

Henry Sussman,  
 Charlotte M. Craig Distinguished Visiting Professor of German,  
 German House, 172 College Ave.,  
 New Brunswick, NJ, 08901  
 (732) 932-7201  
 henry.sussman@yale.edu

**AROUND KAFKA**  
**German House Seminar Room**  
 Monday, 4:30-7:10

**OVERVIEW:** “Franz Kafka” is often understood to be the familiar historical character: a Czech-Jewish writer who wrote and practiced worker’s compensation law in Prague, and who died an untimely death, most likely of TB related to complications from the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic, in 1924. But in keeping with conditions of simulation and representation in our still-young cybernetic age, “Franz Kafka” may also be regarded as a most distinctive idiom, aesthetic, posture, and display or distribution of literary figures throughout a radical virtual space “belonging” as much to his fellow authors and legions of readers as to himself. Our course decisively takes off from this second approach. We will approach Kafka both as an author who made inventive incursions into the preexisting virtual universes of fairy tale and Romantic inspirations including Heinrich von Kleist and E.T.A. Hoffmann; and, as a major resource and inspiration for an astounding variety of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century critics and philosophers as well as fiction-writers. Some of the most distinctive achievements of Jorges Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, Thomas Bernhard, J.M. Coetzee, Orhan Pamuk, and Haruki Marukami, not to mention critics Walter Benjamin and Maurice Blanchot, would be unthinkable outside the unique imaginary terrain that Kafka configured and programmed. We begin by asking ourselves: what are the parameters of the virtual simulated world that Kafka both synthesized and appropriated. We’ll then hang on for the improvisational literary demolition-derby happening when “Franz Kafka” collides into the imaginations of Beckett, Borges, Pamuk, Murakami, and peers on the syllabus.

**READINGS:**

**REQUIRED:**

Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories* [*Sämtliche Erzählungen*] (in English, Schocken)  
 --*Amerika* (New Directions ed.)  
 --*The Trial* [*Der Prozeß*] (Schocken)  
 --*The Castle* [*Das Schloß*] (Schocken)  
 --*Letter to my Father* [*Brief an den Vater*]

*Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* (selected tales).

Heinrich von Kleist, "Michael Kohlhaas" (Eng.: *The Marquise von O. & Other Stories*)

Jacques Lacan, material on *Imaginary* (*Seminars 1 & 2*)

Samuel Beckett, "The Lost Ones"

Thomas Bernhard, *Correction*

J. M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K.*

Orhan Pamuk, *Snow* (selected passages)

Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations/Selected Writings*—re "Franz Kafka," "The Storyteller"

Maurice Blanchot, "The Song of the Sirens" and related passages

(from *The Gaze of Orpheus* and *The Space of Literature*)

Jacques Derrida, "Before the Law," from *Acts of Literature*

### OPTIONAL & TOUCHED ON IN CLASS:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-too Human* (selections)

Ben Katchor, "*Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer* (graphic novel)

Luc & Benoit Schuiten and Benoit Peeters, *The Fever of Vrbincede* (graphic novel)

Theodor Adorno, "Notes on Kafka," (from *Prisms*)

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka, Toward a Minor Literature*

*A Thousand Plateaus* (selected passages)

Ernesto Laclau, *New Revolution in our Time* (Chapter 1)

### FILMS MENTIONED IN CLASS:

Charlie Chaplin, "Modern Times"

"Orson Welles's *The Trial*"

Stanley Kubrick, "Dr. Strangelove"

### SCHEDULE:

Week # 1	Introduction. Why Kafka? A writer of texts as opposed to an author.
1/26/15	Interventions as commentaries. The epoch-making author as a scrambler of the prevailing <i>Imaginary</i> (notion elaborated by Jacques Lacan). Aesthetic interventions as reprogrammings (how do computers simulate artistic strategies?) Kafka and his times. Paintings by Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele, Braque, Léger,

