise that finally failed (Binder 1983, 303). Albach (1968)

³⁹ In The Castle, p. 21, K. when calling on the administration is addressed as "Der ewige Landvermesser" (the eternal surveyor), a strange expression that reminds on "Der ewige Jude"; I have nowhere found a comment on this possible allusion.

has drawn attention to the peculiar character of entrepreneurs in Kafka's early short stories; they are regularly not in control of the economic process, but rather it's victim, thus objectifying Kafka's anxiety and subjectively felt burden of his entrepreneurial responsibility.⁴⁰

Maybe, the large range of potential associations allowed for by Kafka's metaphors occasionally stimulate interpretations of details that appear far-fetched. In the last resort, this is probably the very distinction between artistic and analytical work. Nevertheless, in view of Kafka's rich bureaucratic experience condensed in the novels alternative interpretations of the meaning of the novels should be envisioned, which take into account Kafka's profession, his training as a jurist and his thorough historical reading including an oral examination in history of law in 1906.⁴¹

5. Kafka's and Weber's Evaluation of Bureaucracy

If we assume that Kafka's novels are not merely grand metaphors for transcendental or psychological problems, but - in addition - can also be regarded to reflect the author's serious personal concern about his position and function as a public official, it is legitimate to ask for Kafka's evaluation of bureaucracy.

Although the immediate impression of his personal suffering from office work could lead us to conclude that

⁴⁰ For instance, in the person of the bank manager Josef K. or Gregor Samsa (Metamorphosis).

⁴¹ As to the Trial, where the thrasher and the judge, even the portraitist Titorelli are members of the same system, one could argue that Kafka describes state authority before the differentiation of powers, in particular of the judicative from the executive branch was implemented; as noted above, The Castle reflects clearly a patrimonial system. Orthodox interpretations also overlook, that the monstrous killing machine in the Penal Colony (1913-1919) was undoubtedly depicted under the influence of the 1st world war (Müller-Seidel 1986, 126; Wagenbach 1975).

bureaucracy is negatively evaluated (Fischer 1962), this would be too simple an answer. There are various dimensions along which Kafka's evaluation of bureaucracy can be summarized:

- First, there is what I should call his functional criticism of bureaucracy. As a bureaucratic insider of the Labourers' Accident Insurance and as a citizen, who often had to apply for a passport (Binder 1976, 410 f.), Kafka is critical about the social distance between citizens and authorities, about filtering processes in hierarchical decision making and about the fictional basis of decisions relying on insufficiently read reports, as we have noticed when we analyzed his concept of bureaucracy in terms of the Weberian model. Furthermore, Kafka is functionally criticizing the juridical system in his time as to personal biases and secrecy and even morally attacking corruption, as we have seen. The author, through the perspective of Josef K., takes the standpoint of the goal-rational actor⁴² confronted with bureaucracy's pathologies. On this level of analysis McDaniel (1971, 75 f.) is correct in pointing out the difference between Kafka's view and Max Weber's so-called efficiency-thesis stressing precision, continuity, discipline, thoroughness, reliability, universal applicability and performance; we shall, though, see that this argument is too unsophisticated with respect to Kafka and Weber.

- In fact, both authors are ambivalent in their judgement. There can be no doubt that Kafka when taking the point of view of the organization would subscribe to Weber's praising precision, discipline or reliability; in *The Castle* these traits of bureaucracy are underlined by informants to K., i.e. the systems perspective, which is not K.'s perspective, emphasizes positive aspects, while K. perceives the social costs

⁴² Similar to the traveller in *The Penal Colony* whose standards conflict with the system practiced on the island, cf. Schmidt (1984); Pasley (1977, 303).

accruing to the individual official, e.g. being tired or signs of alienation in general. At this point of the analysis both, Kafka and Weber, tend to employ the **machine-metaphor**⁴³ and thereby draw our attention to the **merely formal as opposed to substantive rationality of the system.**⁴⁴ This distinction implies the possibility of the **paradoxon** that a formally rational system produces **substantively**⁴⁵ irrational results - a fact that is fervently expressed by Kafka:

