TOWARD A *CANINICAL* THEORY OF THE NEIGHBOR

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In summer 2019, Kenneth Reinhard and I were invited to give keynote lectures at a conference entitled 'Neighbor-Love: Poetics of Love and Agape' at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. The conference was scheduled to take place in April 2020 but was canceled in the wake of the pandemic. You may recall that some public intellectuals, including Giorgio Agamben, criticized such measures as part of a more general, ideologically driven "cancel culture." The governor of the state of Florida defended his prohibition of masks in schools in terms that could have been taken from Agamben's own writings; they were, he declared, part of a "biomedical security apparatus." From my own perspective, it just turned out that the best way to love one's neighbor in the time of COVID-19 was to isolate oneself, or if that wasn't possible, to maintain "social distancing" while the face of the Other was, ideally, covered by a mask.

I

Kenneth Reinhard[1] and I owed our invitation to the work we did together with Slavoj Žižek on a book devoted to the topic of the neighbor.[2] This co-authored volume attempted to revisit the biblical injunction to love one's neighbor, but to do so in a Freudian spirit, that is, to see what psychoanalysis might have to offer with respect to the meaning and stakes of this imperative in general and for our contemporary moment in particular. We were well aware of Sigmund Freud's (1856–1939) own considerable skepticism about this commandment, a skepticism that pertained to a neighbor in one's own community as well as—and no doubt more strongly—to a stranger or foreigner who enters our midst, who appears right *next* to us (much, of course, depends on the nature of the proximity indicated by this little word;

in German, the neighbor in the biblical sense is *der Nächste*). In both instances, the neighbor remains utterly and even threateningly *alien*, utterly *other*, to Freud. One could, of course, say that Freud's attitude should not be surprising considering that what is at issue here is, after all, a divine commandment, one that perhaps only truly carries force for a person of faith, for someone who recognizes the word of God in the commandment. For a nonbeliever like Freud, it represents a moral generosity toward one's fellows who are for the most part undeserving of love or special kindness. As Freud writes,

> I must honestly confess that he [the neighbor] has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred. He seems not to have the least trace of love for me and shows me not the slightest consideration. If it will do him any good he has no hesitation in injuring me, nor does he ask himself whether the amount of advantage he gains bears any proportion to the extent of the harm he does to me. Indeed, he need not even obtain an advantage; if he can satisfy any sort of desire by it, he thinks nothing of jeering at me, insulting me, slandering me and showing his superior power; and the more secure he feels and the more helpless I am, the more certainly I can expect him to behave like this to me.[3]

The commandment remains especially alien to Freud against the backdrop of what he had at this point in his thinking concluded about the psychic makeup of human beings. As "creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness," he writes,

> their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo homini lupus*.[4]

These words are taken from the 1930 essay *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, where Freud puts forth the paradoxical thesis that man is a wolf to his fellow man not because of some failure on the part of civilization to fully tame his bestial nature; the bestial element in man is seen, rather, to be in some sense—Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) called it a dialectical sense—a by-product of the civilizing process itself. Civilization, whose fundamental aim is typically seen as the development of a degree of immunity against dangers assailing life from the outside, is, Freud argues, so constituted that it inevitably begins to attack itself in autoimmune fashion (much like the disease entity that goes by the name *lupus*). To put it in different biblical terms, what makes man a *lupus* to his fellow man is precisely what sets him apart from the animal kingdom: His sinful, fallen nature, his primordial, his "original" deviation from his divinely created nature. As the biblical traditions would have it, this is, of course, what also makes possible the emergence of the kingdom of God—I am tempted to say, the *royal neighborhood* of God—in which our various immune systems against external and internal aliens have been finally rendered inoperative.

This language has particular resonance against the backdrop of the crisis that led to the global spread of a virus itself bearing a kind of corona or crown.

