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The Divided City: Prague's Public Space and Franz Kafka's Readings of Prague[1]

It is no surprise that the monuments on Prague's squares, riverbanks, and hills reflect the national ideologies from which they emanated. In the nineteenth century, when the first memorial monuments were founded, middle-class civic society used them to present and pass on its values to viewers in public space, viewers who themselves may have been nationally indifferent. In nineteenth-century Prague, these values were above all national in character: for the Czech and German middle classes, language-based nationalism dominated all other values; it determined the political programs of most Czech and German political parties, as well as more private choices, such as where parents sent their children to schools. Czech middle-class nationalists demanded that the Czech language and Czech people be given equal standing with the Germans, while German middle-class nationalists wanted to maintain the status quo. Both groups were becoming more and more interested in creating linguistically distinct spaces that would be dominated by the language and symbols of Czech and German nationalism.

In Prague, public space became the staging ground for national discourse, where adherents of monolingual national ideologies competed with one another and attempted to control public opinion in various ways, including the domination of public space. One of the ways to control and speak to the public was to properly stage ceremonial acts, for example the funerals of Václav Hanka, Karel Havlíček Borovský and Božena Němcová or the laying of the first stone of the Czech National Theater. Another was the "conquest" of an area by naming it, as in the case of the establishment of the Žižkov quarter (1869) or of the modern Bílá Hora (White Mountain) in the 1920s and 1930s and the connection of city street names with the Hussite and Reformation tradition. Yet another was the construction of architecturally dominant buildings in the so-called national style (National Theatre, National Museum) or memorial monuments that had the

primary function of presenting and representing the monolingual constructed nation and its goals.

At the same time, the transformation of urban space into public space – understood in a modern sense as a place where it is possible to address and mobilize the public – is closely connected to the development of modern civil society and the increasing participation of the individual in its public institutions. In some sense, modern civil society returns to the public urban spaces associated with the Roman polis that were "being [religiously, M.N.] redefined in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages".[2] According to Max Weber it is in this civil society, which began to develop dynamically in the end of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, that the modern "public" is formed. According to Jürgen Habermas the bourgeoisie creates its public sphere (for the public discourse) in the bourgeois salons in the wider context of a big city. Theaters, concert halls, reading circles and cafés play the same role. Habermas (1989: 31–56) places the creation of a public sphere in Paris in the eighteenth century. A similar process takes place later in Bohemia and Prague, more slowly in the Czech than in the German context. But the Czech and German nationalistic middle classes also used public space to mobilize the public and propagate their own national (homoglossic and monolingual) point of view. The other part of creating a public is the creation of privacy and a private sphere for the modern individual, whom secularization has "freed" from fixed religious values. It is therefore no coincidence that the squares, bridges and hills, which had previously been dominated by sacral or votive structures, such as churches, plague columns, or figurative portrayals of Christ and saints, which became a part of religious processions, began to be filled with national memorial monuments in the nineteenth century. The places themselves where these religious values were communicated were likewise sacral structures. But just as a religious community is not a public created by a modern civil society administrated by public institutions, sacral structures are not public spaces in a modern sense; they are "public" places of liturgy and ritual. Despite this, these sacral and votive buildings and statues, such as the statues of the saints on the Charles Bridge, the original statue of Saint Wenceslas on Wenceslas Square or the Marian Column on Old Town Square, were "translated" and read from a monolingual national point of view.

Nevertheless civil society's monuments have much in common with figurative depictions of saints. In both cases the following are meaningful: their "public" placement, their visual presentation and personalization of ideological messages, and the use of enduring construction materials such as stone, the endurance of which became a part of the semantics of religious as well as civic monuments.

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2   Cf. BRUBAKER (2001: 34). Brubaker, however, understands "public space" in a different sense than I do. "Public" doesn't have its "modern" meaning in the context of her paper.

The belief that monuments are constructed *sub species aeternitatis,* that is not only for the present but also for future generations, is combined with the belief in the eternal validity of the communicated values, which is reinforced by the amount of money collected and invested by the public. Thematically, however, monuments refer to the past, which they rewrite from a modern perspective. But their placement, timing, iconography and ceremonies are used to react to the present: the reference to the past as well as the construction of a relevant history serves to unveil a program for the future and to legitimize the present.

