

Negative Anagnorisis:
Notes on the Uncanny and the Metamorphosis in Kafka's
The Metamorphosis

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The following paper will examine the aesthetic category *das Unheimliche* as a result of the erased mark that separates the binary opposition in the process of negation. This operation posits the uncanny as one of the major concepts for the theory in the 60s and 70s of the previous century,¹ because it shows the failure of the grounding philosophical divisions, such as: A/not-A, inside/outside, interior/exterior, subject/object, spirit/matter, essence/appearance, mythical/logical, pleasure/beyond the pleasure, Eros/Thanatos, Symbolic/Imaginary and etc.

The present text will use three paradigmatic examples: first, one of the crucial literary works of modernism: *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915) by Franz Kafka; second, two essays by Freud "The Uncanny" ("Das Unheimliche," 1919) and "Negation" ("Die Verneinung," 1925).² The third example is theoretical, it is Adorno with his "Notes on Kafka" ("Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka," 1953) and his *Aesthetic Theory* (*Ästhetische Theorie*, 1970), through the perspective used by Adorno to think over *repetition* and *negation* in Kafka's work.

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1. For the genealogy of the uncanny in the 60s and 70s, or the reception and conceptualization of Freud's essay "Das Unheimliche," see Anneleen Masschelein, *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory*, SUNY Series, Insinuations, New York: SUNY Press, 2011.
 2. Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, Vol. XVIII (1917-1919), London: The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1973, 218-256; Sigmund Freud, "Negation," *On Metapsychology*, The Pelican Freud Library, vol. 11, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977, 435-442.

The choice of authors here is predetermined to a certain extent, in so far as Adorno's reflections are based upon the negative terms in Kafka and Freud.

The intervention will try to explain two types of conceptual relations: the relation between the *uncanny and negation* and the relation between *negation and metamorphosis*. The second pair, negation and metamorphosis, will reveal the potential of those categories, offered by Prof. Manchev and Prof. Kobayashi in our previous forum "Metamorphosis and Catastrophe" (Sofia, 2013).

The story of *The Metamorphosis* by Kafka could be thought exactly at the nexus of the tension between the modus of *negation* (negativity) and the modus of *metamorphosis* (transformation). The modus of negation allows analysis of the inner incoherences, gaps and intervals in the literary work of art. The side-effect of negation brings into focus the conceptual trial for the human situation staged in *The Metamorphosis* and the limits of literary space, opened by the story. The modus of metamorphosis reveals the resumed repetition in the process of transitions. The gaps in the story are connected in a series of interruptions.

Already in the first striking sentence of the story the reader can see how the negation marks an abrupt form of transformation into *something* immense: "*Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheueren Ungeziefer verwandelt.*" ["One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in his bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous *something* (ungeheueren Ungeziefer)"].³ The emphasis in the sentence, which marks the transition from a stable to an unstable situation in the plot, is placed in the negative form of the noun *Ungeziefer* (*vermin*). And the noun is preceded by another negative form, by the adjective *ungeheuer* (monstrous, immense). The German preposition *aus* allows us to interpret the transformation into a monstrous verminous *something* in term of negation in the phrase

3. Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, trans. Ian Johnston [accessed on October 25, 2015, <http://www.kafka-online.info/the-metamorphosis.html>]. We made a change in the end of the phrase with "a monstrous verminous *something*."

unruhigen Träumen (anxious dreams). The relation between dreams and transformation does not follow the causal logic of *one after another*, but is part of the logic of *one out of another*. The transformation into a huge vermin does not happen after the awaking from the anxious dreams, but the transformation is *from* the anxious dreams.⁴

At the moment of awakening, following the logic of negation, the reader expects that the awakening itself will lead to something that does not belong to the logic of anxious dreams, but it appears that the negation of “anxious dreams” does not have a second, opposite or positive side. The subsequent explicit negation “It was no dream” (“*Es war kein Traum*”) guides to such an interpretation. Such move subverts the possibility of inscribing the story in the Tzvetan Todorov’s poetics of the fantastic — there’s something strange or uncanny, but it is neither a dream, nor madness.⁵ The interpretative mechanisms of the strangeness and of the fantastic are not functioning. The dimension of non-reality of dreams does not possess an opposite, i.e. a dimension that we can call reality. Rather, the release from non-reality leads to a space of even more restless nightmares. Metamorphosis is the very result of this multiplied, mounting, continuous, and gradual negation. The change, the metamorphosis is a movement of *non-*, to *more-non* or to *the less-non*, etc., without finalizing and without a promise of an end to the de-gradation: *reductio ad infinitum*.

