The Cruelty of Waking: Ahypnotic Experience in The World of Franz Kafka*

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Abstract:
The study interprets two novels by Kafka (*Metamorphosis* and *Disciplinary Camp*), and shows that one of the motives both novels share is the "ahypnotic experience", i.e., the state in which the character of the story is frightened by sleep, since in sleep he loses control over himself, and is given up to the forces which rid him of of his human form (*Metamorphosis*). Based on the analysis of the apparatus of torture, interpreted here as "apparatus for producing justice", the paper argues that for Kafka, the law means not freedom, but inhumanity (*Disciplinary Camp*). The following part of the paper explains that a similar process is uncovered in Donnarumma's *Amygdala* art installation, and poses the question as to whether the increasing autonomy of modern technology intensifies Kafka's fears of dehumanisation of the world. The final part of the paper offers an alternative conclusion to the problem building on Nietzsche's understanding of the sense of the sublime.

Keywords: Kafka; ahypnotic experience; sublime; inhumanity; sleep; Metamorphosis; Nietzsche; Untimely Meditations; historicity; machinicity; Donnarumma; Calyx

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In a short text,[1] Freud reveals, perhaps against his own will, the type of person he has in mind when he talks about health. It is a hypothetical model of humanity from which it could be possible to theoretically derive different types of deviation (neurosis, psychosis) from this model. For his description, Freud takes inspiration from the short story *Dreaming Like Waking*, from the collection *Realist Fantasies*, by a Czech compatriot, Josef Popper-Lynkeus.[2]

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1 Freud, S., Josef Popper Lynkeus and the Theory of Dreams. In: *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XIX (1923–1925), The Ego and the Id and Other Works.* Tran. J. Strachey. London, Hogarth Press 1961, pp. 261–263.

2 Josef Popper-Lynkeus (1838–1921, born in Kolín) was a Czech and Austrian scholar, writer, and

A truly healthy person would be one who, without any of the distortions that are common, and even seem inevitable in sleep, would dream about what is shown to him in waking life; therefore, it would be impossible to distinguish between dreaming and waking. Such a person would dream the real or the waking; he would dream the truth. The deviation from the ideal pattern, that is, the descent in the line of mimesis, could be measured by the extent to which the content of a particular person's dreams is distorted by the process Freud calls *dream-censorship*. Freud sees the origin of this censorship in the shame one feels for the desires manifested in the dreams, which one therefore tries to disguise by distorting them into nonsense.

Lynkeus' story bears the same idea: "In you other people, there seems always to be something that lies concealed in your dreams, something unchaste in a special and higher sense, a certain secret quality in your being which is hard to follow. And that is why your dreams so often seem to be without meaning, or even to be nonsense. But in the deepest sense, this is not in the least, so; indeed, it cannot be so at all – for it is always the same man, whether he is awake or dreaming."[3] What distorts our dreams, after all, is immorality, a kind of mystery inherent to our character, something hidden. If we were limpidly moral, our dreams would be no different from waking, sleep might even become an unnecessary luxury, or a kind of last reminder of the burdensome physicality which, because of fatigue, takes away the time that could be spent in a more useful way. Although Freud never formulated it in this way, the text in question suggests that his ideal would be a person of permanent wakefulness, or of merely formal sleep.

Freud rarely speaks of the dreams of healthy people; perhaps, based on the model of humanity outlined above, one might even assume that a high degree of mental health entails almost sleepless nights, a kind of echo of the Socratic notion of death[4] in relation to death itself. It is as if in a "healthy" person there were no tensions from daytime life that needed to be compensated for or dissipated during sleep. Freud indicates elsewhere, somewhat unintentionally, how he pictured the mentally healthy person we might actually encounter at some point.[5] Such a person would be one who takes the

inventor. He was the uncle of Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper, and a good friend of Albert Einstein.

3 Freud, S., Josef Popper Lynkeus and the Theory of Dreams, p. 263.

4 "And if it is unconsciousness, like a sleep in which the sleeper does not even dream, death would be a wonderful gain." Plato, *Apology* 40d. Trans. H. N. Fowler. Cambridge, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press 2005, p. 141.

5 "We call behaviour 'normal' or 'healthy', if it combines certain features of both reactions – if it disavows the reality as little as does a neurosis, but if it then exerts itself, as does a psychosis, to effect an alteration of that reality. Of course, this expedient, normal, behaviour leads to work being carried out on the external world; it does not stop, as in psychosis, at effecting internal

first step of neurosis – that is, he does not deny reality, however, in the second step he does not avoid it either, but tries to rework it, as is the case in psychosis. Therefore, a healthy person, for Freud, stands in the middle, between neurosis and psychosis; that which keeps him in such a state is *work*. We can conclude that psychoanalysis – at least in Freud's version – still upholds the imperative of production, and however much it focuses on the pathological in man, its ideal is the fully productive man. Illness, which affects sleep both structurally and topologically,[6] is seen as an obstacle or a barrier. The inverted metaphysics of Freud's theory lies in finding the obstacle or barrier potentially in every mental agency. Being "normal" requires enormous effort and, on top of it, one has no control over any part of the process. A "fragile" subject will most likely fail in his efforts, and veer off into illness. It is reasonable to rather expect the abnormal; the "normal" may be considered a rare occurrence.

The "new normal" should be obvious to the careful observer, simply because a person spends half of his life in a state simulating mental illness – sleep. Nevertheless, even psychoanalysis retained a profoundly humanistic ethos, seeking to emancipate the patient at least to the extent of making his condition bearable. On the other hand, it saw its task as interminable.[7] The "fragile" subject must always reapply his efforts as if he were always at the beginning, his eventual completion is always postponed indefinitely. We could perhaps say that the subject is returned to the very beginning every time he falls asleep.

1. Ahypnotic Experience

Falling asleep always requires a bit of courage. And not only because the sleeper is left at the mercy of the adventures of his own unconscious, which speaks to him in a mysterious voice, and makes him read the hieroglyphics of the dream. To fall asleep is, above all, to trust; to have a strong faith that

changes. It is no longer *autoplastic*, but *alloplastic*." Freud, S., The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis. In: *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XIX (1923–1925)*, p. 185.

6 "The close affinity of this psychosis to normal dreams is unmistakable. A precondition of dreaming, moreover, is a state of sleep, and one of the features of sleep is a complete turning away from perception and the external world." Freud, S., Neurosis and Psychosis. In: *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XIX (1923–1925)*, p. 151.

7 "Every analyst should periodically – at intervals of five years or so – submit himself to analysis once more, without feeling ashamed of taking this step. This would mean, then, that not only the therapeutic analysis of patients, but also his own analysis, would change from a terminable into an interminable task." Freud, S., Analysis Terminable and Interminable. In: *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. XXIII (1937–1939), Moses and Monotheism and Other Works.* Trans. J. Strachey. London, Hogarth Press 1964, p. 249.

I will be the same person when I wake up, and that the world I wake up to will also be, at least in its basic features, the same as before I fell asleep. If one did not go to bed with this elementary conviction, one would have to experience states of anxiety so powerful and intense that he would never find the courage to retire to the realm of dreams. This is why Descartes, at the very end of the first of his *Meditations*, speaks of the fear of waking up, when "tranquil sleep will give way to laborious hours of waking."[8] For the supposed wakefulness might lead one not to the knowledge of the truth, but into darkness, where there are many difficulties to be overcome, whereas "dogmatic" sleep at least guarantees the clarity of images and ideas one can entertain and enjoy. Descartes is compelled to remain in the dream by the same laziness that Nietzsche speaks of at the beginning of the third *Untimely Meditation*. With a little poetic licence, in the figure Nietzsche introduces to the scene, a kind of explorer who has travelled to several continents and seen many countries and lands, we could see a contemporary anthropologist or ethnologist. And this "witness of the general humanity of man" gives the same answer as Descartes to the question of what he encountered everywhere: laziness.[9]

The difference between the young Nietzsche and Descartes is that the laziness the latter talks about is of philosophical kind: man in general lives in a dream, the philosopher is the one who must find a way to wake up. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, laziness appears to be very waking and overwhelmingly real. One is lazy out of fear of one's neighbour, and because of this fear, whose mutations are comfort and indifference, one lives a life he knows is somehow not his own. It is a kind of dream life which someone other than himself has taken over. So, while Descartes is afraid to wake up because waking reality might be a chaotic darkness compared to the lumi-

8 "But to carry out this plan requires great effort, and there is a kind of indolence that drags me back to my customary way of life. Just as a prisoner, who was perhaps enjoying an imaginary freedom in his dreams, when he then begins to suspect that he is asleep is afraid of being woken up, and lets himself sink back into his soothing illusions; so I, of my own accord, slip back into my former opinions, and am scared to awake, for fear that tranquil sleep will give way to laborious hours of waking, which from now on I shall have to spend not in any kind of light, but in the unrelenting darkness of the difficulties just stirred up." Descartes, R., *Meditations on First Philosophy.* Trans. M. Moriarty. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2008, p. 17.