Some eight years before Freud wrote *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Franz Kafka (1883–1924), a fellow German-Jewish survivor of the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, wrote a remarkable prose text published posthumously under the heading 'Forschungen eines Hundes' (1922; English edition: 'Researches of Dog', 1933). As in all of Kafka's animal stories, this one, too, serves as a kind of allegory that makes visible something distinctly human, which in Kafka's case typically overlaps with traits associated with assimilated Central European Jews. It's a dense and difficult text, and I won't venture any sort of comprehensive reading here but try instead to underline a few features that will hopefully bring us into greater conceptual proximity to the neighbor.[5]

II

The story is presented as a kind of memoir of an aging dog reflecting on his choice as a young dog to pursue the life of the mind, one dedicated to research, to a certain kind of theoretical activity, rather than sharing in the common life of dogs. He confesses that this choice set him on a difficult path:

> "Why won't I behave like the others, live in harmony with my kind, silently accept whatever disturbs that harmony, overlook it as a little mistake in the great reckoning, and turn forever toward what binds us happily together and not toward what, time and again, irresistibly, of course, tears us out of the circle of our kind?"[6]

In hindsight, the narrator-dog seems to realize that such disturbances to the harmony of "dogdom," of *Hundeschaft*, point not to contingent and determinate errors, but to a more fundamental errancy grounded in a structural glitch in the constitution of the species: "on closer scrutiny I soon find that something was not quite right from the beginning, that a little fracture [*eine kleine Bruchstelle*] was in place."[7] He notes that a "a slight uneasiness"[8] (*ein leichtes Unbehagen*) would come over him not only in the midst of the collective but also in more intimate settings, indeed that the mere sight of another dog could throw him into a sense of helplessness and despair.[9] Call it *Unbehagen in der Hundekultur* (with a touch of canine self-hatred).

He goes on to recall the event that first set him on the course of his researches. It was an encounter with a group of seven dogs who engage in a kind of dance set to a clamorous music that seems to come from nowhere, a music *ex nihilo*. "They did not speak, they did not sing, in general they held their tongue with almost a certain doggedness [*mit einer gewissen Verbissenheit*], but they conjured forth music out of the empty space." He recalls "the way they raised and set down their feet, certain turns of their heads, their running and their resting, the attitudes they assumed toward one another, the combinations they formed with one another like a round dance."[10] At a certain point the music becomes overwhelming:

> you could attend to nothing but this music that came from all sides, from the heights, from the depths, from everywhere, pulling the listener into its midst, pouring over him, crushing him, and even after annihilating him, still blaring its fanfares at such close range that they turned remote [*in solcher Nähe, daß es schon Ferne war*] and barely audible.[11]

The young narrator-dog retreats to a pile of wooden planks and from his hiding place observes how the performance takes a new and horrifying turn; the seven dancing dogs "had truly cast off all shame" and stand upright on their hind legs.

> They were exposing themselves and openly flaunted their nakedness, they prided themselves on it, and whenever they obeyed their better instincts for a moment and lowered their front legs, they were literally horrified, as if it were a mistake, as if nature were a mistake, and once again they rapidly raised their legs, and their eyes seemed to be asking forgiveness that they had had to desist a little from their sinfulness [*daß sie in ihrer Sündhaftigkeit ein wenig hatten innehalten müssen*].[12]

The young narrator-dog's obsession with this for him deeply enigmatic, not to say, traumatic, encounter is what ultimately alienates him from dogdom and sets him on his course as a researcher with the aim of, as he puts it, solving the mystery of the dancing dogs "absolutely by dint of research, so as finally to gain a new view of ordinary, quiet, happy, everyday life." As he then adds, "I have subsequently worked the same way, even if with less childish means—but the difference is not very great—and I persist stubbornly to this day."[13] Be that as it may, the dogged pursuit of a sort of absolute canine knowledge begins with questions close to hand, questions pertaining to the most basic needs of canine life. "I began my investigations at that time with the simplest things [. . .] I began to investigate what dogdom took as nourishment."[14] The research concerns the question of the source of food, where food comes from. Does it come from the earth?

Does it come down from the sky? Can dogs influence the appearance of food? Though these are questions that have apparently concerned canine scholars for generations, our young researcher, admitting the limits to his capacity for proper scientific study, pursues such questions more or less on his own without consulting the authoritative, call them *caninical*, sources. A first conclusion would have it that dogs' main foodstuff indeed comes from the earth but that, for still unknown reasons, the earth needs dogs to help with its production: "we find this food on the ground, but the ground needs our water." He adds that the appearance of food has been known to be accelerated by means of "certain incantations, songs, and movements."[15] Later in the story, our canine researcher entertains an opposing opinion, one seemingly supported by empirical evidence, that food comes not from the ground but rather from above and is only brought down to earth by way of said canine rituals.[16]