The thesis of this paper is that conceptual intersection between *negation* and *metamorphosis* is radically changed in Kafka’s prose. Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* is neither a consequence of negation, nor is the other (opposite) side of negation; the story is neither a negation of the negation, nor introduces a dialectic that suspends negativity. Furthermore, in its first sentence Kafka’s story reveals how the appearance of metamorphosis comes, how it originates from inside of

4. On a Lacanian interpretation of the logic of dream in Kafka’s stories, and especially the *awaking* as the riskiest moment in the perspective of the emergence of Modernity, see Mladen Dolar, “The Riskiest Moment. Kafka and Freud,” *Deutsches Haus at New York University*, April 20, 2012. Forthcoming by Duke University Press is Dolar’s book, entitled *The Riskiest Moment*.
[accessed on October 25, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrXhkvUqzA4>].
5. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Cornell UP, 1975.

the logic of negation. The metamorphosis is the very negation, seen in its extended time, duration, in its continuation and gradualness; it is the negation as a continuum, a continuum of ruptures.

What is the object of transformation? In what exactly did Gregor Samsa transform himself in terms of negation and metamorphosis? Regarding the whole phrase *ungeheuer(es) Ungeziefer* — a monstrous bug, a strange vermin, uncanny pest — we can be sure that what Gregor Samsa became is difficult to translate and it places a specific emphasis on the negative forms.⁶ *Ungeheuer(es) Ungeziefer* is deterritorialization of language, creating its own language within the language, which in the reading of Deleuze and Guattari reveals the revolutionary potential of the phrase. *Ungeheuer(es) Ungeziefer* subverts the so-called major literature and elaborates “his own patois, his own third world, his own desert.”⁷ It is a non-grammatical phrase. Kafka in a letter to the publisher explicitly asks *Ungeziefer* not to be represented or to be illustrated in a close or in a distance portrait.⁸ So the book cover of the first edition from 1916 features the illustration of a man who holds his head with his hands and has covered his face with his palms.

Seemingly *Ungeziefer* negates nothing as far as both the noun *Geziefer* and its negation *Ungeziefer* mean a bug, an insect, or most correctly vermin. As with the convergence in the German *unheimlich* and *heimlich*, on which Freud extensively dwells to explain the mechanism where the negation does not negate but reveals the repressed,⁹ here the

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6. The untranslatability of the composition *ungeheuer(es) Ungeziefer* is carefully observed by Richard H. Lawson. He claims that the complex polysemy of the phrase is not exactly interpreted neither with the English word *insect* (Kafka refuses to use the same German word *Insekt*), nor with the other most frequently used in translation — *vermin*. But Lawson himself does not suggest more appropriate translation. Richard H. Lawson, “*Ungeheueres Ungeziefer* in Kafka’s “Die Verwandlung,” *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (May, 1960), 216-219.
 7. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, foreword by Réda Bensmaïa, *Theory and History of Literature*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, 18.
 8. Franz Kafka, *Briefe 1902-1924*, hg. Max Brod, 1958, 135f.8
 9. Sigmund Freud, “Das Unheimliche,” *Studienausgabe, Bd. IV. Psychologische Schriften*, hg.

hidden content of *Ungeziefer* and *Geziefer* converge. In the narrative Kafka is trying to erase a similar clear boundary between opposites and therefore uses the possibilities of the German language introducing the paradoxical figure of *ungeheuer(es) Ungeziefer*. In this zone of indistinction between the two contradictory concepts, negation is an operation that works on a principle different from classical logic. Freud deals with this problem again and again, but it is only developed very thematically in his brief article “Negation” (“Die Verneinung,” 1925).¹⁰

Freud’s essay on negation starts with a key example from his psychoanalytic practice on the occasion in which patients articulate their associations and interpretations: “You ask who this person in the dream can be. It’s not my mother.” The same mechanism, says Freud, can act projective: “Now you’ll think I mean to say something insulting, but really I’ve no such intention.”¹¹