Having listened to the explanation of the mayor, how the castle's bureaucracy is functioning, the following dialogue develops:

Mayor: "...doesn't the story bore you?"
 "No", said K., "it entertains me."
 Then the mayor: "I do not tell it for your entertainment."
 "It entertains me merely in that I get an insight into the ridiculous entanglement, that eventually decides about the existence of a man," said K."⁴⁶

A similar scene can be found in *The Trial*, when Josef K. argues with the thrasher punishing the two warders who had misbehaved when Josef K. was searched at the beginning of the story:

"Had I known, they were to be punished or even that they could be punished, I had not told their names. I do not believe they are guilty, the organization is guilty, guilty are the high officials."
 "If you had a high judge under your rod", K. said.... "indeed I did not prevent you to thrash, on the contrary, I gave you money so that you gained force for a good purpose."

⁴³ Kafka most prominently in "The Penal Colony", Weber was often speaking also of "automaton" and "apparatus"; cf. Wachler (1981). Among jurists this metaphor was quite common (Schmid 1988).

⁴⁴ Weber's sentence containing the above mentioned efficiency criteria ends: "in all these respects formally most rational" (Weber 1976, 128).

⁴⁵ Ultimately a value-loaded point which judges results from the point of reference of clients, officials or society, as Weber was well aware of. It should be recalled that his theoretical point of reference is political domination (and not employee satisfaction or whatsoever).

⁴⁶ My translation, p. 56

"What you say sounds credible", the thrasher said, "but I don't let you bribe me. I am employed in order to thrash, thus I thrash."⁴⁷

These dialogues indicate, what is known in organizational sociology as goal displacement, and hint at the inclination of the apparatus to produce results or deeds that are substantively irrational.

Kafka also realizes, that achieving substantive rationality depends on the high officials' capability to define reasonable goals of the system. But the higher officials hide themselves, and the top ranks of the castle are even empty. One is tempted again to draw a parallel to Weber's thinking. His "legal-rational type of political domination with bureaucratic staff" does not specify the structure of the political system, in which goals are defined (monarchy, absolute or constitutional, presidential or party government - alternatives Weber was empirically familiar with). Furthermore, the bureaucratic machine, universally applicable as it is, functions to implement all sorts of tasks, no matter how well they are legitimized or what consequences they bring about.

Those scientists, who are not familiar with Weber's political writings (Beetham 1974) and - even worse - interpret the ideal type of bureaucracy as a prescriptive model like McDaniel (1971), will probably be surprised to learn that Max Weber, too, was an acid, at times even outrageous critic of the politico-administrative machinery of the German empire (in particular in 1917), because he was aware that the system produced irrational results.

A-political as he is said to have been in life, nevertheless, Kafka as a writer puts the systemic rationality of the Habsburg monarchy into question, but he did not go as far as Weber; instead of attempting to reform the system (how should he in all his marginality?) he seems to have rather tried to survive under the given circumstances and to subject to the system's formal rationality.

⁴⁷ p. 65, my translation, my emphasis

In The Trial Josef K. is considering his situation:

"Almost every defendant, even very simple people, begin to deliberate at the very beginning of the trial how to improve the system, and they often waste time and courage with it, which they otherwise might have better used. It is simply the best to accept the given circumstances."⁴⁸

In succumbing to this device and excluding considerations of absolute justice and substantive rationality from his pondering, he seems to persuade himself:

"There was no guilt. The trial was nothing else than a big business"⁴⁹ of the sort he experienced in the bank.

What was for Weber the outright political attack, was for Kafka the satire. Ernst Fischer (1962, 544) reports that Kafka's friends burst out in laughter, when he read to them the beginning of The Trial, where the warders request Josef K.'s driving licence for his bicycle.

