

## Kafka's bed

### *Die Verwandlung*<sup>1</sup> and the problem of the private

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*The literature of Franz Kafka (1883-1924), is renowned for its representation of strange circumstances and existentially threatened protagonists. From the giant bug to the inexplicable court trial and the elusive castle, Kafka's stories are full of familiar objects that have been distorted into unsettling metaphors. One such object is the bed, a location that repeatedly appears in his prose, short stories and novels. A closer look at one such text, Die Verwandlung (1915), demonstrates how the bed's representation highlights a problematic boundary between the public and private spheres, lending a possible cause to the fundamental disorder pervading Kafka's literary universe.*

*[Kafka, bed, public, private, space, metamorphosis]*

Kafka's beds are bizarre places that defy traditional associations with privacy, safety, and domesticity. Indeed, they stand in areas, which are rarely private, safe or domestic. Culturally, the bed is delineated as the most intimate object within the most private space, the bedroom. It figures in Kafka's literature, however, as a very specific location where characters are arrested, conduct business meetings or turn into giant vermin. Activities traditionally related to the bed like sleep, recuperation or sex are displaced to floors, chairs or benches and often occur in public areas. Otherwise associated with security and privacy, bedrooms erupt into hot spots of a topsy-turvy landscape, transforming setting into a universe of insecurity, estrangement and vulnerability.

In the following article, I will seek to demonstrate how this literary pattern draws attention to the frequent lack of a clear distinction between public and private spheres in Kafka's texts. Taken together, those bizarre bed scenes raise critical questions by drawing attention to a larger literary universe where spatial operations are regularly reversed and the constellation of the private and public distorted. Treated by existing secondary literature as isolated, 'Kafkaesque' instances, these scenes have yet to be examined extensively in 'public' and 'private' terms.

While critics like Sokel (2002) and Deleuze and Guattari (2000) indicate an awareness of spatial operations in Kafka's texts, they fail to make any overt determinations regarding the 'private' and 'public' or to relate any such reference directly to a general

topographical phenomenon. Those few others who speak more specifically in terms of recurring spatial motifs tend to deny Kafka's spatial or architectural representation any significance beyond the psychological, autobiographical or philosophical. Klaus Jeziorkowski uses the bed in Kafka's texts to identify a reversal of the private and "official" spheres of life, comparing literary text, however, to problematically normative bases such as "reason," "our reality," or "our daily orientation" (1992: 101). Gerhard Rieck, on the other hand, associates the origins of Kafka's recurring bed motif to a psychologically traumatic experience from Kafka's childhood (cf. 1999: 26-51).

The bed's specific capacity to highlight the problematic boundary between the 'public' and the 'private' emphasises the necessity of a renewed approach to Kafka's literature – to establish the significance of the consistently blurred division between the spheres in Kafka's texts. The literature appears to reflect the historical instability of the contemporary spatial reality – a consequence of modernised living conditions, in which the boundaries between the public and the private were experienced as perpetually in flux.

In the following article, I will examine the literary architecture of one textual example, Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* (1915), using the bed as a springboard for a discussion about the spheres. As in several other texts by the author, such as *Der Proceß* (1925), *Das Schloß* (1926) and *Das Urteil* (1913), the skewed associations of the bed in this story also extend to adjacent spaces. Metonymically viewed, the bed, its affiliated objects and activities are components of the private sphere. Domestic associations with convalescence, intimacy and exclusivity extend from the bed to the private space around it. When these associations are disrupted, as in the life of Gregor, the disturbance accordingly extends to the surrounding space. This ripple effect ultimately results in a distortion of the boundary between the private and public spheres. The vulnerable position of the bed in *Die Verwandlung*, which serves as the location of Gregor's transformation, becomes a metaphor for his vulnerability.

By focusing on the domestic situation around the bed event, I will attempt to show how the spatial constellation in *Die Verwandlung* ultimately exercises a detrimental influence on the private life of the protagonist's family, the Samsas. I will begin with an introduction to the relationship between character and domestic setting, using the bed in its metaphorical function to characterise Gregor and his father. Architectural elements will disclose how work and private life of the former have blended, 'rationalising' what was once private into a less exclusive, less domestic object. Using spatial analysis, I will seek to demonstrate how the nullification of the boundary between the public sphere and the Samsa household have ultimately resulted in estranged relations between Gregor and his family.