In the course of the article Freud investigates the technique of negativity, to emphasize that it is not reduced to a mere reaffirmation of that which denies (if I deny that this is my mother, therefore this is my mother), but that it is a sign that negation is a mark of the repressed [*Verdrängung*, repression]. Negation implies an intellectual breakthrough, in which the repressed content manages to reach consciousness. The exact thought or idea continues to be repressed, it is unacceptable as content, but it finds expression in language. “A negative judgement is the intellectual substitute for repression; its ‘no’ is the hall-mark of repression, a certificate of origin – like, let us say, ‘Made in Germany.’ With the help of the symbol of negation, thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and enriches itself with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning.”¹² This mark of origin, this signifier “Made in Germany” as a certificate of negation is

Alexander Mitscherlich, Angela Richards, James Strachey, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1982, 241-274. (First published in *Imago*, Bd. V, 1919, 297-324.)⁹

10. The notions of the negative, which deal with the work of repressed in Freud, are several, and the *Verneinung* is one of them. Most commonly the topoi of the negative in Freud are outlined as following: *Verneinung* (negation - neurosis), *Verleugnung* (denial - perversions), *Verwerfung* (repudiation - psychosis).

11. Freud, “Negation,” 435.

12. *Ibid.*, 436.

the place of the repressed in the symbolic order, in discourse.

This similar nature of negativity allows Horkheimer and Adorno to derive the thesis that the irrationality of myth and the rationality of the Enlightenment do not simply come into collision and confrontation among themselves, but also that the attempt to negate the mythological structures led the Enlightenment mind to a new form of myth.¹³ Negative dialectics relies not only on this reverse version of Hegel's dialectical process, but also on the stakes left by Freud's return of the repressed. The important thing is not to miss the second key point: the negativity in Freud and Adorno is connected with the problem of repetition. With Freud nothing can be finalized under the sign of negation, because all that is repressed comes back: *fort-da* repeatedly.

Freud demonstrates how the negation and repetition function in a common rhythm in terms of generating an aesthetic theory in his essay "Das Unheimliche." The uncanny refers precisely to the hesitation and uncertainty concerning the mechanism of repetition. Is this the return of something which is repressed, the unexpected appearance of a hidden fear (as a morning in which you wake up as a giant bug)? Or do we have a fundamental repetition, initial déjà vu¹⁴ — something that appears inherently as double. This double vision,¹⁵ this parallax is connected with the temporal undecidability between negation and traumatic repetition (of past), on the one hand, and negation and repetition of lack of past or illusionary past, on the other hand. The hesitation is precisely on the "real" or "unreal" status of what is repeated.

A linguistic analysis of the German word "*das Unheimliche*" can help us trace the history of its ambivalence: the first meaning of the adjective *heimlich* is — domestic, familiar, close, but the second meaning is just

13. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002.

14. For the intersection between uncanny and déjà vu, and the temporal paradox of repetition, see Nicholas Royle, "Déjà Vu," *The Uncanny*, New York: Routledge, 2003, 172-186.

15. Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.

the opposite — hidden, secret, alienated. This second meaning of *heimlich* matches the antonym *unheimlich*, of which *via negativa* the *unheimlich* itself might indicate a return to something close, home-bred, familiar, but unacceptable. Freud refers to the multiple uses of the adjective *unheimlich* in German literature, the example that best captures the tension and paradox of similarity between the two antonyms' meaning is: "The Zecks [a family name] are all 'heimlich.'" "Heimlich? What do you understand by 'heimlich'?" "Well...they are like a buried spring or a dried-up pond. One can not walk over it without always having the feeling that water might come up there again." "Oh, we call it 'unheimlich'; you call it 'heimlich.' Well, what makes you think that there is something secret and untrustworthy about this family?"¹⁶

To summarize, the essay "Das Unheimliche" is another opportunity to follow the logic of negation or the transition from the statement "It's not my mother" to "So it is my mother." Furthermore, the uncanny could be seen as a result of the erased mark in the process of the negation.¹⁷ So, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* subverts not only the mechanisms of the classical logic, but it also goes beyond the negation in terms of Hegelian dialectics.¹⁸

How should we read Kafka's formula *ungeheuer(es) Ungeziefer*? In Middle High German *Ungeziefer* means "unclean animal unfit for sacrifice," as opposed to the Old High German *Zëbra*, or "sacrificial animal," that traditionally applied to large animals (birds or cattle).¹⁹

16. Freud uses the example from Karl Gutzkow. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" *ibid.*, 223.

17. The shortest definition of uncanny is extracted from Schelling in Freud's essay: According to Schelling "everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light." Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" *ibid.*, 224.

