

What does Kafka mean today?

Kaj Bernhard Genell 2023

What was unique about Kafka?

Kafka - as a matter of fact - used high-Romantic *Ästhetik des Schwebens* and without this reference to the Romantic Tradition, there would have been no Kafkaesque. The Kafkawsque - of course - is what most of all interests us, when it comes to Kafka.

But what - then - is meant by the term "Kafkaesque"? We are - as our prime object of study - looking into this Concept. THUS [*Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis*](#) is an analysis of Kafka's novels and short stories, with special regard to the concept of the Kafkaesque. This book concentrates on understanding what contributed to the famous Kafka effect. The

author explains the structural triplicity of a discourse seen as consciousness. It also describes how Freud, Romantic irony, and Symbolistic literature simultaneously co-work as the mythical subtext of Kafka's work. Kafka created something that would become part of defining Modern Man. Understanding Kafka is the road to understanding Modernity.

Many a Dissertation and many an Essay on Kafka have dealt with the strange "dreamlike character" or effect of Kafka's novels and short stories. This has always been dealt with as if the "kafkaesque" was brought into the game by someone adding "Freudian symbols" to something. *Nothing could be further from the truth!* This is what Genell's book [Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis](#) (2021) shows.

Rather, the case is this:

Kafka's structural, literary form is based upon a refined mega-structural narrative split.

It is the split between subject-"voice" and object-"voice" on the one hand, and human conscious and unconscious mind, on the other. This is not easy either to describe or to understand! The uniqueness of the works of Franz Kafka and the perplexing historical accuracy of the concept of Kafkaesque are both phenomena that many readers and scholars have noticed over the years. Through the years, a fruitful explanation of the uniqueness and accuracy of these works has been missing.

Scholars have ever from the 1930ies been noticing the

extraordinary qualities of Kafka text. Strange - Kafkaesque - features have been attributed to the short stories and the novels of Kafka. The Kafka hero has - rightly - been seen as a mere figure, and the "dream-like" landscape universe has been seen as a characteristic, and one has frequently been looking upon these entities, together with a few stylistic features, as technical dominants in the shaping of the concept of the Kafkaesque. Genell's [*Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis*](#) displays a model, together with a biographical survey and a historical perspective on possible influences, that, reversely, forms a hermeneutic, actual explanation of these features, as well as to what is denoted by the concept, from the perspective of a dynamic contextual center, explained in a model containing three levels, levels forming the discourse, typical of Kafka.



This book tries to unravel the enigma of the concept by reference

to the process of creation and by Kafka's implicit use of TWO unconscious levels within the universe of his most important works. The veil of mystery may never be lifted regarding Kafka's eerie classics of Modernity like it will never be lifted when it comes to literature as a whole. Still, it might be essential - in order not to fall into any metaphysical trap - to know about the technique behind the Kafkaesque to be able to reflect upon the Self-Consciousness of Modern Man of the 20th century, a century so intensely marked by a dialogue between society and the works and ideas of Sigmund Freud. Self-consciousness of Man, as it appeared with St. Augustine, the great Italian Renaissance writers, Erasmus, Shakespeare, Montaigne, the German secular Romantics, and Hegel, swiftly developed into something even much more complex with the appearance of Freud and the groundbreaking publication of his *Traumdeutung* in the year of 1900, and, more so, with the creation of the Kafkaesque, with the works of Kafka, around the year of 1912. The birth of the Kafkaesque can be dated to the night in the autumn of 1912 when Kafka wrote *Das Urteil*.

The book, [*Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis*](#) revolves solely around this strange split of consciousness and its consequences.

The Kafkaesque is brought about by two phenomena, and Genell is in his book discussing only the first one.

- 1.) A literary trick, built upon a split Unconscious (strange as it of course may sound, and difficult -) and
- 2.) a unique mental sensibility.

WHAT IF one had a Dream of a Dream and the two of them could communicate?? That is what happens in a Franz Kafka story! The book [*Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis*](#) deals with Kafka's novels and short stories from the aspect of the Kafkaesque, and it does so by looking for the means that create this effect. These means turn out to be largely technical. Thus, this book, [*Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis*](#), shows how Kafka uses a narratological split, split consciousness, and SPLIT Unconscious of the hero to create the Kafkaesque by a rare trick.

This new book shows how Kafka became one of the most prominent artists to create and define Modernity. Kafka took part in the thrilling creation of Self-conscience of the 20th century, marked by a constant dialogue with Freud and his works. Self-Conscience as Man knew it since St. Augustine, the Italian renaissance writers Erasmus, Shakespeare, and Montaigne, and later with the secular Romantics and Hegel swiftly developed within Modernism into something much more complex, primarily with the appearance of Freud's "Traumdeutung" in the year of 1900. And Kafka - rebutting Schnitzler - then set out to complete it all. The works of Kafka appeared as a reaction to 1.) Modern times, to 2.) his own personal alienation, and to 3.) Freud.



Kafka's answer to Modernity – to the modern condition – was astonishingly complex, but it turned out to be very accurate and accomplished right from the beginning. When other reactions to the Modern Condition, like Hugo Ball, Apollinaire, and Dada, displayed a picture of a chaotic and rebellious attitude to reason and morals, Kafka, much like Rimbaud actually, showed a far more complex ability to make modern society's human-understandable itself, in a universal narrative. Kafka, in exploring the Unconscious, as by Freud, and in doing so using a Romantic "Ästhetik des Schwebens," is the unique discoverer of the marvels of mind, and is, in this, equal to Freud. [*Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis*](#) sets out to explain how the Kafkaesque itself generates – even today, 100 years after its birth – an interrogation that scrutinizes the Freudian theory and our conception of the unique human consciousness.