## Picasso. Musical selections: Wagner, Mahler, Berg.

- #2 Experiments of words on the page. Kafka on myth and history.  
2/2 The shortest fiction pieces, including "Trees" ["*Bäume*"], "Prometheus," "Poseidon," "The Silence of the Sirens" ["*Das Schweigen der Sirenen*"], "A Common Confusion" ["*Eine alltägliche Verwirrung*"], "A Crossbreed (A Sport)" ["*Eine Kreuzung*"], "The Cares of a Family Man" ["*Die Sorge des Hausvaters*"]. Major Kafkan inspiration: Heinrich von Kleist, "*Michael Kohlhaas*." **Plus:** The pervasive grounding in *Märchen*, as in „*Das Lumpengesindel*“ (“Riffraff”); „*Von dem Mäuschen, dem Vögelein und dem Würstchen*“ (“The Mouse, the Bird, and the Sausage”); „*Tischchen deck dich, Goldesel und Knüppel aus dem Sack*“ (“The Magic Table, the Golden Donkey, and the Club in the Sack”); „*Aschenputtel*“ (“Cinderella”); „*Die drei Glückskinder*“ (“The Three Sons of Fortune”); „*Sechse kommen durch die ganze Welt*“ (“How Six Made Their Way into the World”); „*Die sechs Diener*“ (“The Six Servants”).
- #3 “Parables for Artists”: “First Sorrow” ["*Erstes Leid*"], “A Hunger Artist”  
2/9 ["*Ein Hungerkünstler*"], “The Judgment” ["*Das Urteil*"], “The Metamorphosis” ["*Die Verwandlung*"]. Also: Toward “Literary Animals”: More on “The Metamorphosis,” “The Burrow” ["*Der Bau*"], “Josephine the Singer, or The Mouse Folk” ["*Josefine die Sängerin*"]. Tangent: The “animation” of culture. Passages on “becoming-animal,” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
- #4 Hence, Benjamin’s epochal 1934 Kafka Study: not only “Franz Kafka: On the  
2/16 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his Death,” but also “The Storyteller” (*Illuminations*)
- #5 Medieval Kafka: “The Knock on the Manor Gate” ["*Der Schlag ans Hoftor*"],  
2/23 “A Country Doctor” ["*Ein Landarzt*"], initial approach, *The Castle*; references, Pamuk’s *Snow*.
- #6 Kafka, *Castle*, *Snow*, #2.  
3/2
- #7 Modern Picaresque: *Amerika* #1. Side reading: Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Jorge Luis Borges, “Parable of Cervantes and the *Quixote*,” “Kafka and his Precursors.”  
3/9

**Spring Break:** Week, March 15-22, 2015.

- #8 *Amerika* # 2. Ernesto Laclau, from “New Revolution in our Time.”  
3/23 Clips, Chaplin, “Modern Times”; Kubrick, “Dr. Strangelove.”  
Assignment # 1 due.
- #9 Ironic-Pathetic Kafka: *The Trial* #1. Analog predecessor to *Der Proceß*: Fyodor  
3/30 Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dmitri’s trial. Also Jacques

Derrida, "Before the Law" and "Orson Welles' *The Trial*, (clips).

- # 10 The Endless Monologue. Surreal Kafka: Conclusion, *The Trial*; passages, *The Castle*; Samuel Beckett, "The Lost Ones"; passages, Thomas Bernhard, *Correction (Korrektur)*; Kafka critique by Maurice Blanchot.
- #11 Kafka at the Comics: The Comics Art of R. Crumb, Ben Katchor, Art Spiegelman, and the Belgian *Bande Desinée*.
- #12 Literary Ex-Tensions #1: Colonial Kafka:  
4/20 "The Penal Colony" [*In der Strafkolonie*]  
J.M. Coetzee, *Life & Times of Michael K*.
- #13 Literary Ex-Tensions #2: Haruki Marukami,  
4/27 *Kafka on the Shore*.
- #14 Class presentations related to final project.  
5/4
- #14a (Finals Week): More time for presentations if necessary.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** There will be two major assignments in the course, and lesser assignments will be in preparation of them: 1) A close reading of a text by Kafka in terms of its "internal" workings and economies, and in relation to an exegetical framework (e.g., philosophical, theoretical, rhetorical, theological, sociological, historical, psychological) of the student's choice. 2) An "adaptation" of a Kafka text (or amalgamation of several) in a non-literary medium of the student's choice, whether visual, cybernetic, dramatic, or musical, in consultation with the instructor; OR a sustained critique of such an adaptation by someone else. One of these major pieces of work will be due around mid-semester (3/23); the other at the end of the semester (5/11). Brief assignments (outlines, sketches, bibliographies) will be in preparation of these two pieces of work. In cases where students feel hampered by either of these two assignments, they are welcome to work out alternatives with the instructor.

**BOOKS:** University Bookstore

**OFFICE HOURS:** Weds., 3:00-5:00 PM and by appt.

**OFFICE:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, German House, 172 College Ave.