In conclusion, I will discuss the distorted quality of the larger setting itself. I will show how the boundary between the private and public is suspended by the visit of the manager and then by the arrival of the three lodgers, whose financial importance transforms the home into a business object. I will close by explaining how this domestic tendency toward rationalisation is furthered by the family's physical exclusion of Gregor, illustrating how his imprisonment converts the apartment into a space of collective fear.

Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate how the metamorphosis, thus, alters not only Gregor's physical being, but serves as catalyst for the transformation of domestic setting into an 'un-heimliche' location. The bed event, in its uncanny, foreign and disconcerting incongruity to the bed, extends to the apartment around it, stripping this, too, of all domestic notions of security and comfort.

### Character and setting

In terms of the metamorphosis itself, the significance of the bed is quite obvious. Although the travelling salesman has spent many a night in hotels, the bed in question is located at home. Consequently, the location of the metamorphosis situates the subsequent plot of the story in the private sphere: the family's confinement of Gregor to his room spatially restricts the narrative to the world within the Samsas' apartment. Accordingly, the characters in *Die Verwandlung* are then characterised through their relationship to that space. The reader is introduced to the family members through their domestic setting and the activities within it – their private life, daily rituals and distribution of domestic roles.

The character of the father, for example, is represented by way of his relationship to the bed. It serves as a reference point for his reactive metamorphosis from an unemployed, lethargic and atrophic invalid to an employed, authoritative giant of a patriarch. Gregor's father has been rejuvenated from his earlier persona, "der müde im Bett vergraben lag [...] der ihn an Abenden der Heimkehr im Schlafrock im Lehnstuhl empfangen hatte" (Kafka 1998b: 137). The father's previous association with the bed, likened here to a sarcophagus, was underscored by his continual wearing of the nightgown. Both objects correspond to the former Herr Kafka who took long breakfasts, rarely left the house and moved around only with assistance.

The resurrected father, however, is now "frisch und aufmerksam" (Kafka 1998b: 137), well-groomed and due at work at six o'clock each morning. The night-gown hangs uselessly on a hook and has been replaced by the work uniform, which Herr Samsa now also refuses to remove. The uniform's ironic importance is implied by Gregor's fascination with its filthy surface, "constantly polished gold buttons" and the cramped way it clothes his dozing father (Kafka 1972: 41). It signifies Herr Samsa's paid position in the public sphere, acquiring him a distinguished status at home. Because he never takes off the uniform, the family is perpetually reminded of his new indispensability for the household.

Herr Samsa's habit of sleeping in his suit highlights the physical displacement of this domestic ritual. Since employed at the bank, he insists on staying at the table each evening until he falls asleep there. No longer fixed to the bed, he must now be physically persuaded every night by his wife and daughter to return to it. Again, the father's obstinacy relates directly to his renewed position as breadwinner. The armchair figures here as his patriarchal throne. His attachment to it signifies a narcissistic reluctance to suspend his public role and higher domestic status, even while sleeping. Moreover, the conflation of armchair and bed imply that private and domestic interests have become

obsolete. Every significance attached to the bed in the life of Herr Samsa has been replaced. His old identity, indolence and lack of occupational value have apparently become as unimportant to him as comfort, leisure and retirement.

Herr Samsa's new appearance overwhelms his son. This specific power dynamic is metaphorically illustrated when Gregor, in confrontation with his angry dad, physically ducks from the uniform's projectile hat and dangling tails. Gregor's awestruck reaction to the "Riesengröße seiner Stiefsohlen" (Kafka 1998b: 137) recalls a similar observation made by Georg Bendemann in *Das Urteil*: "mein Vater ist noch immer ein Riese" (Kafka 1998a: 52). Both sons respectively witness the father's metamorphosis after erroneously perceiving the latter's "Schlafrock" as a indication of the fathers' invalid state. For Bendemann, this association proves fatal, blinding him to true circumstances. Towering over his son in bed, Bendemann senior proclaims Georg's death sentence, his words assailing him like the apples thrown by Herr Samsa. Like Gregor Samsa, the younger Bendemann is surprised by the father who once appeared disabled, senile and regressive. Both sons are portrayed cowering in room corners or standing frozen before their renascent fathers who ultimately expel the sons into impending death. The private setting that initially supported a 'domesticated' representation of the father effectively evolves with this character into a space of patriarchal fear.