At this point in the story, if not much sooner, the reader recognizes its fundamental conceit, namely, that the dogs live amid human beings who for some reason remain invisible to them. Put another way, the dogs live as if human beings did not exist and are thus forced to contend with a multiplicity of phenomena that must remain enigmatic to them or can be explained only by way of empirically noted regularities: Dogs pee; dogs find food on the ground. Dogs bark, howl, moan (so-called incantations); dogs find food on the ground. The story's conceit becomes completely obvious when the narrator-dog, discussing the odd variety of occupations in which dogs are employed, mentions the air dogs, the *Lufthunde*. This Yiddish expression for a dreamy, impractical person with no visible means of subsistence clearly refers here to small lapdogs who instead of being walked are carried around by their invisible masters. Known to the narrator only by hearsay, he expresses his incredulity that

> There was supposed to be a dog, of the smallest breed, not much bigger than my head, even in advanced age not much bigger; and this dog, naturally a weakling, to judge by appearances an artificial, immature, overcarefully coiffed creature, incapable of

> taking an honest jump—this dog, the story went, was supposed to move about most of the time high in the air while doing no visible work [. . .].[17]

In hindsight, it becomes clear that the encounter that set him on his path as a researcher was with a group of trained dogs performing, perhaps in a park or public square, to the accompaniment of human musicians. We feel confident that the answer to that first enigma, "Who was forcing them to do what they were doing here?",[18] is a straightforward one: Their human masters.

Returning to the main question the narrator-dog pursues, namely, where food comes from, the story would seem to suggest that the *Bruchstelle* or fracture in the constitution of dogdom is connected to the lack of a concept of *providence*, that is, that food is *provided for them* by the good graces of human beings, that they are, as domestic animals, *dependent* on human care and nurturance. One might think of it as a thought experiment: What happens when a region of being is foreclosed from one's picture of the world? Kafka seems here to be revealing the sorts of uncanny enigmas and paradoxes that emerge once divine being—once revelation—has been foreclosed from human life, no longer figures as a central point of reference and orientation in the world, once man becomes, to coin a phrase, *ungodded*. The texture of ordinary life comes to be ruptured by a series of impossible questions that, as it were, hound human life without hope of "domestication" by either the natural or human sciences. This is, I want to suggest, at least part of what is in play in Freud's perplexity with respect to the neighbor and the commandment of neighbor-love; it's as mysterious as the spectacle of the seven dogs dancing to a music that seems to come from nowhere, as the appearance of food for a dog whose "ontology" has no place for the being of human being and who bark and howl into an empty sky.

III

As I've noted, the narrator-dog in Kafka's story considers himself to be poorly trained and without special talent for the researches he undertakes (he later speaks of his "lack of propensity for science, scant

intellectual power, poor memory and, above all, inability to focus consistently on a scientific goal"[19]). Nonetheless he devises a series of experiments meant to grasp the causal chain that leads to the appearance of food, to catch it in action, as it were. After several efforts with uncertain outcomes, he decides to undertake a more radical experiment: To withdraw from the society of his fellow dogs and, more importantly, to fast, as if only the most radical ascetic practice—starvation—could clear the space for true knowledge about what keeps dogkind alive.[20] At the point where our canine *hunger artist*—Kafka wrote the story bearing that title the same year, 1922—has reduced himself to a minimum of bare life—we might say, to life in the neighborhood of zero—he awakens to find himself confronted by another dog who demands that he remove himself from the area. In the course of the dialogue that ensues the strange dog declares his breed—"I am a hunter"[21]—and continues to insist that our narrator-dog is interfering with his work and must leave. At a point of stalemate something remarkable occurs that, though the narrator-dog will later attribute it to his "overstimulation at the time [. . .] nevertheless had a certain grandeur and is," he adds, "the sole reality, even if only an apparent reality, that I salvaged and brought back into this world from the time of my fast."[22] It was a moment of ecstasy, of *Außer-sich-sein*, accompanied by "infinite anxiety and shame" produced by a second encounter with music *ex nihilo*: "I noticed through intangible details [. . .] that from the depths of his chest this dog was getting ready to sing."[23] Though the hunting dog appears to remain silent, a music emerges nonetheless:

> What I seemed to perceive was that the dog was already singing without his being aware of it—no, more than that: that the melody, detached from him, was floating through the air and then past him according to its own laws, as if he no longer had any part in it, floating at me, aimed only at me [. . .].[24]

By this point in the story, the reader is already clued in, already prepared to attribute the music not to the narrator-dog's hypersensitivity brought on by fasting but rather to human hunters blowing their

hunting horns. And though this musical epiphany remains empty of content, the narrator-dog, as already noted, nonetheless registers its uncanny force as an interpellation addressed to him only, now as a kind of overwhelming Orphic voice (one is here reminded, perhaps, of the man from the country standing before the law, *Vor dem Gesetz*, the gates of which, as he learns in his last moments of life, were meant only for him):

> I could not resist the melody that the dog now quickly seemed to adopt as his own. It grew stronger, there may have been no limits to its power to increase, it was already on the verge of shattering my eardrums [*schon jetzt sprengte sie mir fast das Gehör*]. But the worst of it was that it seemed to be there for my sake alone, this voice, whose sublimity made the woods grow silent, for my sake alone [. . .].[25]

At this point it is hard, at least for me, not to hear in this voice resonances with the debate between Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and Gershom Scholem (1897–1982) concerning the status of "revelation" in Kafka's writings. The central point of contention between the two friends concerns the status of theological trace elements in Kafka's work. Scholem insists that Kafka's work is suffused with the radiance of revelation, but a revelation, as he puts it, "seen from the perspective in which it is returned to its own nothingness."[26] Scholem will later characterize this "nothingness of revelation" as "a state in which revelation appears to be without meaning, in which it still asserts itself, in which it has validity but no significance [*in dem sie gilt, aber nicht bedeutet*]," a revelation "reduced to the zero point of its own content, so to speak."[27] For Kafka, what I said earlier with respect to Freud's relation to the commandment of neighbor-love needs a slight but significant revision. A divine commandment, I said, is one that only truly carries force for a person of faith, for someone who recognizes the word of God in the commandment. Kafka seems to offer another possibility, namely, that it is possible to register the force of a commandment the content of which approaches zero.[28]

The canine version of this *Nichts der Offenbarung*, this "nothing of revelation" conveyed by a disembodied voice, a floating signifier of transcendence (that could nonetheless take residence in a particular dog, become the music of the Other *in* it), leads to a new turn in the researches of the narrator-dog. After this second musical encounter of the story—call it a *Musiktrauma*—he feels new life entering his body and, more importantly, a new sense of his proper vocation, a call to engage in a new branch of scientific research: Musicology or, as Max Weber might have put it, *Musikwissenschaft als Beruf*. More importantly, he finally realizes that the science of nutrition and the science of music overlap at a crucial juncture, one about which he already had some inklings at the time of his first musical encounter:

> Of course, there is some overlap between the two sciences [*ein Grenzgebiet der beiden Wissenschaften*] that even then aroused my suspicions. I mean the doctrine of the song that calls down food from above [. . .].[29]

Again, the equally more and less mysterious reading would be that the various sorts of vocalizations produced by domestic animals can move their owners to feed them. The mystery here is, of course, that it is a mystery for the dogs how this works once the domestic sphere has become the site of a *humanitas absconditus*. These last thoughts about the border zone of the two sciences—where the two sciences neighbor one another—lead immediately to the narrator-dog's concluding words that repeat the theme of his lack of talent for proper science. But now, at the very end of his autobiographical reflections, he seems ready to fully embrace this lack as rooted in an instinct for a different mode of inquiry, for the development of an entirely new kind of science, a kind of new canine thinking: "It was my instinct that, perhaps precisely for the sake of science but a different science than is practiced today, an ultimate science, led me to value freedom above all else. Freedom! Of course, the freedom that is possible today—a stunted growth [*ein kümmerliches Gewächs*]. But nevertheless freedom, nevertheless a possession."[30]

IV

At the conclusion of his inspiring reading of Kafka's "caninical" text, Mladen Dolar suggests that it was Kafka's neighbor, Freud, who had already begun to develop the warp and woof—hard not to say woof-woof—of this ultimate science of at least a kind of freedom, a freedom rooted in that border territory where nutrition and music, food and voice, seem to converge and diverge at the same time, where the locus of nutrition, the mouth, tongue, teeth, become, by a kind of intermittent fasting, the locus of the articulation of sounds (as every child is taught, one shouldn't speak with one's mouth full). Giving a psychoanalytic twist to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri's characterization of this "deterritorialization" of the mouth, Dolar puts it this way:

> By speech [the] mouth is denaturalized, diverted from its natural function, seized by the signifier (and [. . .] by the voice which is but the alterity of the signifier). The Freudian name for this deterritorialization is the drive [. . .] Eating can never be the same once the mouth has been deterritorialized—it is seized by the drive, it turns around a new object which emerged in this operation, it keeps circumventing, circling around this eternally elusive object.[31]

Our efforts to reterritorialize this object, to integrate the alterity of the voice into our life in the space of meaning never comes off without a remainder. As Dolar puts it, "But this secondary nature can never quite succeed, and the bit that eludes it can be pinned down as the element of the voice, this pure alterity of what is said. This is the common ground it shares with food, that in food which precisely escapes eating, the bone that gets stuck in the gullet."[32]

Here Dolar is more or less repeating with respect to the voice Freud's famous account of thumb-sucking first presented in his 1905 treatise *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*.[33] There Freud locates the birth of sexuality in the way in which a semiautonomous autoerotic activity splits off from its place and purpose in the homeostatic regulation of the organism. Before homing in on the "event" of that split,

Freud first calls into question what, with respect to sexuality, we seem naturally to see as the norm and normally see as natural.

In the first essay, which addresses what he refers to as *die sexuellen Abirrungen*, the sexual aberrations, Freud offers a rather stunning formulation of an errancy he's discovered to be constitutive of sexual "object choice," of the drive's deviation from its ostensibly destined natural object (a member of the opposite sex):

> It has been brought to our notice that we have been in the habit of regarding the connection between the sexual instinct and the sexual object as more intimate than it in fact is. Experience of the cases that are considered abnormal has shown us that in them the sexual instinct and the sexual object are merely soldered together—a fact which we have been in danger of overlooking in consequence of the uniformity of the normal picture, where the object appears to form part and parcel of the instinct. We are thus warned to loosen the bond that exists in our thoughts between instinct and object. It seems probable *that the sexual instinct is in the first instance [zunächst] independent of its object*; nor is its origin likely to be due to the object's attractions.[34]

The cause of the drive's attachments would thus seem to be something other than the object, or rather an otherness in the object itself, something in the object that exceeds that object's properties, that is, all that can be accounted for by one predicate or another. The drive functions, we might say, according to a kind of "negative anthropology" (in analogy with the doctrine of negative theology, which posits God's essence beyond propositional knowledge). What arouses sexual desire is something in the object that is strangely independent of the object, a part that has no part in it, in a word, a *partial object* to which desire finds itself to be singularly partial.

In the second essay, which is dedicated to infantile sexuality, Freud uses the example of thumb-sucking—the German words Freud uses, *Lutschen*, *Ludeln*, and *Wonnesaugen*, are translated as *sensual sucking*—to illustrate the way in which a new and surprising satisfaction emerges

at the site of nursing, an activity that satisfies the demands of a homeostatic imperative of the organism. With Kafka's dog in mind, we might say that the object of the science of food thereby becomes the object of Freud's new science, the science of libido and its modes of production and circulation, the science of libidinal economy. Here it is not a question of object choice but rather of the splitting of the object into itself and something "in it" that bears its libidinal value, a something that, as Freud earlier suggests, can wander, can come to light upon seemingly aberrant objects endowing them with "it," the real thing that really satisfies. As Freud proposes, at the point of its emergence, thumb-sucking represents the infant's attempt to recapture a sensation of pleasure already experienced. "It is easy," he writes, "to guess the occasion on which the child had his first experiences of the pleasure which he is now striving to renew. It was the child's first and most vital [*lebenswichtigste*] activity, his sucking at his mother's breast, or at substitutes for it, that must have familiarized him with this pleasure. The child's lips," he continues, "behave like an erotogenic zone, and no doubt stimulation by the warm flow of milk is the cause of the pleasurable sensation." That pleasure, as noted, gains a kind of semiautonomy, becomes wayward.