18. The difference between Hegel's and Freud's usage of negativity, which leads Hegel to the absolute knowledge and Freud to the unconscious as an "excess and deficiency, or flaw, of knowledge" is brilliantly outlined by Mladen Dolar, "Hegel and Freud: Negativity and its Vicissitudes," *ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry*, 13 April 2011 [accessed on October 25, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHuYayQ0Jws>].

19. Friedrich Kluge, *Etymological Dictionary of the German Language, 1856-1926*, London: G. Bell, 1891 [accessed on October 25, 2015: <http://german.stackexchange.com/>]

Ungeziefer and *Zebra* stand in opposition to each other in terms of scale. The logic of language in the transition from Old High German to Modern German includes the implication that the animal that is unfit for sacrifice is too small and hence unclean; so it is a vermin. Kafka is obviously playing upon this logic of language inasmuch as the doubly-negating formula *ungeheuer(es) Ungeziefer* emphasizes, on the contrary, the monstrous proportions and could be translated as “unseen-non-sacrificial.”

Kafka loves such hybrids that introduce the singular precisely at the level of creatures that are one of a kind.²⁰ The clearest example of such a hybrid is *A Crossbreed* (*Eine Kreuzung*).²¹ The beginning of this short story introduces the following: “I have a curious animal (*Tier*), half kitten, half lamb. It is a legacy from my father,” “It has the restlessness of both beasts, that of the cat and that of the lamb, diverse as they are.” (“*Es hat beiderlei Unruhe in sich, die von der Katze und die vom Lamm*”). It is crucial that “against all their hopes there was no scene of recognition.”²²

An autotextual comparison²³ between *The Metamorphosis* and *A Crossbreed* highlights and delimits a situation that is beyond the sacrificial and that we shall refer to as a paradigm of the non-sacrificial. A major characteristic in the paradigm of the non-sacrificial is its transgression beyond catharsis, beyond salvation, with the possible messianic connotations. Both the crossbreed and Gregor Samsa

questions/6455/ungeziefer-and-its-meanings-and-connotations].

20. Margot Norris, “Kafka’s Hybrids: Thinking Animals and Mirrored Humans,” *Kafka’s Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012, 17-31.
21. The parable *A Crossbreed* is written in 1917, close to *The Metamorphosis*, but it is published posthumously in 1931.
22. Franz Kafka, “A Crossbreed,” *The Complete Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, New York: Schocken Books, 1971, 268-269.
23. For the concept of autotextuality as a dialogue between texts in the framework of one and the same author, see Radosvet Kolarov, *Repetition and Creation: Poetics of Autotextuality*, Sofia: Prosveta, 2009.

have been denied the gift of death that would have saved them the torment. Both creatures are crossbreeds, hybrids; they make an interim appearance in a state that is neither that of an animal, nor that of a human. The non-sacrificial animals of Kafka have been deprived of the mercy of the butcher's knife and have literally been left to their own gradual self-expiration (*"bis ihm der Atem von selbst ausgeht"*). Their metamorphosis consists in their slow procedural self-depletion.

The paradigm of the non-sacrificial lies beyond the logic of the sacrificial, i.e. beyond the "tragico-political sacrificial logic." Boyan Manchev's conceptualization makes it possible to derive the figure of the non-sacrificial from the sacrificial logic of the political (that is to say, in its potential related to figuration). Through the figure of Oedipus and the Sphinx, Manchev introduces the self-constitution of the autonomous political subject. The two-stroke-engine machine of *political anthropotechnics* uses both figuration-and-defiguration, both representation-and-rift. The (self-)sacrificial logic of the political and the representation presupposes a withdrawal of the founding hero and the gesture of self-erasure is the ultimate gift to the new order. The steps included in Manchev's tragico-political sacrificial logic are the following ones: figuration of "the formless," establishment of the logo-*poïetic* regime, and a kind of a hybridization of the founder, who, through the act of sacrifice, acquires a part of the monstrous power of the unrepresentable.²⁴