Gregor's metamorphosis allows the reader to likewise become acquainted with his character through its relationship to setting. Details of Gregor's domestic life disclose a fusion of his public and private identities that was apparently established prior to Gregor's metamorphosis. The blending of his role as travelling salesman on the one hand and the 'son, brother and private individual' on the other, is significant for its negative effect on his relationship to the family.

The protagonist's thoughts reveal, for example, as he nostalgically watches the family from afar, that his salary provided their domestic comfort. Gregor himself, however, does not enjoy any part of this cozy home life, neither before nor after his metamorphosis. While travelling on business, he experiences those sentimental family moments by the hearth via correspondence with his sister:

Im Wohnzimmer war, wie Gregor durch die Türspalte sah, das Gas angezündet, aber während sonst zu dieser Tageszeit der Vater seine nachmittags erscheinende Zeitung der Mutter und manchmal auch der Schwester mit erhobener Stimme vorzulesen pflegte, hörte man jetzt keinen Laut. Nun vielleicht war dieses Vorlesen, von dem ihm die Schwester immer erzählte und schrieb, in der letzten Zeit überhaupt aus der Übung gekommen (Kafka 1998b: 118).

Excluded from the daily life of the household through the nature of his job, Gregor's relationship to his family has been reduced to a reading of his sister's epistolary, thus secondary, accounts. Even after the metamorphosis, Gregor maintains his marginal position. Now it is spatially indicated: the son does not return to the hearth but must experience it, again, from the periphery – now from behind a slightly open door a room away.

Gregor's estrangement from the family is also spatially demonstrated by a long-established habit of locking the bedroom door. It comes in handy on the morning of the metamorphosis:

Der Vater kehrte auch zu seinem Frühstück zurück, die Schwester aber flüsterte: "Gregor, mach auf, ich beschwöre dich." Gregor aber dachte gar nicht daran aufzumachen, sondern lobte die vom Reisen her übernommene Vorsicht, auch zu Hause alle Türen während der Nacht zu versperren (Kafka 1998b: 100).

The travelling salesman applied an occupational tendency onto his home life. This automatic practice signifies the great degree to which his professional self has become his private one. Likewise, it indicates a connection between the fusion of the 'public' and the 'private' on the one hand, and Gregor's estranged, suspicious and self-alienating orientation toward the family on the other.

This problematic blending is disclosed by the most explicit token of his private life – a portrait on the bedroom wall. The gilt frame, which Gregor made himself, holds an image of a woman cut from an illustrated magazine. His mother designates the frame's fabrication as the single "distraction" which occupied her son outside his job (Kafka 1972: 10). This claim suggests an imbalance between work and leisure. It is a disparity incorporated in the composition of the hanging picture:

Über dem Tisch [...] hing das Bild, das er vor kurzem aus einer illustrierten Zeitschrift ausgeschnitten und in einem hübschen, vergoldeten Rahmen untergebracht hatte. Es stellte eine Dame dar, die, mit einem Pelzhut und einer Pelzboa versehen, aufrecht dsaß und einen schweren Pelzmuff, in dem ihr ganzer Unterarm verschwunden war, dem Beschauer entgegenhob (Kafka 1998b: 96).

Speculation regarding the meaning of Gregor's fondness for this print range from the role of modern life in the bachelor's unconscious (Poltzer in Corngold 1972: 69) to its allusive value of Sacher-Masoch's text *Venus im Pelz* (1870). The significance however, is not just psychological, material or masochistic. In simpler terms, the impersonal hangs framed in the personal.