> The satisfaction of the erotogenic zone is associated [*vergesellschaftet*], in the first instance [*anfangs*], with the satisfaction of the need for nourishment. To begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to [*lehnt sich zunächst an*] functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent until later [. . .]. The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction now *becomes detached from the need for taking nourishment*.[35]

Freud's account of the emergence of the libidinal object, the object invested with libidinal value, more or less maps on to the way in which Aristotle describes the emergence of chrematistics, the art of making money. There too something detaches itself from its own purpose, from its functional role in the management of the household, the *oikos*. For Aristotle, making money for the sake of making money represents

a deviation from, a perversion of, the primary function of money, that is, to enable the commerce necessary for the provision of the household.[36] For Marx, of course, chrematistics acquires a new source of energy in modern capitalism, the possibility of exploiting so-called free labor, of consuming that unique commodity, "labor power," for the production of surplus value (for Marx, this marks the shift from merchants' capital to capital proper). The capitalist qua capitalist must at some level be indifferent to the use values of the commodities he produces, for what is at issue here is the repetition of the production of surplus value, a supplementary satisfaction that attaches itself to, that "leans on," the production of commodities the use values of which fulfill some need or want. More precisely, capital discovers a new satisfaction at the point at which the laborer has, by adding use value to raw materials, earned what allows for living and working another day. The capitalist, however, discovers that he can continue sucking more labor out of the laborer and that the additional use value thereby produced becomes surplus value accruing only to the capitalist. *Sucking more*, *more sucking*, comes to be the primary activity, the raison d'être, of the capitalist's existence. In a word, capitalism *really does suck*.

V

I want to work my way back to the question of the neighbor by way of some reflections on another text by Kafka I often return to. It's one that explores disorders of the domestic sphere—an enigmatic excess in the *oikos*—caused not by the absence of the human but by the presence of the inhuman, a strange creature called by the name—or is it just a word?—"Odradek." In his contribution to the volume on the neighbor to which Kenneth Reinhard and I also contributed, Žižek invokes this figure resistant to figural representation—Odradek would seem to be a sort of cubist entity or animate collage—as the proper name for a dimension of the neighbor that, in his view, constitutes a fundamental challenge to the Levinasian understanding of ethics as the just response "before the law" manifest in the commanding presence, the face of the Other (what Paul Celan calls *die Gegenwart des Menschlichen*). Is, Žižek asks,

> the 'neighbor' in the Judeo-Freudian sense, the neighbor as the bearer of a monstrous Otherness, this properly *inhuman* neighbor, the same as the neighbor that we encounter in the Levinasian experience of the Other's face? Is there not, in the very heart of the Judeo-Freudian inhuman neighbor, a monstrous dimension which is already minimally 'gentrified,' domesticated, once it is conceived in the Levinasian sense?

In Celan's terms, this might be thought of as the difference between art and poetry, between what is registered in *Kunst* and what is conveyed in the *Gegenwort* of *Dichtung*. "What if," Žižek finally asks, "the Levinasian face is yet another defense against this monstrous dimension of subjectivity?"[37] The concern with domestication is so crucial because the text, published under the title 'Die Sorge des Hausvaters,' is itself the story of something that can't be domesticated, can't be economized, by the "father of the house," the master of the *oikos*.[38]

In my own previous engagement with the text, I have tried to challenge what I see as another strategy of domestication, one that also presents itself as a more radical opening to the true alterity of Odradek, an opening that could be said to represent the stakes of a true life, one fully responsive to the "face" of such alterity. In her contribution to the so-called new materialism in the cultural and social sciences, an intellectual movement that promotes a more capacious understanding of the various forms of "vibrant matter" that neighbor on the human and that shares in the ethos of the "postcritical" turn, Jane Bennett writes, "Odradek exposes this continuity of watery life and rocks; he/it brings to the fore the becoming of things."[39] Odradek becomes Kafka's name for self-organizing matter, for spontaneous structural generation in the interstices between inorganic and organic vitality: "Wooden yet lively, verbal yet vegetal, alive yet inert, Odradek is ontologically multiple. He/it is a vital materiality and exhibits what Gilles Deleuze has described as the persistent 'hint of the animate in plants, and of the vegetable in animals.'"[40]