9 "A traveller who had seen many lands and peoples and several of the earth's continents was asked what quality in men he had discovered everywhere he had gone. He replied: 'They have a tendency to laziness.' To many it will seem that he ought rather to have said: 'They are all timid. They hide themselves behind customs and opinions.' [...] From fear of his neighbour, who demands conventionality and cloaks himself with it. But what is it that constrains the individual to fear his neighbour, to think and act like a member of a herd, and to have no joy in himself? Modesty, perhaps, in a few rare cases. With the great majority it is indolence, inertia, in short that tendency to laziness of which the traveller spoke." Nietzsche, F., Schopenhauer as Educator. In: *Untimely Meditations.* Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1997, p. 127.

nous imagery of dreams which therefore seems to be the only living world, Nietzsche, on the other hand, feels as if forced into sleep by laziness. For where do timidity, comfortableness, and indifference stem from? Nietzsche is quite clear: from public opinion.

Today, the problem of falling asleep is even more serious. Descartes and early Nietzsche were still able to generate a more or less adequate alternative to laziness, and so give waking its proper form. For they operated within the classical Baroque figure of "life is a dream", and truth always requires a certain philosophical work analogous to the procedure of waking.[10] Therefore, a lack of strength or an unwillingness (bordering on cowardice) to undergo such philosophical performance, which is itself problematic and demands violence against the existing conduct of life, can be seen as an obstacle to awakening. Above all, however, their culture and conception of the world has not yet experienced the trauma of falling asleep, since they have not read and known these words: "As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into some kind of monstrous vermin."[11] In Gregor's case, man's former trust in falling asleep was now betrayed. Now there was a marked asymmetry; a significant difference between the state in which Gregor fell asleep and the situation to which he awoke. For Kafka's hero, awakening brings not a movement towards truth, but a traumatic loss. One could also say that the traditional idea of philosophy, whose practice is hindered by the laziness that prevents waking, has been, by some as yet unidentified shift, transformed into dread that makes falling asleep impossible. Gregor Samsa therefore becomes a figure who announces the "ahypnotic experience".[12]

10 In *Untimely Meditations* (namely in the third one, *Schopenhauer as Educator*), Nietzsche speaks entirely in accordance with the motion of philosophical awakening: "In individual moments we all know how the most elaborate arrangements of our life are made only so as to flee from the tasks we actually ought to be performing, how we would like to hide our head somewhere as though our hundred-eyed conscience could not find us out there, how we hasten to give our heart to the state, to money-making, to sociability or science merely so as no longer to possess it ourselves, how we labour at our daily work more ardently and thoughtlessly than is necessary to sustain our life, because to us it is even more necessary not to have leisure to stop and think. […] Now and again, as already said, we realize all this, and are amazed at all this vertiginous fear and haste and at the whole dreamlike condition in which we live, which seems to have a horror of awakening and dreams the more vividly and restlessly the closer it is to this awakening." Ibid., pp. 158–159. We will soon see that less than two years later he understands the dream in a completely different way.

11 Kafka, F., The Metamorphosis. In: *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Trans. J. Crick. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2009, p. 29.

12 For Freud, this experience would manifest itself as the absence of a distinction between sleep and waking. When asleep, one's mental life continues in the same mode as when awake without any perceptible caesura. But since sleep is accompanied by a turning away from the external world, it would be, psychologically speaking, truer than waking, as it would focus solely on

What gives us the courage to fall asleep? On the elementary level, it is certainly the fact that others do not disappear when I fall asleep, but they somehow carry the world from which I, the sleeping subject, have temporarily withdrawn. On the other hand, it is also because others wake up as well, which supports the belief that falling asleep in not a leap into an absolute abyss. Surely, much can take place in this "absence", and perhaps sleep constitutes one of the fundamental "events" (in the sense of *Ereignis*) of human life as such, for it is never obvious what "occurs" during it. Nevertheless, every dreaming always finds refuge in the awakening of others, and therefore its wrenching drama never gets to be played out unreservedly. It is the other who holds a protective hand over the sleeper to whom he thereby guarantees that whatever occurs during his absence in sleep will be coherently reintegrated into the context the sleeper has turned away from when falling asleep. To fall asleep without the other's guarantee is therefore to anticipate the terror of waking. Without the other, it would be better either never to fall asleep or never to wake up. A world without the other would have to be a world without sleep. A world without sleep, isn't that the definition of cruelty? And how much violence would one have inflicted on oneself to uphold this imperative? The ahypnotic experience would be one of pure violence and boundless cruelty.[13]

But is the world of Gregor Samsa a world without the other? At first glance, it obviously is not, as he retains the relationship to his family members.[14] That is why we said he merely "announces" the ahypnotic experience; its full significance will be revealed later. Certainly, the fact that he has metamorphosed into an unspecified, yet certainly the most disgusting kind of insect imaginable, has its consequences, and his life will never be the same again. However, this "never the same again" seems to apply only to a certain area, which is best grasped by first clarifying what remains of Gregor's former life; indeed, we might even say that this area has paradoxically benefitted from the seemingly tragic metamorphosis. The metamorphosis into

the mental life. After a good night's sleep, one would much more about oneself than before. It would be the most effective therapy. Clearly, the situation is for Kafka radically different. For his characters, permanent waking does not complement the "knowing sleep", and is therefore always tinged with dread and terror, not healthy performance.

13 A remarkable implication of this thesis is that the traditional philosophical movement of awakening would imply the "unproblematicity of the other"; perhaps one could infer that philosophy was unable to think cruelty until it took the problem of the other into account in all seriousness. Nietzsche's critique of morality seems to carry something of such problematization.

14 The reality remained the same, too: "It was not a dream. His room, a proper, human being's room, rather too small, lay peacefully between its four familiar walls. Above the table, on which his collection of textile samples was spread – Samsa was a commercial traveller – there hung the picture he had recently cut out from an illustrated magazine and mounted in a pretty gilded frame." Kafka, F., The Metamorphosis, p. 29.

a giant bug has not in any way affected Gregor's consciousness, his ability to maintain an inner dialogue, and thereby reflect everything that is happening around him. A fact that this inner voice speaks in us all the time, or at least very often, which we do not know, because we are tuning our ears to something else, a fact that our ears turn in the right direction, so that we can hear something of ourselves, a demand or a desire of which we had no idea before – this aspect is the joyful facet of the metamorphosis.

To put it quite profanely, the metamorphosis frees Gregor from a job he loathes, and although he initially feels remorse and promises himself that he will plunge back into the consuming hatred with joy and all the more effort, a state of elation quickly grows within him that will get rid away with his hatred of the role of a salesman once and for all. Perhaps we should not read *The Metamorphosis* solely as an existential tragedy, but as a journey of liberation. A liberation from what has until now prevented Gregor Samsa from thinking of himself, from focusing on himself and his self. He is now asked to stop, to gather himself in himself, and look at his previous life from a distance which he can only find somewhere within himself.