By placing this replicated stranger in an ornate, self-made frame (Kafka 1972: 10), Gregor has made the abstract more subjective. Despite its specific function to embellish a mass-produced and aesthetically prefabricated object, the frame is original and above all, representative of the salesman's feeble, albeit creative response to the restrictive work-home constellation in which he finds himself. The combination of frame and picture underscores the antithesis between mass culture and the individual, as well as the discrepancy between the occupational and the personal in the life of the salesman.

The reason behind this discrepancy is suggested by Gregor's devotion to the job. "Der Junge hat ja nichts im Kopf als das Geschäft" (Kafka 1998b: 105): he spends evenings at home, reading the paper or studying train schedules. The fusion of the private and public as embodied in the framed picture has thus effectively undermined Gregor's private life. This part of his identity is represented as a stunted sphere, lacking in real relationships and leisure activities beyond the occupational.

Gregor's failure to separate his private life from his public occupation grounds itself in one primary, obvious reason, frequently documented in the text: he was overworking to pay off a debt accrued by his parents. This blending of public occupation with private interest was based on Gregor's altruistic sense of responsibility, on his pri-

vate concern for his family's happiness. The arrangement, however, was made standard by both parties through a sense of cold automatism: "Man hatte sich eben daran gewöhnt, sowohl die Familie, als auch Gregor, man nahm das Geld dankbar an, er lieferte es gern ab, aber eine besondere Wärme wollte sich nicht mehr ergeben [...]" (Kafka 1998b: 124). Like Tönnies before them, Simmel and Kracauer attributed such cooling of personal relationships to be an effect of economically determined behaviour. Reduced by modern socio-economic conditions to parties in a exchange of goods or services, individuals ceased to interact with each other on a personal basis, applying instead the calculated, rational mindset of the *Kaufmann* to once emotionally determined bonds (Tönnies 1991: 44, Simmel 1992: 178-180). Likewise, Gregor's private interest in the family's well-being becomes rationalised by the family through their focus on its economic significance. The evolution of his altruistic interest into a commodity eventually rendered the personal and the rational one and the same.

### **Rationalisation of the home**

*Damit wendet sich der Blick kritisch auf die Regeln der erzählten Welt selbst.  
Sie ist bestimmt durch die Rationalität des Geschäfts*  
(Fingerhut 1994: 62).

Gregor's metamorphosis induces a series of events within the Samsa household which allow elements of the public, occupational sphere to infiltrate the domestic one. Herr Samsa's uniform is one example, his wife's seamstress work is another. The appearance of Gregor's manager and the three lodgers, however, demonstrate the large extent to which the occupational and the domestic have merged with each other. The exclusive character of the private sphere is suspended during these visits, and the home no longer seems private. What Fingerhut generalises as "Deformation durch die Berufswelt" (1994: 70) can be specifically and spatially recognised as an effective rationalisation of the home, climaxing in the occupancy by the three lodgers. The disconcerted balance between the private and the public is therewith transferred from the son to his environment.

The protagonist's monologue on the morning of his metamorphosis makes it clear that despite his new body, Gregor's only concern is getting to work on time. As the clock ticks forward, this fear is replaced by his anxious anticipation of a job-related visit. Sokel is correct in drawing a parallel between the nature of the manager's appearance and Gregor's occupational fear, suggesting a critical correlation between the manager's patronising, suspecting and abusive orientation toward Gregor and the exploitative functionality of Taylorism<sup>2</sup> (1980: 274). Yet precisely this point, "die Unmenschlichkeit des Geschäfts" (Sokel 1980: 274), can be taken further and applied in terms of a spatial analysis.

The manager's visit and diatribe before Gregor's closed bedroom door are, as job-related elements, misplaced in the family home. Sokel's characterisation of the manager's appearance as a predatory "pursuit" insinuates this point (1980: 274). Absent,

however, is a terminology demonstrating the obvious importance of the “pursuit” with regard to spatial analysis. Spatially characterised, the firm swoops down on its employee, tracking Gregor from the public, occupational sphere into the private. This fact is nonetheless represented in the text as a completely normal, expected and rational consequence of Gregor’s absence from work.