As many scholars have noted, the word "Odradek," which Kafka's narrator suggests might have Germanic and/or Slavic roots, seems to

signify, on the basis of family resemblances with words from these and other linguistic "households," a figure of radical rootlessness and non-belonging—*Od-radix*, *Od-adresa*. The meanings scholars have adduced for this word that, as the narrator indicates, may not have a meaning at all, include deserter from one's kind; apostate; degenerate; a small creature whose business is to dissuade; a creature that dwells outside of any kind, rank, series, order, class, line, or use; a creature beyond discourse or *Rede*; waste or dirt—*Unrat*—and so, to use a well-known characterization of dirt, "matter in the wrong place." All this suggests, I think, that Odradek's *ontological* statelessness—this is what Bennett emphasizes—cannot be separated from the sense of *political* statelessness evoked by the linguistic and historical overdetermination of its name (if it even is a proper name). It was precisely through the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that the state of statelessness came to be, as Hannah Arendt argued, the political symptom par excellence of modern Europe. And it was the particular "tribe" to which Kafka belonged—a tribe associated, of course, with a peculiar hybrid language between Germanic and Slavic—that came to embody a kind of foreignness that had no natural fit within any state. This was a tribe whose members could never be fully "naturalized," absorbed without remainder, and indeed thought by many of its own members to be, at its core, *passionately detached* from any historical nation-state. Think of it as a tribe whose very form of life in some sense *mattered in the wrong place*.

It is, then, not so much a "newish self"—Bennett's phrase—forged on the basis of a vital materiality and new sense of self-interest that Kafka's text helps us to envision, but rather the uncanny dimension of the "Jewish self" that he himself no doubt experienced as profoundly linked to a series of other historical and existential dilemmas. For Kafka himself, perhaps the most important of these was the dilemma of a writerly existence, an existence lived in passionate detachment from other social bonds and one apparently incompatible with being a *Hausvater*, the head of a household or *oikos*. It's worth adding one more association to Odradek. The creature's "statelessness" is underlined in the text when the narrator notes that when asked where it

lives, Odradek replies, "unbestimmter Wohnsitz," an expression with a distinctly bureaucratic tone signifying the lack of a fixed address. But "unbestimmter Wohnsitz" might also be read as a German translation of the word *utopia*; Odradek would thereby come to figure additionally as an abiding spirit or specter of utopia.[41]

Žižek for his part goes on to equate Odradek with the substance of human sexuality understood as a kind of errant remainder of our inscription in a normative order, as a spectral surplus matter that emerges when bodies come to matter:

> Odradek is thus simply what Lacan [. . .] developed as *lamella*, libido as an organ, the inhuman-human 'undead' organ without a body, the mythical pre-subjective 'undead' life-substance, or, rather, the remainder of the Life-Substance which has escaped the symbolic colonization, the horrible palpitation of the 'acephalic' drive which persists beyond ordinary death, outside the scope of paternal authority, nomadic, with no fixed domicile.[42]

In light of these reflections, I am tempted to characterize the new science that Kafka's narrator-dog hoped to develop as "Odradek studies," the science of constitutively errant objects, of uncanny remainders, the "original" of which is the object of the drive as first elaborated by Freud apropos of sensual sucking. Against this background, such activity might be referred to as a sort of pulsive theorization.

If we read Kafka's 'Researches of Dog' at least in part—with Kafka, readings only come in parts—as an allegory of the collapse of transcendence into a space of pure immanence—in the story, of human transcendence into canine immanence—we see that a new dimension emerges, one I have elsewhere characterized as a surplus of immanence, as an *informe* remainder that now attaches itself to every form of life. There is now, on the plane of immanence, an enigmatic and uncanny sort of excess, a too-muchness inaccessible to the natural or human sciences generally on offer in the secular world (and thus demanding a new science). If we want to try to reconstruct the figure of

the neighbor, the love of whom is commanded in the biblical texts, we need to begin here, with this remainder of life that never quite fits into a form of life and that, under conditions of modernity, *cannot be re-absorbed by divine being*. My argument has been that Freud's skepticism about neighbor-love notwithstanding, his theory of human sexuality in fact provides the resources for just such a reconstruction, thereby orienting the new thinking around what I have called a psychotheology of everyday life.[43]