The Metamorphosis illustrates very clearly what sleep is to the travelling salesman: the greatest terror, for sleep carries the danger of falling asleep, of missing the train, of thwarting a potential deal, of dishonouring the business. It is the announcement of the worst of all possible worlds, a world where business is no more. Thereby speaks the chief clerk who has come to find out the reasons for Gregor's absence in the shop: "true, it is not the season for doing particularly good business, we acknowledge that; but a season for doing no business at all, Herr Samsa, there is no such thing, and there cannot be."[15] This is the world that Gregor broke away from, simply by waking up. So, what had happened to him during his sleep that he must now force himself even to answer the clerk? Of this we know nothing. All we know is he has awakened in a condition which makes it impossible for him to continue his life as before. He has awakened to a temporal distance that provides him with the very thing he has been silencing up to this point. A look at himself and endurance of this gaze which says: now is not the season for doing business. The *Metamorphosis* tells a story of such season and of what happens when it lasts.

Gregor has, somewhat "spontaneously", performed the philosophical movement of liberation, but its effect is manifested as a *metamorphosis* into a monster. Hence, Kafka does not seem to share the pathos of the philosophy of awakening; on the contrary, he shows with overwhelming facticity that a liberation guaranteeing a turn to oneself is far from enough. The heart of

15 Ibid., p. 36.

the contradiction lies in the fact that the travelling salesman Gregor Samsa did his duty – he woke up, and yet was prevented from continuing his work. By doing his duty, he rebelled against it.

2. Between Animal and Rationale: Invalid Self

Starting with *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche began to view dreams and sleep through a new prism. He abandoned the movement of philosophical awakening and sought in sleep the origin of metaphysics in general as well as all the divisions inherent to it.[16] He did not draw the "naive" conclusion that sleep is to be discredited in the name of overcoming metaphysics; on the contrary, he saw it as the source of knowledge of the earlier phases of humanity.[17] We mention this important step for Nietzsche's later thought here only to better understand the situation set up in the *Metamorphosis*.

Gregor, who was not armed with a philosophical reflection on history, indeed freed himself from the bondage to which he had been subjected as a travelling salesman, but his terror of falling asleep and his more or less absence[18] of sleep plunged him into a much more bound state. *Metamorphosis* is a story that tells of the absence of the beyond, the absence of the exteriority; in general, one could say that there is a lack of transcendence. Gregor, through his metamorphosis, enters the modern world of literal facticity, whose cruelty lies in the fact that there is no rest from fact; it is a facticity driven to nonsense, a facticity that does not instigate any event. In his case, it would necessarily have to be an event that would carry a weight of meaning comparable to a metamorphosis. But his very refusal to sleep, arising from a horror he has once experienced and never intends to repeat, makes such

16 "*Misunderstanding of dreams.* – In the ages of raw, primordial culture, people believed that in dreams they came to know a second real world; here is the origin of all metaphysics. Without dreams, there would have been no reason to divide the world. The separation into soul and body is also connected to the oldest view of dreams, just like the assumption that the soul can appear in bodily form, hence the origin of all belief in ghosts, and probably also the belief in gods. 'The dead live on; for they appear to the living in dreams': that was the conclusion one previously drew, throughout many millennia." Nietzsche, F., *Human, All Too Human I*, 5. Trans. G. Handwerk. Stanford, Stanford University Press 1995, p. 18.

17 "The perfect clarity of all dream representations, which presupposes an unconditional belief in their reality, reminds us again of the conditions of an earlier humanity, in whom hallucination was exceptionally frequent and sometimes seized upon whole communities, whole peoples at the same time. Therefore: in sleep and dreams we go through the lessons of earlier humanity once again." Ibid., 12, pp. 22–23. In this respect, Nietzsche was a thinker more rooted in humanism than Kafka, who took a more naive and therefore more traumatic position.

18 "The nights and the days Gregor spent almost entirely without sleep." Kafka, F., The Metamorphosis, p. 61; cf., for example, *A Hunger Artist* where the main character does not sleep.

an event impossible. It is as if he would rather endure the effects of a primal event, however terrifying and pernicious, than risk something even more terrible happening to him in his sleep. In this respect, we can understand the ahypnotic experience as the anxiety of the event.

Surely, certain episodes happen to Gregor in the course of the story (the eviction of the room, the injury inflicted by his father, the frightening of the tenants), but they all strictly follow the binary structure of his movement, which consists of remaining in the territory of the room or of a deterritorial escape that always ends in a quick return. These are merely random episodes that do not bring anything fundamental. Gregor's situation is very illustrative of the confusion of an event with the banality of the new, which, although it keeps coming, cannot in any way change what has already happened. In principle, Gregor cannot distinguish between the past and the future; he lives in a kind of timeless present that has become paralysed. He cannot return to the simplicity of the instinct because he has consciousness, but his consciousness also fails, since it no longer projects an imaginable future and becomes increasingly bound by his own immobility, which mirrors the automatism of the instinct. Hence, he is therefore stuck in a kind of in-between space between body and spirit, without being able to find a sufficient reason to deviate in either direction. It seems the dispersion of the classical elements of the definition of man (*animal rationale*) leads to the emergence of a "crippled" self, whose animality, while ensuring man's self-preservation, provides no base to be transcended and therefore to set the "reason" in motion. In the ahypnotic experience, anxiety of the event makes the transcendence of the spirit impossible.

Gregor's whole story therefore tells us that the flip side of mental illness is not health, but something much more terrible; namely the rigidity of fact, which knows no relief and demands permanent attention. In this respect, neurosis and psychosis seem to be very human reactions to anxiety, for they resort to reactive creations which, while they distort the whole world and deform the soul into irreparable perversion, are still a human situation. A situation that got out of hand, that is. Upon considering the fragility of man, his vulnerability, and therefore fear, it is highly probable that a certain degree of perversity is inherent to his being. The possibility to speak of perversity, however, presupposes an ideal or model against which the particular state of man in a particular situation is measured. Yet, such a measurement is no longer possible in Gregor's world. The virtuality of the unreal has disappeared and there is nothing but the reality of the factual. It is not possible to hide in a reactive creation, for behind the neurosis and psychosis lurks pure

anxiety, an anxiety that catapults man out of the realm of humanity without offering any option of return.

That is why it seems that Gregor's metamorphosis was not complete, did not go through all the stages it should have, stopped at some point, or rather was violently interrupted. This point is the moment when the apple thrown at him by his father lodged in Gregor's back. The text speaks of a bombardment, but the apple in this case represents the entomologist's pin. No matter where Gregor moves now, he will remain pinned, not only symbolically, in the sense that the apple stuck and rotting in Gregor's back will forever be a reminder of his father's severity and the injuries it caused, but also topologically, since pinning is at the same time pinning "to the ground". Because of it, Gregor loses one of the greatest advantages of his entomological body – the ability to climb walls and ceilings, and therefore to occupy perspectives that are usually completely inaccessible to human sensibility. After this loss, the movement of Gregor's consciousness grows slower and slower until it is completely halted.

It is useless to speculate what would have happened to Gregor if he had not been struck by a mechanical blow from "the outside". All that matters is, as we already said, that Gregor's metamorphosis stopped at some point, and therefore the *Metamorphosis* is bound to end in the absurdity of nonsense. A world in which it is dangerous to fall asleep makes a sublime extinction impossible, for one can never find enough confidence in it to let oneself be carried away by the caesura of absence. Reckless as it may sound, Gregor's death results from remaining all too human in his consciousness. He dies of a paradox uttered by his sister: "You must just try to get rid of the thought that it is Gregor. Our real misfortune is that we have believed it for so long. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have understood long ago that it's not possible for human beings to live with a beast like that, and he would have left of his own free will."[19] After this utterance, Gregor acknowledges that he is a beast, and as such, intolerable to the family, and therefore leaves quietly and peacefully, without anyone expecting it. By fulfilling his sister's verdict, he proves that he has kept his human side till the end, even if it meant admitting relentlessly also his animal side. It is quite telling that no one notices his proof of being human.