- Apart from functional criticism from the point of view of the individual and doubts about the rationality of bureaucracy when perceived as a system, Kafka (and Weber) embarked on a third level of critical evaluation, which I should like to call the anthropological dimension.

As a result of the occidental process of increasing formal rationalization of all life spheres Max Weber not only noticed the "disenchantment of the world" and the "breakdown of cultural matters of course", but also saw the "iron cage" of a bureaucratized world replace traditional patrimonial order and dependence; on the level of the individual he complained - in his political statements together with his brother Alfred - that the need of bureaucracy brought about what he called the "Berufs- und Diplommensch" (vocational and diploma-man):

⁴⁸ Trial, p. 89 (my translation)

⁴⁹ *ibid.* p. 93 (my translation)

"A dreadful idea that the world once would consist of nothing but professors even more dreadful is the vision, that the world shall be completed with nothing but those small wheels (of a machine) people clinging to their tiny positions and aiming at a somewhat bigger little position What can we oppose to this machinery in order to spare a remainder of humanity from this parcelling out of the soul, from this rule of bureaucratic ideals of life."⁵⁰

He envisioned this specialized, professionally trained, functionally adapted type replace the "Kultur-mensch". Where Weber's aristocratic individualism clashed with the upcoming professional man, Kafka experienced this conflict within his own personality: on the one hand he did (reduced) office work, on the other hand he aspired to be an artist. However, in his later years, he was well aware that he personally needed the bureaucratic subsistence of life and the relieving office routine (Hermsdorf 1984, 67). The same ambivalence characterizes Kafka's protagonists. As I have pointed out above, Kafka's imaginary counterparts appear to be goal-rational actors confronted with a rather traditional environment. At a first glance, they therefore appear morally superior, too. However, Kafka the writer is distancing himself from his protagonists' rational and economic approach; in inner monologues, for instance, K. in *The Castle* views his habit of reckoning people and calculating chances as selfish, and Frieda reproaches him of his recklessness. In fact, from the Nietzschean point of view he shared with Weber he despised in a letter to Milena that

"with respect to his inherent traits he were an official, thus a member of a class of the gutter (Auswurfklasse) of the European professional man" (Berufsmensch).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Max Weber's statement in the Verein für Sozialpolitik in Vienna 1909, *Schriften des Vereins* 132 (1910), 284 (my translation). Weber opposed to the positive evaluation of bureaucratization by Schmoller and Hintze.

⁵¹ Binder 1976, 412; my translation

Isn't it a striking parallel that Kafka resembles Max Weber even in the wording? Should there be more than an elective affinity² between Kafka's and Weber's conceptualization and evaluation of bureaucracy?

6. Intellectual Parallels and Biographical Relationships

In the following an attempt will be made to arrive at an understanding why Kafka's artistic fiction has such a strong affinity to Weber's analysis of bureaucracy. First I should like to draw attention to some parallels in both men's intellectual condition, and secondly I shall point out that there existed two albeit indirect biographical connections between Kafka and Weber.

6.1 Intellectual Parallels

In fact, despite many obvious biographical differences, the number of parallels is striking, that go beyond the purely formal coincidences that their most important works were published only posthumously and that both were to have a renaissance in the 1960's. First, there are similar biographical facts which could have conditioned the intellectual disposition of the two men. Both had a peculiar relationship to women; Kafka was not able to establish a marital relationship, a problem he tried to cope with by objectifying the circumstances in particular in *The Trial*. Max Weber, to say the least, was unable to break through his preoccupation with asceticism in his marital life (Mitzman 1985, ch.9) and in his relations to other women - almost - never stepped beyond the boundary set by chivalry. Then there is the strained relationship to the father in both cases; Weber's nervous breakdown in 1898, which forced him to give up his professorship (finally in

² cf. for this term Treiber (1985)