In Prague, where the monolingual national programs of Czech and German societies competed with one another starting in the nineteenth century, there were also monuments that dominated public spaces and shaped public thought. This is also apparent in the representative buildings, monuments and other building projects in Prague that were financed by public funds or collections starting in the later 1860s, when a Czech (national) middle-class majority took control of the city council (cf. LEDVINKA/PEŠEK 2000). Examples of these projects are the Czech National Theater, the Palacký Bridge, the Slavic pantheon Slavín, the Municipal House, the monument to František Palacký, and the monument to Jan Hus. Although the Czech majority did not agree on how to push through demands for the equality and autonomy of the Czech language, nation and territory (the Bohemian Lands as a whole), it did agree that it was necessary to advocate them. Monuments referring to Hussite times and the time of Libuše communicated Slavic/Czech democracy and tolerance for both the Czech and German language and nation, which was the monolingual Czech political program of the nineteenth century, and gradually slavicized public areas in the center of the Bohemian Lands and excluded alternative (not only German, but also non-linguistic) ways of viewing Bohemian or Czech history. The German monuments in Prague were either not allowed (for example the monument to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart on the "German" Nostitz Theater) or they were destroyed after 1918 (for example the monument to Johann Joseph Wenzel Graf Radetzky on the Lesser Town Square or the Marian Column (cf. PACES 2004) on the Old Town Square). The Jewish Town was also largely destroyed during the reconstruction of Prague around 1900 and architectonically integrated into the whole of the city of Prague.

Prague's monuments can thus be understood as a continuum of intertextually active signs or – in the words of Jurij Lotman or Vladimír Macura – "texts" that recall language-based national themes and values and are also mentioned in or used as a background for public discourse that has the form of a diachronically changing system. This is particularly apparent in the iconography of Libuše in connection with the decoration, repertoire and staging of the Czech National Theater; it is also clear in the Palacký Bridge, the Czech/Slavic pantheon Slavín, the Municipal House, and in the proposed monument to Libuše on the Letná hill. This iconography of Libuše is complemented with Hussite iconography (see

further Palacký's conception of Czech history as the pursuit of democratic ideals, which he anchored in the time of Libuše and Hussitism). Hussite iconography appears in the same or other buildings and structures such as the monument to Jan Hus, the liberty monument (with the statue of Jan Žižka from Trocnov, planned in Kafka's time and later built on the Vítkov/Žižkov hill) or in connection with the founding of the town quarters of Žižkov and Bílá Hora. This diachronically changing system of signs can be seen also in the iconography of the monument to Saint Wenceslas on Wenceslas Square, which entered into a polemic with monuments referring to the Hussite tradition and semantically reloaded the statues of Saint Wenceslas on the Charles Bridge.

It is also necessary to consider the monument to Josef Jungmann, the Czech/Slavic pantheon Slavín, the Czech National Theater, Prague's bridges and the Municipal House together as "Czech" iconography's gradual takeover of public space. This iconography appeals to the values of democracy and tolerance that nineteenth-century Czech national ideology evoked by referring to Slavism (Slavic paganism of Libuše's time and Hussite Reformation) as a counter-weight to intolerance and bondage (Germanic feudalism and Habsburg Catholicism). As a result of demographic developments in the nineteenth century, national agitation, and the gradual domination of public space by Czech iconography, Prague itself became an icon of Slavism in the context of Czech culture, a complexly structured "monument" of Czechness.[3]

One should not view public discourse only as a polarization between Germanness and Czechness or Germanic and Slavic, as they were reflected in monuments in Prague and other cities in the Bohemian Lands. The view of Jewish intellectuals of the time is an important correction of the Czech/Slavic vs. German/Germanic national discourse presented in Prague monuments and in the monuments of Bohemian towns. In their texts these intellectuals, such as Franz Kafka, subverted the control of public urban space at the turn of the twentieth century by a national discourse, in which the Jewish community was not visibly reflected.