Gregor anticipates the appearance of a representative from the firm twice during his monologue – first of his boss and a company doctor, next of an unspecific employee. His parents and sister then seem to accept the terms of the visit without much protest. They actually pressure Gregor to explain himself on the manager’s behalf or, like his mother, attempt to appease the manager with claims of Gregor’s good faith. The manager even states his demand “in the name of” Gregor’s parents and himself, presenting the family and firm as a unit (Kafka 1972: 11).

No one questions the propriety of the firm’s jurisdiction within the private sphere. Gregor’s indignation concerns only the attack on his occupational integrity. He responds indignantly to “diese Fragerer” (Kafka 1998b: 103), the firm’s lack of trust and its overreaction to his absence, never contesting, however, the manager’s right to question him before his bedroom door. This situation signifies a private sphere which has become highly rationalised by the occupational. Like the civil servant in Kracauer’s *Die Angestellten* (1930), whose personal life has become a public, prefabricated object (cf. Kracauer 1971: 91), the Samsas have allowed external, occupational elements to assume authority over family relationships, personal problems and domestic space.

This predicament resurfaces with the tenancy of the three so-called *Zimmerherren*. Their unique identification by Deleuze and Guattari as “three bureaucrats” who “move in and take over the terms of the family” (2000: 54) is not explained by the authors, but is critical in its juxtaposition of the terms ‘bureaucrats’ and ‘family’. The extremely rational, business-like, unified behaviour of the three men lends them the categorisation as ‘bureaucratic’ types and classifies them as opposites of the family unit. This characterisation emphasises the polarity between the rationalised, commercial and functional on the one hand, and the domestic, private and familial on the other. The antithesis is negated and the two poles, blended, when the lodgers’ treat the Samsa home as the product of a business transaction.

Sokol’s description of their “dominant place in the household” acquired by “virtue of their paying power” (2002: 223) is potentially allusive of the spatial importance of the new tenants. Topographically more determinate is Deleuze and Guattari’s physical characterisation of the men who “penetrate the family itself, taking up its roles, sitting ‘where formerly Gregor and his father and mother had taken their meals’” (2000: 14). The Samsas’ abdication of their dining and living room seats ultimately confirms their naïve contribution to a loss of autonomy and to the tenants’ gain of influence.

[...] die Eltern, die niemals früher Zimmer vermietet hatten und deshalb die Höflichkeit gegen die Zimmerherren übertrieben, wagten gar nicht, sich auf ihre eigenen Sessel zu setzen; der Vater lehnte an der Tür [...] die Mutter aber erhielt von einem Herrn einen Sessel angeboten und saß, da sie den Sessel dort ließ, wohin ihn der Herr zufällig gestellt hatte, abseits in einem Winkel (Kafka 1998b: 148).

Indeed, the Samsas' apartment was spatially altered when the tenants moved in with personal items. This forced family 'junk' to be cleared out and placed into piles in Gregor's room, now used as both his living space and a storage closet (Kafka 1972: 45). Rendered subordinate in the new domestic arrangement, Gregor and the family furniture are have been spatially marginalised into a suppressed area of the house. The rationalisation of the Samsas and their home is thus metaphorically represented by the family's spatial prioritisation of business over the personal – by the ultimate conversion of the home into a commercial space.

### Space of fear

The rationalisation of the private sphere in *Die Verwandlung* culminates in Gregor's exclusion from the family following his transformation. No longer occupationally functional, his worth within the Samsa household deteriorates with his condition, ending in his death. This positional and emotional decline is architecturally represented through the projection of Gregor's exclusion, alienation and feelings of estrangement onto spatial elements and objects. The interior is transformed into a space of psychological anxiety, spelling out the protagonist's alienation in a language of ceilings, doors, windows and furniture.

Gregor's sudden fear of his room, for example, clearly indicates agoraphobic symptoms. His angst directly correlates to the architectural attributes around his forced isolation. In his new corporeal form, the ceiling appears higher and the space above more vast and vacant.