1903) is attributed to a guilt complex he was tormented by, because he had aggressively defended his mother against his suppressive father and thrown him out of the house shortly before his father's death (Green 1974; Fügen 1985, 63 f.). Kafka was agitated by a disturbed primary relationship to his dominant father (Binder 1983, 47) and all through his life he suffered from the feeling he were not capable to live up to the standards of his father. Consequently, both men not only showed psychosomatic problems, were forced to (partly) retire, and had to visit a sanatorium, but they also tried to come to grips with their psychological problems by writing self-analyses. Karl Jaspers, who had kept it for some years before it was destroyed by Marianne Weber in fear of the Nazis, reported of Weber's self-analysis that it were mercilessly objective. Kafka's famous letter to his father, which was never posted, cannot only be regarded as an - once again - unpublished piece of literature, but even as a letter addressed to Freud (Jonckheere 1986, 212). Indeed, both Kafka and Weber were familiar with Freudian analysis, a point I shall return to later. Then there is the topic of Judaism. While Kafka's personality was formed under the conditions of marginality as a German speaking Jew in Prague (Politzer 1976, 53-108), Weber not only thoroughly studied ancient Judaism in his sociology of religion, but also fought against the discrimination of Jewish colleagues like Sombart and Simmel in the German university (Shils 1973).

In addition, for both of them America was a contrasting model to European society. Relatives of Kafka's emigrated to the USA in 1906 and 1909 (Binder 1983, 26 f.), and Kafka's third posthumous booklengthy novel is named "Amerika". Max Weber had visited the US in 1904 on occasion of the St. Louis world exhibition and was inspired by this journey to write his "Protestant Ethic" and to work on religious sects.

Both were affected by the first world war; Weber volunteered to administer a military hospital near Heidelberg, and Kafka, who had not been drawn because of his

bad health, became active in creating an asylum for mentally ill soldiers in 1916. (Hermsdorf 1984, 295 ff.).

While Kafka led the life of a bureaucrat but aspired to be an artist and was occupied with literary production, Weber the scientist had marked artistic interests; not only did he receive poets (George, Toller) and literaries (Lukacz) at home, he also wrote a less known sociology of music.⁵³ Despite these artistic interests, that are hardly extraordinary in the sense that they lay outside the confines of a well-educated German bourgeois, one goes probably too far equating Kafka's production of fiction and his perspectivism with Weber's idealtypical methodology and the "Verstehen" it involves (Dornemann 1984, 23 f.; McDaniel 1971, 63).

Whereas these parallels could be incidental and point at psychological dispositions and idiosyncrasies, it is more important that Kafka shared a common intellectual background with the much older Weber. This consisted of the then typical grammar school education (Latin, Ancient Greek), but included also the most radical and revolutionary thinkers of the fin de siècle. As indicated above, both were familiar with Freud's early psycho-analysis. While Freud achieved the dissolution of the idealistic conception of man, Nietzsche shattered the belief in absolute moral standards by pointing out their psychological roots and their historical relativity.⁵⁴

Both, furthermore, were profoundly influenced by Dostojewski and Tolstoi. The Trial was probably partly inspired by "Raskolnikov", as might have been The Penal

⁵³ M. Weber, Musiksoziologie, München 1972 (1921). Weber regarded himself a-musical, but might have become converted during his relationship with the pianist Mina Tobler 1911-14 (Mitzman 1985, 277).

⁵⁴ For Nietzsche's influence on Kafka see Pasley (1977), Binder (1983, 154). Nietzsche's tremendous influence on Weber has recently again attracted attention after the earlier article by Mommsen (1965); see e.g. Stauth/Turner (1986).