All in all, it seems that the ahypnotic experience that turned Gregor into a monster has its continuation in the indifference with which the family accepts the ultimate proof of Gregor's humanity. The ahypnotic anxiety of the event is prolonged into a sensibility that is immune to the event. Gregor's

19 Kafka, F., The Metamorphosis, p. 69.

crippled self is therefore somehow completed. Not only is it itself unable to move, but it also no longer moves the sensibility of others either. Gregor's extinction does not come from any guilt; it is the result of an immobility that began with his quite ordinary falling asleep.[20] Kafka's world is filled with similar trivialities, the consequences of which are fatal.[21]

3. Vicious Circle of Emancipation

Still, Gregor seems to have achieved something significant. He broke free from his hatred, that is, in Nietzsche's words, he unburdened himself of his resentment (we will return to this at the end).[22] He achieved what he most desired – he got rid of his job. On another level of the narrative of The *Metamorphosis,* almost behind the plot and quite imperceptibly, a kind of phenomenology of consciousness is taking place. Not of a pure consciousness, however, on whose ground ideas can be investigated, but of an almost "empty" consciousness, a consciousness that separates the animal body from the human world. Everything happens as if Gregor were gradually losing interest in the objects of his human past, as if the monstrous body were depriving him of intentionality and revealing to him with growing clarity that a consciousness separated from the human world, a consciousness without any existent object, without transcendence – a non-intentional consciousness, then – can only have itself as its object. The measure of such "self-centred" consciousness cannot be the quantity of content, but the intensity with which it experiences itself. Indeed, at first "intensive consciousness"

20 The importance of not/sleeping throughout the story is evidenced by the fact that on the night of Gregor's death, his sister did not sleep at all: "she was fully dressed, as if she hadn't slept at all; and her pale face seemed to show it." Ibid., p. 71. The pronouncement of the verdict made the sister alike to Gregor. With the fulfilment of the sentence, however, the resemblance immediately disappeared. By leaving, Gregor saved his sister from imitating him.

21 See the short story *A Country Doctor*: "Having obeyed the false ringing of the night bell just once – the mistake can never be rectified." Kafka, F., A Country Doctor. Trans. S. Appelbaum. In: *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories.* New York, Dover Publications 1996, p. 119. It is a kind of a negative of *The Metamorphosis*; Gregor did not hear the bell (alarm), the doctor reacted too eagerly to it. In both cases, however, there is no going back.

22 The ambivalence of a fulfilled desire is aptly described in *The Castle* when Josef K. returns to the village after his first unsuccessful attempt to get hired by his employer: "The Castle up above, now curiously dark, the place that K. had hoped to reach today, was retreating into the distance again. As if suggesting that this was only a temporary farewell, however, a bell rang there with a lively, cheerful note, although the sound was painful, and made his heart quail momentarily as if threatened with getting what it vaguely desired. But soon the clang of this great bell died away, to be succeeded by the faint, monotonous sound of a smaller bell, perhaps also up at The Castle or perhaps in the village." Kafka, F., *The Castle.* Trans. A. Bell. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2009, pp. 17–18.

seems to have an advantage over intentional consciousness: when Gregor first appears to his parents and the chief clerk he is fully aware of being the only one who has remained calm amidst the chaos, and when the chief clerk makes a startled escape, he surpasses the parents in his awareness even more: "Gregor perceived that there was no way he could let the chief clerk leave in this mood, if his position in the firm was not to be in the utmost danger. His parents didn't really understand it all. In the course of the long years they had convinced themselves that Gregor was provided for in this business for life, and on top of that, they were now so caught up in their present worries that they had lost any view into the future. But Gregor had this view."[23] Intense consciousness, therefore, guarantees Gregor's distance from the most natural human reaction, maintaining calm and insight in a situation where everyone else is literally freaking out.

Intensive, not intentional, consciousness therefore appears at first to be a direct consequence of the fulfilment of Gregor's innermost desire – he is no longer a travelling salesman, he has been freed. This is not the end of the story, though, it is only the beginning. For it gradually becomes clearer and clearer that for the intensive consciousness, freedom means imprisonment. Isn't it ultimately the case that once a desire is fulfilled, there comes yet another? It seems that however debilitating his job was, it kept him situated in the human world. Not in the sense in which man is essentially shaped by work, but in the sense in which his work provided him with co-ordinates where he could meet with others, in however alienated way. Emancipation does not bring him relief; on the contrary, it deprives him of the possibility of relating to others. The logic of this deprivation is somewhat strange, yet thought all the way through to absurd consequences. The starting point is a hatred of the lifestyle of the travelling salesman; it is only natural to achieve relief by changing the job, but is there any job at all that does not require a lifestyle, a certain way of doing things, skills, cleverness, or the ability to calculate profitably? Apparently not, and therefore a change of job means merely a change of one practice for another; without ever breaking free from dependence on a particular way of doing things that whichever practice requires. Yet it is possible to free oneself from this seemingly hopeless situation. If one must always take upon oneself the form of one's vocation, the rejection of such fate would have to consist in a kind of "facelessness", in the achievement of a form in which one retains oneself but is not bound by requirements of an occupation. It is therefore a task of getting rid of worldly subordination, – or in other words, of the obligations imposed on man by an occupation – but at the same

23 Kafka, F., The Metamorphosis, p. 41.

time not turning away from worldliness. That is, to remain the same man, yet freed from the forms imposed by an occupation.

It is the most paradoxical task, and its solution therefore promises freedom which must also be paradoxical. The contradiction lies in the fact that man became man throughout history, and history makes it clear that man is a social being and as such he is tied to an occupation. The desire to be without occupation and at the same time maintain a human form are mutually exclusive (we are, of course, speaking only of Gregor's perspective, not of historical versions of the separation of humanity and employment; the world in which Gregor lives does not allow, indeed forbids, such separation). We could say that in the world of Kafka's characters, the intertwining of life and occupation is inexorably valid;[24] one can never distinguish between them; one's identity coincides perfectly with one's occupation. Gregor is a hero precisely because he has tried to live in the difference between life and occupation. However, his story shows with frightening lucidity that the bond against which he rebelled goes deeper than he thought. To maintain the difference between life and occupation, he had to sacrifice his outer human form and transform himself into another form of living being. The idea of an animal came naturally, the insect or the beetle was a residue of an earlier creation of Kafka's imagination.[25]

The ahypnotic experience is accompanied by a certain fundamental feeling or attunement in life. It is the annihilation of the distinction between sleep and waking, since permanent waking sooner or later inevitably results in a state of "hallucinatory psychosis" in which the temporal and spatial network of relationships gradually disintegrates, with everything merging into a new form of indistinction in the end. It seems as if the consistency of pursuing one difference (life/occupation) cancelled out another difference (sleep/waking). Hence the paradoxical status of Gregor's freedom: he moved from one indistinction to another; and it is impossible to decide which one is more adequate to the human condition. Rather, it seems that each indistinction subjects man to a corresponding burden he cannot bear. Gregor's

24 Analogically, this intertwining, this time of life and official duties or the law, is described in *The Castle*: "Nowhere before had K. ever seen official duties and life so closely interwoven, so much so that sometimes it almost seemed as if life and official duties had changed places." Kafka, F., The Castle, p. 55.

25 "I don't even need to go to the country myself, it isn't necessary. I'll send my clothed body. [...] For I myself am meanwhile lying in my bed, smoothly covered over with the yellow-brown blanket, exposed to the breeze that is wafted through that seldom-aired room. As I lie in bed I assume the shape of a big beetle, a stag-beetle or a cock-chafer, I think. [...] The form of a large beede, yes. Then I would pretend it was a matter of hibernating, and I would press my little legs to my bulging belly." Kafka, F., *Wedding Preparations in the Country.* Trans. E. Kaiser – E. Wilkins. London, Secker and Warburg 1954, pp. 11–12.

liberation from occupation, therefore, does not lead him to a state in which he has an immediate access to himself and can make decisions without the dictate of the duty. It only plunges him into a different version of subjection in which he is as unhappy as before. He has only passed from one form of unhappy consciousness (intentionality) to another (intensity); but the unhappy consciousness has not been overcome.