NOTES

1 Kenneth Reinhard is Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California.
2 Žižek, Santner & Reinhard 2005.
3 Freud 1989, pp. 66–69. In the following, I will use the German title of the book, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, which a more literal translation might render "Uneasiness in Culture."
4 Freud 1989, pp. 66–69.
5 For a comprehensive philosophical engagement with the text, see Schuster 2023.
6 Kafka 2006b, p. 133; Kafka 1994b, p. 50. Subsequent references are made in the text with the page number of the translation first.
7 Kafka 2006b, p. 135; Kafka 1994b, pp. 52–53.
8 Kafka 2006b, p. 135; Kafka 1994b, pp. 52–53.
9 Kafka 2006b, p. 132; Kafka 1994b, p. 48.
10 Kafka 2006b, p. 134; Kafka 1994b, pp. 51–52.
11 Kafka 2006b, p. 135; Kafka 1994b, pp. 52–53.
12 Kafka 2006b, p. 136; Kafka 1994b, pp. 54–55.
13 Kafka 2006b, p. 138; Kafka 1994b, p. 57.
14 Kafka 2006b, p. 138; Kafka 1994b, p. 58.
15 Kafka 2006b, p. 139; Kafka 1994b, p. 59.
16 Kafka 2006b, p. 151; Kafka 1994b, p. 77.
17 Kafka 2006b, p. 143; Kafka 1994b, p. 66.
18 Kafka 2006b, p. 136; Kafka 1994b, p. 54.
19 Kafka 2006b, pp. 160–161; Kafka 1994b, p. 92.
20 I'm alluding here, of course, to the Brecht-Weil song 'What Keeps Mankind Alive?', which would be sung some six years later at the *Theater am Schiffbauerdamm*. The German title is ‚Ballade über die Frage: Wovon lebt der Mensch?'.
21 Kafka 2006b, p. 158; Kafka 1994b, p. 89.
22 Kafka 2006b, p. 159; Kafka 1994b, p. 90.
23 Kafka 2006b, p. 159; Kafka 1994b, pp. 89–90.
24 Kafka 2006b, p. 159; Kafka 1994b, p. 90.
25 Kafka 2006b, p. 159; Kafka 1994b, p. 90.
26 Scholem 1992, p. 126, letter of July 17, 1934.
27 Scholem 1992, p. 142, letter of September 20, 1934. Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho* to which I've referred provides an entire series of "worst words" for what Scholem was after, for example: "Least never to be naught. Never to naught be brought. Never by naught be nulled. Unnullable least." See Beckett 1996, p. 106.

28 In a brilliant lecture on Heidegger, Dieter Thomä argued that Heidegger's entire philosophical project could be understood as a series of attempts to distill into a pure imperative, into a pure call without content, the force of Being in history, see Thomä 2015.
29 Kafka 2006b, p. 160; Kafka 1994b, p. 92.
30 Kafka 2006b, p. 161; Kafka 1994b, pp. 92–93. One will recall in this context Celan's characterization of Lucile's counterword in Büchner's *Death of Danton*: "it is an act of freedom. It is a step." (Celan 2001, p. 403.)
31 Dolar 2006, pp. 186–187.
32 Dolar 2006, p. 187. The "anal" complement to this "oral" object might be characterized as the indigestible remainder that we always at some level retain whether we want to or not.
33 Freud 2000.
34 Freud 2000, pp. 13–14; my emphasis.
35 Freud 2000, pp. 47–48; my emphasis.
36 While revising this chapter a relevant anniversary took place. Fifty years had passed since the publication of Milton Friedman's seminal essay 'The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits' in the *New York Times Magazine*, see Friedman 1970. The essay has been credited with inaugurating a new era of corporate greed, a pure ethos of chrematistics.
37 See Žižek 2005, p. 163.
38 Kafka 1994a. Corngold (cf. Kafka 2006a) translates the title as 'The Worry of the Father of the Family'.
39 Bennett 2010, p. 8. Odradek's preferred pronouns would seem to be "he/it."
40 Bennett 2010, p. 8.
41 Odradek's laughter that immediately follows seems to emphasize the spectral over the spiritual: "it is a kind of laughter that can only be produced without lungs. It sounds more or less like the rustling of fallen leaves." See, once more, Kafka 2006b, pp. 72–73.
42 Žižek 2005, p. 166–167.
43 This is a slightly revised version of chapter 4 from Santner 2022.

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