Colony by "Letters from a Deadhouse" (Egeberg 1985; Binder 1983, 370). Undoubtedly, Tolstoi's "Resurrection" affected Kafka's perception of bureaucracy (Dornemann 1984, 19; Binder 1983, 423). Weber, on the other hand, besides having read Dostojewski, was deeply impressed by Tolstoi's moral rigorism when it came to ultimate value judgements required by the "ethics of conscience" as his decisionism of the "ethics of responsibility" was inspired by Nietzsche.⁵⁵

Last not least, both were jurists. The result of the juridical training can be told from their style of writing: precision and even casuistry, traits that make reading Weber so difficult and render Kafka's texts so cryptical. A juridical training in those days entailed the dominant legal positivism, knowledge in the history of law⁵⁶ and at least a sketchy overview of the state apparatus. Although Weber's seminal work on bureaucracy was not published early enough for Kafka to have read it, we may assume that Kafka had heard of some of the sources Max Weber gained his knowledge from, be it German administrative law⁵⁷, which until today is regularly read in Austria, be it historical research about

⁵⁵ Weber, *Science as a Vocation*, even quotes Tolstoi and Nietzsche on the same page (Weber 1964, 322). He also referred to Tolstoi's "Resurrection" in his article about the 1905 Russian revolution (Weber 1906, 397). I owe this hint to Dornemann (1984, 86).

⁵⁶ Weber wrote his habilitation thesis about medieval commercial law.

⁵⁷ We are still waiting for research on the intellectual sources Max Weber drew on for his analysis of bureaucracy; maybe it is so self-evident that he gained from Schmoller's and Hintze's historical research as well as from Georg Jellinek or Otto Mayer's concept of "Anstaltsstaat", that it is not worth mentioning. The recent anthology by Mommesen/Osterhammel (1987) "Max Weber and his Contemporaries" again excludes the area of jurisprudence and constitutional law due to "constraints of space" (p. 7).

the Prussian administration around the economist Gustav Schmoller.⁵⁸

On a very abstract level one could even compare Kafka's and Weber's epistemological peculiarities. Kafka had the ability to observe with a "cool, anthropological interest" (Pasley 1977, 303). Undoubtedly, his literary approach had been influenced by Flaubert (Binder 1983). Mitzman (1981) interestingly relates Flaubert's *l'art pour l'art* conception of literary production to Weber's stress on value-freedom of social sciences; both are, in Mitzman's view, typical for a "post-heroic consciousness" devoid of a metaphysical reference point.

Of course, these parallels may be mere coincidences indicating Kafka's and Weber's being exposed to the same *Zeitgeist* and intellectual influences before they died in 1920 and 1924 respectively. Kafka, however, was 20 years Weber's junior, and Weber not barely theoretically could have been Kafka's teacher, but in fact had biographically traceable connections to Kafka.

6.2 Biographical Linkages

Kafka and Max Weber did not meet personally. Though, there are two influential people both were akin with: Alfred Weber, Max's younger brother, and Otto Groß, one of the first disciples of Freud.

6.2.1 Otto Gross

Otto Gross (1877-1920) turned Freud political (Hurwitz 1979) in preaching free love as a liberating force in particular for women. His sexual anarchism brought him into touch with the Bohème in Schwabing and anarchists

⁵⁸ Kafka's studies included "Nationalökonomie"; therefore, he could have become acquainted with Som-bart's and Weber's works about the entrepreneur and capitalism (Albach 1968, 52 f.).

there and in Berlin.⁵⁹ Gross became dependent on drugs and, after having helped two girl-friends to commit suicide in Ascona, Switzerland in 1906 and 1911, was put into asylum on request of his father (Anz 1984).

Kafka had read several of Gross's articles published in the journal "Aktion" in 1913 (Binder 1983, 316).

That Gross encouraged his patients to rebel against their fathers, could have appealed to Kafka. In 1917 he became personally acquainted with Gross on occasion of a journey back from Hungary (18/19th July 1917), and both participated in a reception at Max Brod's (together with Werfel) on July 23rd 1917.⁶⁰ Kafka was even inclined to cooperate with Gross in a planned journal "Letters for Fighting the Will to Power".⁶¹