In this respect, Gregor's story is one of the vicious circle of emancipation. Liberation from one confusion is smoothly transformed into another confusion. It is certainly possible to distinguish one confusion from the other aesthetically based on their frighteningness or absurdity, but in fact – that is, in terms of freedom – there is no difference between them. Therefore, in Kafka's world, there is no place for Utopian dreams of a man freed from the historical falsification of his being. One cannot separate oneself from history, nor can one complete it. Each such attempt results only in a new form of subordination, which itself marks merely another thread of history. And perhaps one of the partial meanings of Kafka's story is the knowledge that every attempt to escape from unfreedom ends, because of its one-sidedness, in an even more destructive alternative of unfreedom. The attempt at emancipation ends in an even more severe unfreedom than the one from which one wanted to break free.[26] The ahypnotic experience abolishing the difference between sleep and waking also abolishes the socialist dream of a man freed from work, but even more so abolishes Freud's model man. For even if the imperative "to dream like to wake" significantly strengthens the instance of the Ego, vis-à-vis the Id, we should expect a commensurate strengthening of the repressive component of the Superego. In Freud's model, it is taken for granted that the Ego, having come to terms with the Id, will be empowered to a more radical resistance against the Superego. Gregor's story shows, however, that there would merely be a shift of emphasis, the discontents of civilisation would nonetheless persist. The ahypnotic world following the imperative "to dream like to wake" would be transformed into a sadistic terror of discipline in which the Ego, though perfectly in control of instincts, would never satisfy the demands of the Superego, as they would grow proportionately to the increasing domination of the Ego over the Id. Perhaps it is exactly here where we might detect the fear, and it was certainly an uncon-

26 Here we find yet another analogy to *The Castle*: "[…] it seemed to K. as if all contact with him had been cut, and he was more of a free agent than ever. He could wait here, in a place usually forbidden to him, as long as he liked, and he also felt as if he had won that freedom with more effort than most people could manage to make, and no one could touch him or drive him away, why, they hardly had a right even to address him. But at the same time – and this feeling was at least as strong – he felt as if there were nothing more meaningless and more desperate than this freedom, this waiting, this invulnerability." Kafka, F., The Castle, p. 95.

scious fear, that lead Freud to a distaste of the "oceanic" feeling of religious experience. In short: the imperative "to dream like to wake" denies man the transcendence he wants to seek only in the realm of the instincts. But this is the domain that man is supposed to master by the very same imperative. Ultimately, then, Freud's model man is supposed to master, and thereby overcome, transcendence. Gregor Samsa is the proof of the impossibility of such a claim.

4. From Animal to Machine

Despite all this, there must be a way to escape the vicious circle of emancipation. Otherwise, man would drown in a boundless nihilism in which there are only two truly human possibilities – either the slavery of occupation, or an insect-like existence in an increasingly closed room. Gregor does not find a way out, he intensifies the ahypnotic way in which ancient memories are flashing by in a cinematic sequence: "The nights and the days Gregor spent almost entirely without sleep. Sometimes he dwelt on the thought that when the door was next opened he might take the family's affairs fully in hand again, as he had before; figures reappeared in his thoughts after long absence: the boss, the chief clerk, the lesser clerks and the apprentices; the porter who was so stupid; two or three friends from other firms; a chambermaid in a hotel in the provinces, a sweet, fleeting memory; a girl, cashier in a millinery shop, he had been seriously courting, but too slowly – they all appeared mixed in with strangers or people already forgotten, and he was glad when they vanished."[27] He cannot stop at any of the memories, none of them will relieve him of the terrifying question: what if he were to "fall asleep" again and lose himself even more than when he had turned into a bug? The original intensity of consciousness is therefore no longer intensified in him, but it attains a certain contentment which outwardly manifests itself as recklessness: "He was hardly surprised that he had shown so little consideration for the others of late; in the past, this consideration had been his pride."[28]

His death, therefore, is not a voluntary end to suffering – for himself as well as his family – but an acceptance of a dead end. Death is not a way out, it is only an end, which is tantamount to resignation. Gregor failed, but he tried to find a solution. His experiment on himself failed. For Kafka, it certainly

27 Kafka, F., The Metamorphosis, pp. 61–62. Such is Gregor's state after the incident with apple, but the restlessness and helpless nervousness overwhelms him already earlier: "He often lay there the whole night through, not sleeping for a moment, only scrabbling for hours on the leather." Ibid., p. 50.

28 Ibid., p. 66.

did not mean despair, but rather a reason for further experimentation. For him, the obvious fact that the fulfilment of one desire is followed by another, and so on ad infinitum, does not bring about the Schopenhauerian urge to seek freedom in the renunciation of desire itself, but an examination of the character of desire, that is, an attempt to intensify it to a state in which individual sequences would not follow, but the desire itself would converge into a unified direction. Gregor's failure does not lie in the fact that he desires something nonsense; it lies in the fact that the desire – which initially helped him break free – backfired. He got rid of his hated occupation, but then began to long for a return to the family circle, although this was impossible because of his transformation. He took a step in one direction, but got frightened by the consequences and wanted to reverse his liberation. The ahypnotic experience seems to begin with this very fright. Kafka's experiment, then, can end neither in resignation nor in the reversal brought about by fright; it is necessary to go on, to try to bring the ahypnotic experience – which is placed only in another indistinction, – to an actual distinction. Where it would no longer be possible to exchange one desire for another, where desire would be unified. Kafka's term for such a desire is "law".

Becoming an animal is not enough. It is only a primary utterance, and it is exactly in this primary utterance that the shock of fright lies. If the loss of human form is to be the price of freedom, it is quite obvious that unfreedom will seem more valuable to everyone. But this is not how Kafka poses the problem. He sees very well that the initial "shock of freedom" has shattering consequences precisely because it stands at the beginning. There is no need to be intimidated by it. On the contrary, such intimidation leads to resignation and, as we have seen, inevitably bring about death. The only possibility lies in the attempt to continue in the direction of Gregor himself, and to reach beyond the stage of becoming an animal. To find immediate contact with the law, and to continue to unite the desire in it. This brings us to *The Disciplinary Camp*, where immediate contact with the law is established. It is all the more surprising that the eeriness of the scene is not diminished, quite the opposite. The possibility of the law, and thereby of the restoration of transcendence, is revealed here, but only very indistinctly.

The key is the description of the effects of the execution as it was traditionally carried out in the disciplinary camp. Here, too, the focus is on the metamorphosis (*Verwandlung*), but it is no longer about becoming an animal, but about the transformation (*Verkleidung*) that happens to a person who has touched the law, or more precisely, a person who has been touched by the law. The hopelessness of the loss of human form turns the attention back to man. Nevertheless, the problem remains the same: how to unite desire so that trust in falling asleep is restored, and man does not fall into an

ahypnotic experience with all its overwhelming consequences? If we exclude the escape to the animal, where lies the transformation that must take place in order not to return to the very beginning: to Gregor hating his job? We have already suggested that such transformation will mean a disguise, or even a mask (*Verkleidung*). It is about changing what one is wearing, not what is in oneself. It will therefore be a form of theatre, a spectacle put on for the "amusement" of the audience. Let us turn, therefore, directly to the passage in which the meaning of the whole theatrical piece is described:

> And now the execution would begin! Not a discordant sound disturbed the work of the machine. Many gave up watching entirely, lying instead on the sand with their eyes shut; they all knew: now Justice is being done. In silence one only heard the groaning of the condemned man, muffled by the gag. Today the machine can no longer manage to force a sigh out of the condemned man stronger than the gag can stifle; but in those days, as they wrote, the needles dripped a corrosive fluid which today we are no longer allowed to use. And then came the sixth hour! It was impossible to grant everyone their request to be allowed to watch from near at hand. The commandant in his wisdom ordered that first and foremost the children should be considered; though I myself, by virtue of my office, could always be present; I often crouched on that spot there, a little child in each arm to right and left. How we all took in the look of transfiguration (*Verkleidung*) from the suffering face, how we bathed our cheeks in the reflection of a justice finally attained and already passing! What times they were, my comrade! The officer had obviously forgotten who was standing in front of him; he had embraced the traveller and laid his head upon his shoulder.[29]

The final tender gesture, which was not intended to move the traveller, as the officer does not fail to point out, convinces the reader of the power of the experience expressed in the memory of the glorious days when executions were at the centre of the life of the disciplinary camp. It is quite irrelevant that the sentences were unjust and the executions inhuman. What is essential is the fact that execution was made to be experienced as an event of justice. And where justice is done, the law must be present, however indirectly.