In that sense, Gregor Samsa is not an Oedipus within the frames of a logic of the tragic but neither is his story that of becoming-animal, as developed by Deleuze and Guattari. The figuration of Gregor Samsa as non-sacrificial leads to the fact that he can be seen as one of the figures of the Sphinx. He is the Sphinx who asks riddles, sings or chirps, and unfolds enigmas that have been denied solutions. Thus the springs of a cathartic transformation fail. Gregor Samsa, this *ungeheuer(es)* *Ungeziefer*, this monstrous non-sacrificial creature, can be conceived through the concept of the monstrous.²⁵

24. Boyan Manchev, *Logic of the Political*, Sofia: Critique and Humanism, 2012, 89-90.

25. Compare *unheimlich* and *ungeheuer* with monstrous (*deinos*) in Höldelin's translation of two famous lines from *Antigone* by Sophocles: Χορός: πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοῦδὲν ἀνθρώπου

Apart from the figure of the sacrifice²⁶ in *The Metamorphosis* we can outline another reversal of the logic of the tragic.²⁷ Both short stories put special emphasis on the possibility of understanding, namely, to what extent the creature has retained the capacity for human understanding (voice, speech, gesture, movement, consciousness) and to what extent, on the contrary, the Other (the narrator, Gregor's family, the reader) can work out the desires of this singular form of life. The process of reaching from possible understanding between the two sides to a lack of understanding is driven by forward motion. This is the transition that we shall label "negative anagnorisis" and, following the model of Aristotle, we shall use it to denote a transition from knowledge to a lack of knowledge, from recognition to a lack of recognition, from understanding to a lack of understanding. In *The Metamorphosis* this moment is the place where the sister decides that they can get rid of Gregor by stopping to recognize him as Gregor, by no longer assigning him the name of Gregor. The negative anagnorisis in *The Metamorphosis* is the critical moment of hiding the truth.

In order to grasp how the recurring and recognition are interrupted by non-recognition, we need to bring out Adorno's theory on the déjà vu as a constitutive principle in Kafka's prose. Adorno draws attention to the fact that there is nothing more unbearable to Kafka than the principle of the symbol under which the totality of the sense is achieved

δεινότερον πέλει. [*Soph. Ant.* 332]. Hölderlin's translation is "Ungeheuer ist viel. Doch nichts/Ungeheuerer als der Mensch." Heidegger commends that translation as a good one, but prefers "Vielfältig das Unheimliche, nichts doch über den Menschen hinaus Unheimlicheres ragend sich regt," Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "the Ister,"* *Studies in Continental Thought*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, 61-74. So, multiple is the uncanny, but the most uncanny is the human.

26. Some prominent remarks on the logic of sacrifice and self-sacrifice always insists on the excess of sacrifice and appeals to unmeasurable self-loss could be read in M. Wood, "Violence Upon The Roads," *Yeats and Violence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 184-227.
27. For the reversal effect or the *peripeteia* in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* within the frame of Benjamin and Hölderlin, see Enyo Stoyanov, *Die Umkehr: The Chiasmic Transformations of Gregor Samsa*, unpublished paper presented at the forum of the Sofia Literary Theory Seminar "100 years of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*," October 21, 2015.

through the agglutination of meanings.²⁸ To the contrary, what is at work with him is the principle of disassembly, of the uncoupling of literal from allegorical meaning. On the plane of expression, on the one hand, Kafka's phrase is split by the affirming "this is the way things stand," while on the other hand it is accompanied by the permanent *déjà vu* "Have I not said this before? Have I not seen this before?" The principle of *déjà vu* is a repetition that radically disrupts self-identity at the point of interruption²⁹, it is a gap in the logic of identification, a split in the subject. The aesthetic distance between text and reader has been subverted in Kafka's prose. Collapsing this distance constitutes a technique through which the narrator steers the interpretation and aggressively deprives the reader of the possibility to identify with some of the characters. Once the possibility for compassion for the characters has been cancelled, what remains is the physical fear that the story may go beyond itself any moment, rushing headlong towards the reader like a locomotive in a 3D film. This breakthrough of the train in Kafka's prose can be theorized as a place where negation is objectified. To put it using Freud's association, this is the certificate, the hallmark, the scar of negation.³⁰

Both cases of negation in *The Metamorphosis* that we mentioned in the beginning, *ungeheuer* and *Ungeziefer*, can be cited as such a result of negation. They manufacture precisely a negative "object" that remains less than fully embodied in the process of negation.