Aber das hohe freie Zimmer, in dem er gezwungen war, flach auf dem Boden zu liegen, ängstigte ihn, ohne daß er die Ursache herausfinden konnte, denn es war ja sein seit fünf Jahren von ihm bewohntes Zimmer – und mit einer halb unbewußten Wendung und nicht ohne eine leichte Scham eilte er unter das Kanapee, wo er sich [...] gleich sehr behaglich fühlte und nur bedauerte, daß sein Körper zu breit war, um vollständig unter dem Kanapee untergebracht zu werden (Kafka 1998b: 119).

Gregor's move toward security under the sofa verifies his awareness of a spatially-related angst. This spatial sensibility is further confirmed when Gregor asks why a familiar room would instil such fright.

Such a conscious application of a spatial psychology is highly significant when considered in historical context. Spatial phobias were a contemporary phenomenon new to popular discourse in 1912, when *The Metamorphosis* was written (Kafka 1998c: 556-7). Agoraphobia had been a topic of central sociological importance at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, when, in the wake of urban development, sociologists found it necessary to treat space as "a central category for modeling social relations, a point of reference for the study of individuals and groups" (Vidler 2000: 67). Gregor's spatial awareness verifies the conscious treatment of space as a point of individual, psychological reference. Significant is, again, a reversal of circumstances: the protagonist's agoraphobia is not instigated in exterior space, as was the case with



most city dwellers who suffered from attacks. Rather, he is terrified by the dimensions of his own room – a space he’s been living in the last five years.

Another spatial fear, claustrophobia, appears in this story through the implicit representation of the apartment as prison. This incarceration proves to be both physical and psychological. First, Gregor’s room is stripped of “everything that he loved” (Kafka 1972: 35) – namely, every piece of furniture except the couch. As Gregor reacts to the ‘mere’ moving around of furniture, the psychosomatic effects are very clear:

Trotzdem sich Gregor immer wieder sagte, daß ja nichts Außergewöhnliches geschehe, sondern nur ein paar Möbel umgestellt würden, wirkte doch, wie er sich bald eingestehen mußte, dieses Hin- und Hergehen der Frauen, ihre kleinen Zurufe, das Kratzen der Möbel auf dem Boden, wie ein großer, von allen Seiten genährter Trubel auf ihn, und er mußte sich, so fest er Kopf und Beine an sich zog und den Leib bis an den Boden drückte, unweigerlich sagen, daß er das Ganze nicht lange aushalten werde (Kafka 1998b: 133).

The resulting interior arrangement only serves to remind Gregor of his irretrievable human past and current isolation. His sense of incarceration is furthered by the family’s control of their son’s peripheral participation in family life. The others indicate their willingness for his company by locking his door or leaving it slightly ajar. When Gregor finally leaves his bedroom on his own accord, it’s characterised as a “breakout” (Kafka 1972: 35 & 37). The room’s single window consequently becomes associated as a portal to free, open space, even as liberating: “das Befreiende” (Kafka 1998b: 126).

Gregor’s parents and sister also force an unwilling detention upon themselves: “[...] denn immer waren zumindest zwei Familienmitglieder zu Hause, da wohl niemand allein zu Hause bleiben wollte und man die Wohnung auf keinen Fall gänzlich verlassen konnte” (Kafka 1998b: 123). This behaviour clearly demonstrates how the family’s relationship to space is influenced by their fear of Gregor. The palpable development of the apartment to Gregor’s place of confinement evokes, thus, a claustrophobic reaction from not just Gregor, but all inhabitants. But the father, mother and daughter’s psychological sense of internment is best illustrated by their ‘release’ following Gregor’s death.

Dann verließen alle drei gemeinschaftlich die Wohnung, was sie schon seit Monaten nicht getan hatten, und fuhren mit der Elektrischen ins Freie vor die Stadt [...] Sie besprachen, bequem auf ihren Sitzen zurückgelehnt, die Aussichten für die Zukunft [...] (Kafka 1998b: 160).

The Samsas abandon Gregor and moreover, the residence which he had picked out for them (Kafka 1998b: 160). A new, smaller, ‘better’ apartment would cost less, be easier to manage but above all, render them free from any spatial association with their son.