For the condemned man himself, this means nothing more than death, and undeniably, he receives no reward at all, acting throughout the process merely as a medium representing the law to others for a few hours. But what kind of law is it, if it can only be experienced indirectly through a diabolical

29 Kafka, F., In the Penal Colony. In: *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories.* Trans. J. Crick, p. 87.

machine that inscribes its sentence on the naked body of the condemned? It is certainly a law that withholds itself from man, is unknown to man, – it is not always accessible even by the simplest consciousness, as Kant has it. On the contrary, it happens (*Ereignis*) exclusively in the course of the execution, silently, for at the moment of its supreme efficacy, when the condemned "understands" (it is that sixth hour),[30] it can no longer be communicated. It is made accessible to the spectators of the execution only by seeing the transformation (*Verkleidung*) of the condemned man's expression. There is no other trace of the law to be found. As for the condemned man, the law means nothing more than death to him, he acts throughout the process merely as a medium representing the law to others for a few hours.[31]

Because the law is silently withholding itself, the spokesman of the law becomes the apparatus of torture, without which man would have no access to the law. The transformation is therefore complete. The condemned man is no longer a human consciousness trapped in an animal body; he now is a human body and a consciousness of the law. He has transcended human boundaries and become inhuman. Should the law resound in this inhuman form, its spokesman can only be an inanimate machine. If a more permanent trace of the law were to be maintained in the disciplinary camp, the apparatus of torture would have to work ceaselessly, one execution after another, the supply of dying bodies would have to be permanent. Such is the logic of the disciplinary camp, such is the logic of the modern world and its ahypnotic experience as described by Kafka. Its lack of the law can only be compensated for by permanent execution.

In the demonstration of this ruthless logic, Kafka reveals himself as a political thinker. Absurd scenes and exaggerated images (a man turned into a bug, a torture machine producing justice) cannot be reduced to the aesthetics of a fictional world. They relentlessly mirror the situation of modern man; modern man compensates the cruelty of the ahypnotic world with his own destructiveness, to which he openly admits. When the trusting deliverance to the auspices of the other (sleep) is absent, paranoid suspicion of anyone sets in, and this passes into a latent desire for the annihilation of the

30 "But how still the man becomes at the sixth hour! Understanding dawns upon even the most stupid. It begins with the eyes. From there it spreads further. A sight that might tempt you to join him lying beneath the Harrow. Indeed, nothing further happens; the man simply begins to decipher the script; he purses his lips as if he were listening." Ibid., p. 84.

31 Quite symptomatically, the condemned man featured in the story is guilty of giving in to sleep: "You wanted to have the present case explained; it is as simple as the rest. This morning a captain filed a report that this man, who has been assigned to him as his servant and sleeps outside his door, had been asleep on duty. [...] Last night the captain wanted to make sure that his servant was doing his duty. On the stroke of two he opened his door and found him curled up asleep." Ibid., p. 80.

enemy. Execution in the disciplinary camp, which for all its injustice and inhumanity still referred to the law, has its counterpart in the extermination camp, where there is only the brutality of death. In each of his prose works Kafka draws attention to the fact that modern man is only a step away from the extermination camp, and if he is not to take the final fatal step, he has no choice but to seek the law. This remains so even despite his repeatedly affirmed conviction that the law withholds itself from man and is always silent. Such is the situation – we must choose between impossibility and death by extermination. Kafka opts for impossibility, and describes what this decision does to man.

5. Experimens of Reflective Judgment: Amygdala

Kafka's world is a world without the other, who would complete what the subject himself does not see. It is also a world without tragedy, because without the other there is no conflict and therefore no tragedy; tragedy presupposes hidden tension which develops first as crisis and then as catharsis. Without the other, all that remains is the grotesqueness of a reality[32] in which people still meet, talk to each other and perhaps even produce offspring, but in fact they miss each other, behaving as if it were always possible to escape into a different dimension than that of the other. Intersubjectivity does not bring about the event, because there is no actual meeting of two temporalities. Rather, they take place side by side, in parallel, with occasional, violently provoked mutual contact, from which it is necessary to withdraw as quickly as possible, since conflict creates the danger of contamination. There is, of course, an infinite number of other dimensions, each of which provides shelter from the threat of contamination, with its potential for tragic conflict.

The delocalised image of atomised humanity[33] evokes the idea of a simulated "superconsciousness" that could perhaps shape at least the contours of a being that used to be called human, but is now shattered into an infinite

32 This level is brilliantly analysed by Karel Kosík in his essay *Století Markéty Samsové*, which has, unfortunately, not been translated to English yet.

33 In the third of his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche describes this state as atomistic revolution: "For a century we have been preparing for absolutely fundamental convulsions; […] That individuals behave as though they knew nothing of all these anxieties does not mislead us: their restlessness reveals how well they know of them; they think with a precipitancy and with an exclusive preoccupation with themselves never before encountered in man, they build and plant for their own day alone, and the pursuit of happiness is never greater than when it has to be caught today or tomorrow: because perhaps by the day after tomorrow there will be no more hunting at all. We live in the age of atoms, of atomistic chaos. […] The revolution is absolutely unavoidable, and it will be the atomistic revolution: but what are the smallest indivisible basic constituents of human society?" Nietzsche, F., *Schopenhauer as Educator*, pp. 149–150.

number of isolated particles. It certainly could not be a human consciousness, for the individual components to be mirrored in the whole are too numerous; human consciousness would be overwhelmed by them, and if it manifested anything at all, it would have to be meaningless chaos. It would have to be, in Leibnitzian terms, a kind of a more complete monad, wholly inaccessible to the human mode of being. This more complete monad could register a potentially infinite number of components (i.e. human beings), and make connections between them that could never occur to human consciousness. This is not to say that these connections would produce the event of intersubjectivity; man would only be manipulated into a certain position, which would be consistent with other positions, but not localised within the image of humanity, since man would probably never be able to grasp more than a few surrounding positions.

This delocalized image of humanity seems to condition the current thinking of transhumanism. Kafka is relevant even today. Transhumanism, however, postulates a different politics. A politics that wants to see the "machine for producing justice" as the development of humanity and not as the dependence of humanity on the virtuality of the law. Merging with the machine, which would of course no longer be torturous but intelligent, is to remove this very dependence. Transhumanism, then, dreams, – to evoke Kafka – of entering into the law; and this access should be granted to the no-longer-human by technology. The posthuman, whom transhumanism speaks of as a technologically enhanced human, would not need to relate to transcendence, as he would already be located in it. Philosophical reflection is faced with the question that transhumanism provokes of whether dependence on the machine is ontologically more appropriate to the life of the (post)human than dependence on the law (even though the law remains silent). And also, whether man can surpass the machine. Certainly, not in the amount of information he would be able to process, but in a different capacity. It must be examined whether the problem of data processing is one of subsumption. If so, then man surpasses the machine in something the machine is incapable of – reflective judgment.[34]

34 "For the application of the first sort of laws, namely the universal laws of material nature in general, the power of understanding needs no special principle of reflection: for in that case it is determining, since an objective principle is given to it by the understanding. But as far as the particular laws that can only be made known to us by experience are concerned, there can be such great diversity and dissimilarity among them that the power of judgment itself must serve as a principle even in order merely to investigate the appearances of nature in accordance with a law and spy one out, because it requires one for a guideline if it is to have any hope of an interconnected experiential cognition in accordance with a thoroughgoing lawfulness of nature or of its unity in accordance with empirical laws." Kant, I., *Critique of the power of judgment*, § 70. Trans. P. Guyer. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 258.