In the climactic twist of *negative anagnorisis* in the short story when the affectionate sister tells Gregor in a fit of rage "I won't pronounce the

28. Theodor W. Adorno, "Notes on Kafka" [*Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka*], *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, London: Spearman, 1967, 243.

29. *Ibid.*, 245.

30. This mode of negation, the negation both as a rupture and as an object, is profoundly conceptualized in Alenka Zupančič, "Not-Mother: On Freud's *Verneinung*," *e-flux*, 2012 [accessed on October 25, 2015: http://www.e-flux.com/journal/not-mother-on-freuds-verneinung/#_ftnref2]. We owe a lot of her reading of *negation* in Freud. How to illustrate the negative "object"? How to show the void and the lack? Aleka Zupančič gives a perfect example from Ernest Lubitsch's film *Ninotchka*: "A guy goes into a restaurant and says to the waiter: 'Coffee without cream, please.' The waiter replies: 'I am sorry sir, but we are out of cream. Could it be without milk?'"

name of my brother in front of this monster” (“*Ich will vor diesem Untier nicht den Namen meines Bruders aussprechen*”),³¹ the negative forms “won’t pronounce” and the noun *Untier* mark the place of interruption in Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*. The initial *ungeheuer* (unheard-of, unbelievable, horrible, extraordinary, unsightly, monstrous), *Ungeziefer* (non-sacrificial), and the culminating *Untier* (literally “non-animal,” “monster”), which are used to refer to Gregor, are conceptually related in Kafka. They mark places or degrees of being different at the same time from the human and from the beastly.³² The form *Untier*, or non-animal, is rather an antonym of non-human, than of animal or human.³³ The connection between *ungeheuer* and *Untier* has long been noticed by critics. They are cited as synonyms, with *Untier* implying a higher intensity of change.³⁴ This place causes the caesura or the lack to be replaced by something that is already a non-lack. Something jumps out of the place of the lack and rushes headlong towards us like a locomotive. It comes beyond the determination of the initial moment of reversal: Gregor turned from human to vermin. The true procedure of the metamorphosis consists in these degrees and intensities of the nothing: the non-sacrificial, the non-human, the non-animal. Thus the paralysis of mimesis is not fully objectified. To the contrary, it remains a less than fully embodied negativity that seeks ways of piercing through

31. Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, trans. Ian Johnston [accessed on October 25, 2015, <http://www.kafka-online.info/the-metamorphosis.html>].

32. Miglena Nikolchina claims for necessity to rethink the way we produce the definition of human — probably human is no more simply a political animal, but should differentiate it from automata (Miglena Nikolchina, “Motherhood and the Machine,” *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française*, Vol. XXI, No. 2 (2014), 62-69). For the transformation of the conceptualization of the anthropological machine beyond the trends of anti-humanism in the West and humanism in the East Europe, see Miglena Nikolchina, *Metamorphosis and Subtraction: from Kafka to Lem with Deleuze and Mamardashvili*, unpublished paper presented at the forum of the Sofia Literary Theory Seminar “100 years of Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, October 21, 2015.

33. The inanimal (*Untier*) is seen as a symmetrical and opposite to inhuman by Žižek: the inanimal is “the excess over the animal in animal.” Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2009, 22.

34. Holger Rudloff, *Gregor Samsa und Seine Brüder: Kafka, Sacher-Masoch, Thomas Mann*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1997, 32.

the narrative and jumping out of the imaginary and into reality, just as the locomotive in Adorno's comparison, in order to explode the all-encompassing symbolic network.³⁵ Is this a fantastic rupture?

If there is anything that goes beyond the fantastic as understood according to Tzvetan Todorov's model, it's Kafka's work. Thanks to Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* we can understand transformation not as a causal but as a sudden and uncaused process. In the final part of *The Fantastic* Todorov explicitly points out that according to the grammar of the fantastic, developed by himself, Kafka stands as a non-grammatical figure. Todorov dwells at length on *The Metamorphosis* as an example constitutive of a new model of the fantastic or of the modern fantastic. The story itself refuses to provide an etiology of the metamorphosis or make use of any mechanism which would furnish a possible explanation. The first sentence registers the change and the rest of the narrative preserves the initial event as an uncanny transformation. Todorov pays attention to this paradox by noting that a certain suddenness is evident in the change itself, a transformation "all of a sudden" or a transformation as an event, characteristic of a new definition of the fantastic.