In its futurist emphasis on the modern, the electric and the vital, the closing and only scene in the exterior is both subtly ironic and critical of the family’s sense of optimism. The metaphorical quality of ‘electricity’ anticipates, as explained by Lethen, a central topos in the literature of the New Objectivity. The conducive quality of electricity places the trio as part of a larger, regulated system in the public sphere. Father, mother and daughter are now connected to the *Netz der Modernisierung* (Lethen 1994:

211) as integrated parts of urban flow, traffic and functionality. Having relinquished their deceased son and brother with some sense of relief, this image of the Samsas corresponds to the New Objectivist profile of the cold persona in midst the electromagnetic field (Lethen 1994: 210-11). Focus is accordingly now directed to Greta's marriage potential. The three also embellish the promising outlook of their respective jobs – "worüber sie einander eigentlich noch gar nicht ausgefragt hatten" (Kafka 1998b: 160). Hence despite their 'liberation,' the family members remain estranged from each other in an illusionary euphoria, constructed on the basis of their social and economic marketability in the public sector.

### Conclusion

The critical representation of the fusion of the private and public resurfaces in many of Kafka's texts. The spatial situation depicted there is consistently marked by a social and physical sense of disorientation. When examined within the context of the contemporary reality, the literary representation appears to have a historical basis. While sociologists lamented the impact of industrialisation and modern bureaucracy on private life, architects of the International Style and *das Neue Bauen*, as likewise indicated by Lungstrum (1992), drafted neo-formations which diminished the boundary between the interior and exterior, thus altering the relationship of the domestic sphere to the exterior, public one.

Kafka's literary blending derives new meaning from a comparison to such sociological and architectural discourses. The literary experience of being ontologically, sociologically and spatially in flux may be attributed to the historical shifting and apparent suspension of boundaries between the private and the public. The process of modernisation, industrialisation and rationalisation, often documented in contemporary, first-hand accounts as a problematic, difficult experience, rendered that, what Adorno once characterised as the "home," a notion of the previous century (2003: 42).

A spatial analysis of Kafka's texts places the literature within this historical framework, allowing parallels between textual representation and the contemporary reality. This approach offers an autonomous reinterpretation of the 'Kafkaesque' independent from psychological, autobiographical or philosophical exegeses. In their place, subtle spatial discrepancies, like Kafka's consistently endangered, 'de-domesticated' beds, emerge as points of origin for the bizarre atmosphere, setting and placement of characters. The bed is reinvented as a universal literary symbol in its divergent representation as a location of surprise, vulnerability and danger.

Because the bed is a familiar, fundamental, cultural object, the act of identifying any divergence in its fictive representation is made easy. Herein lies the subtle genius of the author: the interpretation of the literary text becomes as accessible to the reader as the cultural object itself. In simply recognising that Kafka's beds are jilted, disconcerting places, the reader can also understand why the 'heim,' or home, in that literary universe, is so 'un-heim-lich,' or in other words, everything but comfortable, secure or safe. Taken a step further, these 'unheimliche' elements become less enigmatic when

considered in terms of their 'private' and 'public' architecture. The enigma becomes the blurred boundary itself. A historical reading, however, discloses the enigma as a literary representation of a cultural phenomenon. Contextualization places this literature against the backdrop of historical changes, demonstrating how textual elements narrate the ways in which the experience of 'privacy' altered through phases of industrial, political and social modernisation.

## Notes

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- 1 The term "Taylorism" is derived from Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915), an American inventor, engineer and efficiency expert (Taylor 1991: 459). Wilterdink and van Heerikhuizen explain how Taylor's program for 'scientific management' dictated the principle that production tasks be distributed into the most elementary operations: through a calculated system of material stimuli, workers were to be pushed to their maximal achievement, while regular tempo checks were to assist in the increase of output speed to the highest possible level. Ford adopted this speed-up system in his Detroit automobile factories through the implementation of assembly-line manufacturing (Wilterdink & van Heerikhuizen 1999: 68).

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