Kafka's relation to Freud was somewhat like a son's relation to the father. Hence, Kafka did not acknowledge Freud's

discoveries, methods, and notions as truths. But he saw them – ironically enough – as facts. And in a sense, they were. Freud's views were historical facts in their profound influence on the Mind and Society of the century. Kafka used Freud as part of the revealing of Modern Myth, and the myths used by Modernity.

Kafka used Freud, but Kafka added on top of Freud's model of the human psyche another split to human consciousness in his literary universe. Kafka thus did not "believe in" Freud, but he was fascinated by him. Freud suited Kafka well. Almost too well. He did not look at all to Freud to a great extent, ... did not own several books by Freud ... but he had – like many others – acquired a sort of immediate understanding of Freud's ideas through a kind of everyday osmosis.

Kafka actually started as a writer of lyrical prose, short prose poems in the style of Goethe, Kleist, and Flaubert. But his dream was to write a novel, and it ought to be like the one Flaubert in his usual rage once claimed he wanted to write: a lovely book about nothing at all. So it happened that Kafka – not at all being highly intellectual or an eloquent philosopher – developed a technique for writing novels where he was extending a sole situation into a perfectly static (i.e., nothingy) drama displaying a struggle between conscious and unconscious. It also seems as he tried to develop the style of Tieck and the Romantics. Using his extraordinary (perhaps autistic) sensibility, Kafka's technique miraculously was born on one evening in 1912, writing the short story "The Verdict." The following day, he even asked his fiancée Felice for its meaning. Later, in 1912 with the writing of "The Metamorphosis" and, in 1913, the unfinished "The Trial,"

his technique of displaying the Kafkaesque was already full-fledged. Here he – almost FORCE by his own personal and social catastrophe – introduced a pseudo plot in a kind of pseudo novel displaying a story of a split, a struggle of a conscious instance of a person, shown as a hero-figure battling this person's OWN Unconscious. As it turned out, this battle caused a second unconscious part to appear in the universe of this fiction. (Examples can be found in [*Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis*](#) .) It seems that the hero-figure, devoid of his Unconscious, HAD TO develop such an unconscious to be able to handle his surrounding world, which was his original Unconscious. Here we thus are having a triadic structure and a strange meeting of two unconscious instances. This fictional condition primarily results in a double exposure of the unconscious and a strange transcendence of the Ego, which cannot easily be reflected upon since it has no equivalent in reality.



This is NOT EASY TO UNDERSTAND!

As a result of this Kafka-technique, which probably was unconscious (!) to Kafka himself, we are also – apart from the

nausea of double Unconscious, a kind of self-consciousness of the Unconscious - experiencing a very intense poetry, depicting utter loneliness in a framework of a sad pseudo-protest, parallel to Weber's, against the superpower of civil organization and law in general, as well as a hymn of the melancholy beauty of existence the like of which nobody else in the 20th Century has created: The concept of "Kafkaesque" has been created upon the experience of the works of Kafka by the Collective Mind, and in some yet not quite analyzed way, it also has extended our mode of perception. The concept of the Kafkaesque, and the Kafkaesque itself, AS IRONY, is vital for both the being and the understanding of our culture and being! The questions regarding this concept, raised in [*Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis*](#) questions somewhat elusive, are mainly two: [1.]: what IS the kafkaesque? (...that is caused by this split) And [2.]: how did Kafka DO to create this, the " Kafkaesque"?

These questions are highly original and deal with ideological, cultural, and psychological matters and tacit knowledge, and complicated issues concerning the ontology of fiction. Perhaps the concept of "Kafka" is an ongoing question in Modernity itself that will prevail no matter how much Kaj Bernh. Genell - and others - keep trying to sort out the problem?....

Kaj Bernh. Genell 2023.

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Kaj Bernh. Genell was born in Gothenburg, Sweden, in 1944. After having endured an adventurous youth, he became interested in philosophy and, in 1983, after many years at the University of Gothenburg, published a book exclusively on existential (in the Sartreian sense of the word) Irony - "Ironi och existens." Genell here established himself as a fighter for irony. This position was and is a rare one in Sweden. Soon hereafter, Genell, who since his teens had a great interest in one of the giants of Modernism, Franz Kafka, wrote a series of papers at the University of Gothenburg related to Kafka, partly under supervision of the renowned stark Marxist Kurt Aspelin, who then was a senior teacher and avid lecturer there. This would later result in the now disappeared ebook "Kafka och det Kafkaeska" (2018), an essay in Swedish on the Literary Technique of Kafka, and then later - published in English - an extended version of this book as "Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis" (2021).

Kaj Bernh. Genell On the kafkaesque

As a fiction writer Genell started out with several books in the Swedish language, such as "Pistolen", "Tavelstölden",

“Tegelkrona och skönheten”, “Höstdrama” and the horror story “Skjuta sig fri”. These books – of course – have nothing to do with Kafka. Under the pseudo “ Bill Clactoe ”, the first novel in English by Genell appeared in 2021,” called Fell’s Point,” a small idyllic crime story set in Baltimore, USA. With “The Lion’s Disease,” Genell has under his own name in his second English novel created a psychological and philosophical comment on pandemics by describing an odyssey to Indonesia on a Bulk Cargo Carrier.
- Reading a book is to look into oneself.

In 2022 Kaj Bernh. Genell became a stipendiary, by being awarded a large sholarship from Sveriges Författarfond (National Fund for Authors).

www.kajgenell.com, Kaj Bernhard Genell Real Home Site. The main subject here is Kafka and the kafkaesque and the book, [Kafka - a Freudo-Structuralist Analysis](#).