If transhumanism can be understood as an attempt to relocate human through technology, strategies highlighting reflective judgment would have to be oriented towards a different type of relocation, one that would focus on the human body and conduct research on the limits of human perception. Such attempts would aim at de-composing the most commonplace, which we never care about because of its familiarity, and to dramatize a kind of the perception of perception. Philosophical reflection should acknowledge that art is always a huge step ahead of philosophy in this matter. Let us take a closer look at a contemporary installation that aims to explore perception. It shows that Kafka's key motif of "now happens justice", the event of the law, must be a problem of reflective judgment and its ultimate consequence, the sublime.

* * *

At first glance (this first glance is both the reason why this installation was chosen and a classic case of the event) we are struck by the similarity between this robot and the torture apparatus from Kafka's story.

The *Amygdala* consists of a mechanical arm that resembles an articulated insect leg. At the end of this limb is a razor-sharp claw that cuts into the animal skin stretched on a frame, giving the whole installation a static unity. The limb is controlled by artificial intelligence so that it reacts "autonomously" to every movement of the skin by cutting into its surface. The installation's author, Marco Donnarumma, interprets the symbolism of the whole action as a process of purifying scarification, intended to produce a ritual catharsis. The artificial neural network is not pre-programmed, it reacts to movements it cannot predict. With each such "encounter", it simultaneously acquires a memory trace and can therefore perform the next cut less blindly. It is clear, however, that the inscriptions left by the Amygdala are only random cuts. This high-tech machine simulating elementary animal responses reveals, above all, the abysmal difference between the increasing complexity of information and even the simplest event of meaning.

In contrast to Kafka's imaginary apparatus for producing justice, the *Amygdala* is a machine for producing those indecipherable inscriptions on the body of the condemned. It is not at all the case, however, that there is an intention to write a specific text (or verdict) on each such body (that is, on each skin that results from an individual *Amygdala* performance). Rather, we see that it would take a huge number of individual performances for a possible text to begin to stand out through the bodies, and even then we would probably still not know what language or cryptographic code to use to decipher this writing. Therefore, the *Amygdala* does not presuppose a model addressee; on the contrary, the addressee of its "writing" only emerges if the viewer takes at least one step along the path of "purification", whose principle the robot is

supposed to learn. Clearly, Donnarumma's works, exhibited under the title *Calyx*, are the first and very slight outlines of a process in which the *Amygdala* could master the whole history of scarification, with all the meanings and various aspects it entails; a goal that is yet centuries away. If we imagine the immense amount of time it would take the *Amygdala* to get from simply cutting the skin to actually identifying a single letter, we are awed by the history of human cultures in which something analogous has happened, and probably in a much shorter time than it would be in *Amygdala's* case.

The *Amygdala* allows the event to happen on at least two levels. On a kind of "historical" level, it makes its audience feel the horror that something as great and breathtaking as human culture could one day vanish into nothingness, with no trace left of the efforts of human epochs of which we have only a vague idea, and yet on which our life is based. This life itself bears witness to these ancient and long-vanished epochs, and gives us the joy of its duration. It comes to us as the event of our own historicity. On another level, each of the exhibits included in *Calyx* should be understood as an event of its own, for each performance has a different course; it is never possible to predict how the scarified skin will move for the first time, and what reaction of the sensorimotor limb it will provoke. Each subsequent movement, that is, each mark of ongoing inscription, occurs in the interaction between the skin and the claw. One could almost say that each mark is the event, since it can be inscribed in any way, and the artificial intelligence that guides the robotic hand probably cannot predict the connections it might make between each mark, or even between its individual movements.

Although the *Amygdala* is controlled by artificial intelligence, it cannot spontaneously produce an algorithm that comes even close to the meaning of scarification. Perhaps we could call the *Amygdala* an event machine that produces nothing but lines that cannot be drawn, because they cannot be represented. Since there is no subject that could represent, or rather, it always arrives too late, only at the moment when the line is cut, and the subject has no choice but to consider the line in connection with other lines, which in turn represent other latenesses of his own. This is perhaps another characteristic of the *Amygdala* regarding the event. It makes the subject constantly re-experience his lateness to the event, but perhaps it also evokes in him a sense of the sublime. The *Amygdala* consists of two moments: a kind of eerie groping in the void (produced by the yet unintentional, identical, repetitive and mechanic movement) and the first contact with the skin, in which the movement of the robotic hand becomes directed, and its direction gains more precision with each successive movement of the skin, triggered by the previous cut. Hence, the viewer can see the sublime happening. Of course, these are only hints of its structure, but it seems that something like

the event of the sublime does emerge in Donnarumma's *Amygdala*. Trying to represent the event of the sense of the sublime could certainly be a step towards the re-localisation of the body, as discussed above.

6. Nietzsche and the Sublime

But let us return to the ahypnotic experience. What is the origin of the so contradictory idea that sleep, a certain loss of control,[35] an almost enfeeblement of self, must be excluded from human life, when on the other hand it is obvious that waking, when it exceeds a certain limit, itself begins to distort and deform perception, so that we actually fall into a kind of "waking dream" which, however, does not produce the physiological effect of rest, but prolongs itself indefinitely? Friedrich Nietzsche, in his second *Untimely Meditation*, speaks of a certain degree of sleeplessness which, after a long period, leads to the extinction of the living creature. He speaks of this in the context of the "unhistorical" as the element providing man with a protective layer against the vast amount of the past that one can never fully process. Hence, forgetting is obviously a part of human life – a kind of unhistorical condition that defines a limit beyond which the past (which is otherwise necessary and important and, according to Nietzsche, makes a person human) no longer operates.

Nietzsche asks the reader to imagine a man who does not forget at all. After a few days such a person would be completely overwhelmed by events which he would be unable to structure in any way, and in the end he would not dare to lift a finger for fear of the irreversible effects which even something so trivial could cause.[36] This, according to Nietzsche, is the consequence of the excess of the "historical instinct" not only in the individual,

35 Even Schopenhauer suspected a close connection between sleep and death: "As for the individual consciousness that is bound up with the individual body, this is completely interrupted every day by sleep. Deep sleep cannot be distinguished from death (into which it often steadily passes – e.g. in the case of freezing to death) with respect to the present; they are distinguishable only with respect to the future, namely when it comes to waking up. Death is a sleep in which the individual is forgotten: everything else wakes up again, or rather has never slept." Schopenhauer, A., *The World as Will and Representation, vol. I.* Trans. J. Norman – A. Welchman – Ch. Janaway. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2010, p. 304. But in waking up he saw only the entrance into the bondage of the will. His denial of it therefore sounds paradoxical.

36 "Imagine the extremest possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was thus condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming: such a man would no longer believe in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this stream of becoming: like a true pupil of Heraclitus, he would in the end hardly dare to raise his finger. […] A man who wanted to feel historically through and through would be like one forcibly deprived of sleep, or an animal that had to live only by rumination and ever repeated rumination." Nietzsche, F., On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life. In: *Untimely Meditations*, p. 62.

but in the whole culture. Permanent waking, a metaphoric name we might use for historical knowledge, without the corrective of any counter-movement, not only endangers man's life but even destroys it, for its consequence is a state of a continuous apperception. The mass of the past is so vast that the cognitive consciousness never reaches a moment when it is done with knowing it. Moreover, the mass itself increases as the life of the knower goes on. A kind of infinite task is therefore marked out; fulfilment or completion is resolutely postponed; human life is certainly not meant to claim anything like fullness or totality.

Therein lies the curse of the "historical sense": there can never be a moment of pause, it is a postponement that does not allow for distance that would enable one to see into the depths of one's own being. It is always too late. Temporality has the character of this incompleteness that never stops because it is not anchored, or rather it is impossible to anchor it on a moment of such importance, that it could serve as a measure for experience to determine what to forget, let go, pass. And because it is always too late, nothing new can pass without attracting attention at least for a fraction of a second, so it is too early for anything to pass unnoticed. The temporality of modern man oscillates between too late and too soon, without being able to acquire a dimension determined by the sense of nobleness that announces the event. This obliteration of the event, a kind of paradoxical forgetting of what Nietzsche calls the unhistorical or, more generally, the untimely, is the subject of the entire essay On the Usefulness and Harmfulness of History for Life. The whole of *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* is concerned with this obliteration of the event, a paradoxical forgetting about forgetting that which Nietzsche calls unhistorical, or more generally, untimely.