Otto Gross's father, the criminologist professor Hans Gross, was one of Kafka's academic teachers in Prague, whose lectures he attended in 1902-1905 (Müller-Seidel 1986, 50 f.; Binder 1983, 50). The professor had propagated deportation of the mentally ill and decadent (1905) to the colonies, which provoked a reply by his son emphasizing the positive cultural function of the degenerated. In 1913 the father-son-conflict escalated, when Otto Gross, after becoming involved with that suicide in 1912⁶², was taken into custody by the Berlin police on personal request of his father from Austria (!) and was transferred to an asylum in Vienna. This incident caused wide-spread public protest in literary circles (Müller-Seidel 1986, 69). It is assumed that

⁵⁹ Gross und Weber were acquainted with the anarchist literat Erich Mühsam, who participated in the 1919 Munich soviet revolution; Weber had come across him and Toller on occasion of the famous 1917 Lauenstein meeting.

⁶⁰ Max Brod (1962, 192)

⁶¹ Jonckheere (1986, 207)

⁶² Werfel dramatized the case in a way, which severely strained Kafka's friendly admiration for him (Bauer 1978; Anz 1984).

Kafka was inspired by this case in writing "The Penal Colony".⁶³

Not merely did he mention there that the death machine resembles apparatus used in asylums⁶⁴, some analysts even attribute to the Gross affair the enigmatic introductory sentence of *The Trial*: "Somebody must have slandered Josef K."

It was in the person of Otto Gross, that the life-lines of Kafka and Weber crossed. Gross had submitted an article to Weber's "Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik"⁶⁵ in 1907 on the liberation of women, which provoked an annihilating letter of rejection by Weber, as he saw an infliction of the norm of value-freedom in it. Psychologically, however, extra-scientific reasons might have caused Weber's scorn (Green 1974): Otto Gross, married to Marianne Weber's school-friend Frieda, had a love affair with Else Jaffé, borne von Richthofen, who gave birth to a son by Otto the same year his wife did (1907). Not only was Else Jaffé the wife of Weber's colleague Edgar⁶⁶, she was also an old friend of the Weber family and an academic disciple of Max's⁶⁷; furthermore, it was with her that Max Weber finally overcame his sexual asceticism in 1919 during his professorship in Munich.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, Otto Gross's forced hospitalization drew even Max Weber into action again: Professor Gross now

⁶³ Begun in 1913, published 1919; of course, K. is also intellectually indebted to Dostojewski and Tolstoi in taking up the subject of deportation; cf. Müller-Seidel 1986, 34 ff. Moreover, there can be no doubt that Kafka needed intellectual blueprints for his works like Kleist's "Michael Kohlhaas" for *The Trial* and, as Dornemann (1984) contends, Tolstoi's "Ressurrection" for *The Castle*.

⁶⁴ Kafka 1952, 149

⁶⁵ Bought in 1903 by Edgar Jaffé, with Sombart and Weber on the editorial board.

⁶⁶ After 1920 she lived together with Alfred Weber.

⁶⁷ In 1901 she had been appointed industry inspector in the state of Baden; Weber advised her dissertation.

⁶⁸ He had already declared his love in 1910 while touring Italy together with the Jaffés; cf. Mitzman (1985).

claimed guardianship over Frieda's son, also because Frieda Gross had retreated from civil society to Ascona (Switzerland) where a colony of anarchists had gathered to live what Weber alluded to as love-communism.⁶⁹ Characteristical of Max Weber's personality, he travelled to Ascona in 1914 to juridically help Frieda Gross defend her maternal rights against her father-in-law.

In 1918, when Weber lectured in Vienna, he might have come across Otto Gross again, who then was playing a prominent part in the revolutionary plotting there.⁷⁰

It is not likely that Weber heard of Kafka, but Otto Gross could have hinted at Weber's work and given Kafka an impression of what Weber dealt with. Though, in the last resort, the mutual acquaintance with Otto Gross does not prove more than Weber's and Kafka's exposure to psycho-analysis and ways of conduct which they - consciously - might have utterly despised. The second biographical connection, though, could well have had a bearing on Kafka's evaluation, if not conceptualization of bureaucracy.