That which, according to Todorov, goes beyond his own model of the fantastic, is the means by which modernity works out the supernatural. Contrary to the incessant "vacillation" between a supernatural and a natural explanation, employed by the fantastic, in Kafka's story we have a definite "all of a sudden" transformation. This abrupt alteration is signified by the instrument of negation, followed by a process of adaptation to this alteration. The process of *adaptation* is symmetrically opposed to *vacillation*: the initial unexpected event is assimilated by an abnormal world into the constructive principle, which is in defiance of established laws, very much like in the science fiction dealing with robots and aliens. Todorov makes a strict distinction between the

35. "Kafka is exemplary for the gesture of art when he carries out the retransformation of expression back into the actual occurrences enciphered in that expression — and from that he derives his irresistibility." Theodor W Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London, New York: Continuum, 2002, 112.

classic ghost story and Kafka's story: "What in the first world was an exception here becomes the rule."³⁶ The fantastic in modernity thus makes necessary a re-definition of the paradoxical statute of the space of literature in relation to the categories of the possible and the impossible.³⁷

This movement has been in preparation since the introductory definition of the genre theory. Todorov points out that "every work modifies the sum of possible works, each new example alters the species [...] a text is not only the product of a pre-existing combinatorial system (constituted by all that is literature *in posse*); it is also a transformation of that system."³⁸ Should we follow its examples, Todorov's definition of the fantastic is valid mainly for 19th century literature, for romanticism and its immediate successors. But it also offers an approach towards the transformation of this model, taking into account Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* so that it may be possible to consider *the fantastic as a language*. Todorov takes this particular collocation ("the fantastic considered as a language") from Sartre's article of 1948 in the first volume of his *Situations*.³⁹ It is a review by Sartre of Blanchot's early novel *Aminadab*, recognized for its developmental role of the Kafkatesque tradition (in the line of Poe, Hoffmann and Lewis Carroll), introducing a new type of the fantastic which represents a revolt of the means against the ends *ad infinitum*. According to Sartre, in Blanchot we may witness an attempt at a "return to the human being" in fantastic literature. Already Sartre outlines through this experience a "new humanism" whose object is one single entity — the human being. Here the fantastic represents itself as a literature of the impossible, of empty allegory and literalization, of nightmarish logic or incomprehensible metamorphosis.

36. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, New York: Cornell UP, 1975, 174.

37. For the possibility and negativity in literature, see Darin Tenev, "Beyond Bartleby. An essay on Possibility and Negativity" (https://www.academia.edu/8738654/Beyond_Bartleby_An_essay_on_Possibility_and_Negativity).

38. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 6-7.

39. J.-P. Sartre, "Aminadab: Or the Fantastic Considered as Language," *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, New York: Colleur Books, 1962, 60-77.

Tzvetan Todorov relays the tale in the following manner: something bizarre and puzzling takes place (the focal event) but there is no vacillation or explanation as to whether the laws of this world are fictitious or whether the protagonist is dreaming or mad. Quite the opposite, this change will remain unexplained and the very laws of the narrative (the background event) have to adapt themselves to this change, to adapt themselves to the abnormal and to the impossibility of a space of literature.

In such a way, the initial negative transformation of Gregor Samsa into a half-monster and a half-non-animal is succeeded by a process of anagnorisis, which in our own reading represents a series of negations: *ungeheuer, Ungeziefer, Untier*.

We defined the first negation, using Freud's theoretical framework, as *negation-repetition*. Its clear-cut mark is the erasure of the difference in relation to the opposite. In negating itself, it in fact repeats itself. The second mode of negation was defined through Adorno's propositions — as *negation, rupturing the repetition*. The negation-repetition succeeds to materialize itself into a singular object of negation. Why should the first negation be different from the second one? Can *déjà vu* mean anything different from a still yet another negation? With Adorno this type of negation will be a material rupture of the event, the moment in Kafka's prose when the locomotive (the object) is launched into the social. These two types of negation — negation-repetition and negation-rupture of the repetition — work out and form together a third mode of negation: *negation-metamorphosis*, or the means by which the metamorphosis becomes a series of ruptures.

In this sense, the metamorphosis in Kafka's story is not the initial alteration but the synchronization of the focal point and the background in the process of *negative anagnorisis*, viewed as rupture and gradation in the continuum of negation.