Only in the protective atmosphere of the unhistorical, in the bridging of the gap between too late and too soon, that is, in the event that both precedes and establishes the ecstasy of temporality, can history emerge and organise what has happened into a comprehensible whole. It is only in this bridging that man becomes man. But if everything that has happened overlaps, in terms of factuality, with the foundational antecedent of the event, man begins to favour a curiosity that, while ensuring a comfortable existence, also announces a certain feeling of meaninglessness. However, somewhere deep, a doubt about the authenticity of one's life is hidden, and eventually one sinks into an ironic or even cynical form of consciousness. Irony here means the search for meaning, except, after all, there is not and probably never will be any. Such are the effects of this degree of sleeplessness which, as "historical sense", plagues everything living with the overproduction of all events – this description is analogous to what we have already uncovered in Kafka's world.

Nietzsche, however, has at his disposal a weapon that the Kafkaesque heroes did not. It is the unhistorical, which in one movement produces oblivion and ignorance, but in the necessarily following counter-movement leads to the possibility of the subject who lets himself be carried away by the event. This is manifested in a sense of the sublime, and it is in this affect that we recognise those who are able to overcome their own weak personality so typical of modernity, according to Nietzsche.[37] The curiosity of the weak personality prone to innovation, which never finds a moment to stop, is contrasted with the feeling of the sublime, which makes one experience the terrible abyss of the meaningless present, but at the same time the delightful feeling of hope that this meaninglessness will pass, since the event eternally returns everything past to the state of its birth. The event does not make the past reappear, but places it in the perspective of the future, as if it were only now (that is, in the present) that it can be properly grasped. The inconceivability of the sublime consists in the transition which provides the ahypnotic experience with something like a horizon, namely the darkness in which its despair dissolves. The soul, having been awakened from its apathy and indifference, experiences a growing sense of life and, with it, a growing feeling of power (*Macht*). Nietzsche's notion of the will to power, then, does not seem to originate in the realm of control; its origins are to be sought in a sense of the sublime and a sensitivity to the event. The degree of the power of the will is not measured by how much it can control, but by how much of the onslaught of the event it can endure. That is, not by what it wants and how much it wants, not by the quantity, but by the fact that it wants to endure the event patiently.[38] To open oneself to it again and again, and thereby enable that continuation, that delight which is experienced as a growing and intensified life.

37 "Expressed morally: you are no longer capable of holding on to the sublime, your deeds are shortlived explosions, not rolling thunder. Though the greatest and most miraculous event should occur – it must nonetheless descend, silent and unsung, into Hades. For art flees away if you immediately conceal your deeds under the awning of history. He who wants to understand, grasp and assess in a moment that before which he ought to stand long in awe as before an incomprehensible sublimity may be called reasonable, but only in the sense in which Schiller speaks of the rationality of the reasonable man: there are things he does not see which even a child sees, there are things he does not hear which even a child hears, and these things are precisely the most important things…" Ibid., pp. 83–84.

38 "– How manifold is that which we experience as '*moral feeling*': in it there is reverence, dread, a touch as if by something holy and mysterious, in it is the voice of something commanding, something that takes itself more seriously than we do; something that elevates, kindles, or brings calm and profundity. Our moral feeling is a synthesis, a simultaneous resounding of all the lordly and subservient feelings that have shaped the history of our forebears." Nietzsche, F., *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 1[22]. Trans. K. Sturge. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 55.

When Nietzsche speaks of the weakness of the modern personality, he explicitly connects it with the impossibility of the sublime, which is caused by the immediacy of the critical reaction to every event.[39] No act can be sublime because it is to be understood immediately, it is to be placed among all other events, and therefore will inevitably be lost among them and its effect will die out. One should first be shaken, and this state should last long, and then preserve this incomprehensibility as the sublime in his own acts. Instead, an analysis immediately sets, however, and that does not allow the sublime to resound at all. This is why Nietzsche calls for the unhistorical and its oblivion, not in the sense of disappearance, but, on the contrary, as that which allows the event to emerge, for only in this way is history possible, and only in this way can man become man. Hence, the unhistorical for Nietzsche plays the role of a kind of anthropotechnique enabling people to access their humanity.

It is quite obvious that when Nietzsche complains about the absence of the unhistorical, he is drawing attention to the specific modus of inhumanity dominating German culture in his era. His conception of the absence of the unhistorical later becomes a general diagnosis of nihilism. Yet it seems he has sought the only effective protection against this loss of meaningin the very sublime; something he hints at already in the second *Untimely Meditation*. For Nietzsche, the ahypnotic experience of the modern world, which, due to its undying curiosity, confuses its ignorance of the event for a desire for the ever new, is a sign of inhumanity. When he later calls for cruelty and defends cruelty in its innocence, it only means that he sees no other way to revive a soul sunk in apathy.[40] In fact, he contrasts cruelty with cruelty with-

39 "The most astonishing thing may come to pass – the host of the historically neutral is always there ready to supervise the author of it even while he is still far off. […] The work never produces an effect but only another 'critique'; and the critique itself produces no effect either, but again only a further critique. There thus arises a general agreement to regard the acquisition of many critiques as a sign of success, of few or none as a sign of failure. At bottom, however, even given this kind of 'effect' everything remains as it was: people have some new thing to chatter about for a while, and then something newer still, and in the meantime go on doing what they have always done. The historical culture of our critics will no longer permit any effect at all in the proper sense, that is an effect on life and action; […] But their critical pens never cease to flow, for they have lost control of them and instead of directing them are directed by them. It is precisely in this immoderation of its critical outpourings, in its lack of self-control, in that which the Romans call *impotentia*, that the modern personality betrays its weakness." Nietzsche, F., On the Uses and Disadvantages of history for life, p. 87.

40 "*We who are 'objective'* – […] We want *strong* sensations, just as all the *coarser* eras and classes do… This must be clearly distinguished from the needs of those with weak nerves and the decadents: in their case, there's a need for spice, even for cruelty… We *all* seek states in which bourgeois morality *no longer has any say*, even less so priestly morality (– every book with a lingering odour of the pastor and theologian about it gives us the impression of pitiable niaiserie

out making a clear distinction between them.[41] It seems, nevertheless, that he considered cruelty which forces man into indifference to be much more decisive than cruelty which is intended to awaken man to a sense of growing life.

In essence, it is the same cruelty, only directed or "tuned" differently. From this he could foresee that man's future would consist of increasing cruelty and violence. Man can hope that the future will open up before him again only if this cruelty is guided by the event and the sublime. Otherwise, in the nihilistic case, man will sink into ever deeper waking and ahypnotic experiences governed by ressentiment – his life will be dominated by hallucinations and delusions leading to utter inhumanity. One could perhaps say that Gregor Samsa awoke into a world of this inhuman cruelty, and that is why he must have felt like a hideous insect whose consciousness is sinking into an ever more terrible nothingness. Identically, only an inhuman torture machine could have produced the event in the disciplinary camp. Kafka was therefore the first herald of this inhumanity and cruelty that destroys man since it never lets him sleep.

and impoverishment…). 'Good society' is that where at bottom nothing is found interesting except what's *forbidden* in bourgeois society and what ruins one's reputation: the same applies to books, music, politics, the appreciation of women." Nietzsche, F., *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, 10[119], pp. 194–195.

41 Hints of differentiation can be found in the late notes, though: "Cruelty may be the relief of taut, proud souls, of those who are used to exercising constant harshness against themselves; for them it has become a festival to at last hurt others, see them suffer – all the warrior races are cruel. Cruelty may, conversely, also be a kind of saturnalia of oppressed and weak-willed beings, of slaves, seraglio women, as a little piquancy of power – there is a cruelty of evil souls and a cruelty of base and trifling souls." Ibid., 2[15], p. 69.