6.2.2 Alfred Weber

Astrid Lange-Kirchheim (1977; 1986) has investigated this link between Max's younger brother Alfred Weber (1868-1958) and Franz Kafka. Alfred Weber⁷¹ had intellectually followed suit Max's activities in the Verein für Sozialpolitik before turning to cultural so-

⁶⁹ The complicated case is well described by Hurwitz (1979).

⁷⁰ As Weber kept contact to the artistic scene and the Bohème, he respected revolutionary engagements if motivated by "ethics of conscience": Jaffé had become finance minister during the Munich revolution, and Ernst Toller, his student and a poet who became military commander there, was later defended by Weber in court against the charge of high treason. After all, Max Weber himself participated in the Heidelberg Workers' and Soldiers' Council at several meetings.

⁷¹ For a scientific assessment see Demm (1983; 1986).

ciology in later years. Personally, he was quite the opposite to Max, e.g. did not subject to ascetism nor did he so strictly try to abstain from value judgments. He gained his first appointment as a professor at Prague university and taught there during 1904-1907. He even promoted Kafka to the juridical doctor degree on 18th of June 1906.⁷² This, however, was barely a formal procedure of introduction to the rector of the university.⁷³ Although Kafka did not attend Weber's lectures, because he prepared for the examinations at that time, he might well have been familiar with Weber's ideas by what Max Brod, an admirer of Alfred Weber's, told him.⁷⁴ There can be no doubt, that Alfred drew on the body of knowledge and the evaluations he shared with Max, including those referring to bureaucracy. Furthermore, it is not unlikely that Kafka followed A. Weber's statements, after Weber had gone to Heidelberg university in 1907⁷⁵. For instance, he could have read the Weber brothers' contribution to the 1909 meeting of the Verein für Sozialpolitik. This is particularly likely, as Alfred Weber had played a leading role in Prague's public life during 1907 and returned there on several occasions. Lange-Kirchheim (1986, 116 ff.) reports that Alfred Weber helped in the founding of the "Deutscher Verein für Sozialwissenschaft in Prag", together with Kafka's cousin Bruno Kafka, who was occasionally demonstrated to Franz K. as a model of achievement by his father. Weber, in addition, was active in the "Free School", an association that intended to liberate the schools from clerical influence and in which Kafka was a member. Weber also helped in the

⁷² Klaus Wagenbach (1958) was the first who mentioned this incident.

⁷³ In those days one did not have to write a doctoral thesis, thus Weber cannot be regarded Kafka's academic supervisor.

⁷⁴ Max Brod set Alfred Weber an intellectual monument in his autobiography.

⁷⁵ Max Brod kept in touch with A. Weber, cf. Albach (1968, fn. 5) referring to a personal communication by Else Jaffé-Richthofen.

preparations for the "Freidenker"-congress in Prague in 1907 - an event that was to have consequences to the Spanish participant Francisco Ferrer: when Ferrer was to be executed in Spain in 1909, German intellectual circles protested in an article in the Berliner Tageblatt (18-10-1909) signed among others by Alfred, Max, and Marianne Weber; Kafka will definitely have noticed the case, too. There can be no doubt that Kafka, who sympathized with these anti-traditional movements as he did with Otto Gross, was intellectually related to the Webers.

In 1911 Alfred Weber visited Prague again to give a lecture on "Religion and Culture". Furthermore, in the same year Kafka read Ernst Troeltsch's essay on "Luther and the Protestantism" (Binder 1983, 428); Troeltsch was a dear friend of Max Weber's and even shared the same house with him in Heidelberg. As he taught history of religion, he was, of course, familiar with Weber's "Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" (1904). Even more directly, Kafka must have been exposed to Max Weber's sociology of religion, when Max Brod asked him to read a draft of a chapter he had written in 1920 which dealt with Weber's theory; Brod and Kafka debated over this chapter by exchanging letters (Lange-Kirchheim 1986, 129).

Most importantly, though, Kafka is more than likely to have studied the article "The Official" by Alfred Weber (1910), which appeared in the "Neue Rundschau", a paper Kafka regularly read. Lange-Kirchheim (1977, 1986) has conclusively proved on a linguistic basis that Kafka, in writing *The Penal Colony* in 1913, took lots of metaphors (in particular the notion of bureaucracy as a technical apparatus) from the article, that condemned and ridiculed the mentality of civil servants in line with the Weber brothers' judgement of 1909. In this story Kafka also alludes to the quasi-religious image that was widely attributed to state bureaucracy in the

Austrian and German empires.⁷⁶ The Weberian influence on the Penal Colony is also of some general importance for Kafka's literary production, as the story constitutes a turning point in Kafka's opus: the Leitmotiv of law-guilt-punishment after 1917 became transposed from the hitherto dominant intra-family-constellation⁷⁷ into a macro-sociological frame of reference (state, society, history)⁷⁸; the father henceforth is replaced by the impersonal authority of the "apparatus" like in *The Trial* and *The Castle* (Lange-Kirchheim 1986, 131).

7. Conclusion

The main thesis of this essay is, that Kafka like no other German-language novelist of the 20th century wove the notion of bureaucracy into his fiction (especially in *The Trial* and *The Castle*) and that this could have something to do with Kafka's office experience and a Weberian influence on his evaluation of bureaucracy.

I have argued that the novelists coming closest to Kafka's concern with bureaucratization of life are critical, politically oriented writers, among these the Austrians Werfel, Roth, and Musil, novelists Kafka was personally acquainted with. While their fictional work treats bureaucracy basically from the point of legitimacy of political domination and the individual's position vis à vis bureaucracy, Kafka is unique as to the details of structure and function of bureaucracy.

That main stream literary science and the established Kafka experts have not elaborated so far the bureaucra-

⁷⁶ Alfred Weber (1950) again opposed to the German inclination to regard the state as a metaphysical entity.

⁷⁷ As in *The Judgement*, *Metamorphosis*

⁷⁸ This change of perspective coincides with Kafka's turning away from psychology and emphasizing a sociological perspective, cf. Binder (1983, 317).

tic contents of Kafka's work⁷⁹, seems to result from a lack of familiarity with bureaucracy and a preoccupation in the idealist tradition, factors the guild seems to share with the majority of German writers.

In section 3 I have pointed out the parallels and divergencies between the properties of Max Weber's ideal type of legal-rational political domination resting on a bureaucratic staff and Kafka's description of these elements. In addition, it was shown (section 5) that Kafka's assessment of bureaucracy is ambivalent and originates from his multi-level approach (individual, systemic, anthropological) as well as from his personal experience with bureaucracy. The anti-thetical appreciation revealing from the text can also be found in Max Weber's works, when we pay attention to the paradox of formal and substantive rationality and take into account his political writings.

Nevertheless, I have stressed that emphasizing the bureaucratic contents of Kafka's novels, although constituting a challenge to the main currents of interpretations, does not contradict metaphysical and biographical-psychological interpretations; on the contrary, my own argument is an essentially biographical one, it is merely aiming at giving the bureaucratic elements in Kafka's opus the weight they deserve (section 4).

Last not least, I have pointed out that the amazing congeniality of Kafka and Weber as to analysis and evaluation of bureaucracy can be understood from quite a number of common biographical factors and intellectual currents of the *Zeitgeist* impinging on both. After I have drawn attention to two - albeit indirect - biographical linkages between Kafka and Weber, there should be no doubts that the immanent parallels of the artist's and the analyst's treatment of bureaucracy as

⁷⁹ The exceptions are Lange-Kirchheim (1977, 1986), to whom I am intellectually particularly indebted, Müller-Seidel (1986), Hermsdorf (1984), Wagenbach (1958; 1975), Ernst Fischer (1962), Mc Daniel (1971), Dornemann (1984).

a topic go well beyond what otherwise would be a merely elective affinity.

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