In my paper, I will attempt to show Franz Kafka's reading and narration of the "national discourses" of Prague. In this endeavor, I consider both his literary and nonliterary texts and place particular emphasis on his correspondence with friends. I hope to show that the Prague in Franz Kafka's texts is not a real place made of stones, streets, squares and hills, but rather a specific social and semiotic space. This space and the semiotics of Prague's monuments are one of the foundations of Kafka's writing. At the same time, I think that an important characteristic of

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3   The case is different in Brno, Czechoslovakia's second largest city, where Germans and Czechs tried to dominate public space by architectonic dominants (cf. Koryčánek 2003), but where Germans controlled the municipal authorities until 1918.

Franz Kafka's texts is that they rarely refer explicitly to Prague's topography (cf. also Čermák 2001), as for example in the cathedral scene in *The Trial* ("Der Proceß"). Kafka plays – as Malcolm Pasley phrases it – his "semi-private games", but he also tries to narrate his stories more generally, using examples, hyperboles and models for individual fates and social mechanisms. We may observe this shift away from the private and local atmosphere in the novel *The Castle* ("Das Schloss"). When Kafka revised the original manuscript he replaced the first-person narrator with a third-person narrator and he also replaced the simple vertical tombstones, which could be associated with the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague, with crucifixes. In my paper, I will attempt to show that Kafka transforms his local experiences in Prague, where Czech and German nationalists were fighting for their linguistically distinct spaces and monolingual ideologies, into a story about the confusion of tongues. In depicting how modern nationalism divides a particular city or country, Kafka shows how it divides society and humankind.

Kafka, however, repeatedly makes also explicit reference to Prague in his *non*-literary texts. This is hardly surprising, since Kafka was not only born in Prague but also grew up there. He studied in Prague, worked there for fifteen years and spent most of his relatively short life there. Kafka's thoughts never left Prague, even when he was living somewhere else. In Berlin, for example, he wrote the following sentence in December 1923 in a letter addressed to his sister Ottla and her husband Josef David:

> A Ottlo prosím vysvětli rodičům, že teď jen jednou nebo dvakrát týdně mohu psát, porto je už tak drahé jako *u nás*. Vám ale přikládám české známky, abych Vás také trochu podporoval (Kafka 1974: 151; curs. M.N.)

> And Ottla, please explain to our parents that I can only write once or twice a week; postage is already as expensive as it is at home. I am, however, enclosing Czech stamps for you to help you out a bit.

The Czech words "u nás" (at home, in our country) mean Prague, where Kafka had stayed in thought although he was living in Berlin at the time.

At this time, Prague was already the capitol of the newly founded Czechoslovakia. Prague became "Velká Praha" (Great Prague) in 1920 after a new legislation annexed all the Czech suburbs. The small German-speaking minority living in the Old Town in the center of this Central European metropolis became even smaller and more inconspicuous than it was before 1918 during the Habsburg monarchy. From Kafka's point of view, however, Prague is not as large as the Czech majority thinks. From the window of his parents' apartment located in Oppelt's house on the Old Town Square, he could survey the entire area in which he lived (parts of the Old Town and the remains of the Old Jewish Ghetto). After World War I, he outlines this space for his friend Friedrich Thieberger with a small movement of his index finger:

> Als wir einmal vom Fenster auf den Ringplatz hinunterschauten, sagte er, auf die Gebäude hinweisend: ,Hier war mein Gymnasium, dort in dem Gebäude, das herübersieht, die

Universität und ein Stückchen weiter links hin mein Büro. In diesem kleinen Kreis' – und mit seinem Finger zog er ein paar kleine Kreise – ‚ist mein ganzes Leben eingeschlossen.' (Thieberger 1995: 126).

Once when we stood at the window and looked down on the Old Town Square, he pointed to the buildings and said: 'My high school was here, the university there in the building you can see and a little further to the left my office.' He made a few small circles with his finger, 'my entire life is enclosed in this small circle.'

Even if he indicated such a small space with his finger, Kafka lived and moved in a larger area of Prague, and many other places, streets and districts appear in his correspondence and diaries or are remembered by his contemporaries. Kafka worked in the Workers' Insurance Agency for the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague on Na Poříčí street, attended the German New Theater in Vinohrady and the Czech National Theater on the bank of the Vltava, climbed up Petřín hill, crossed the Charles Bridge to the Prague Castle (Hradčany) or to the Kampa island. With his sisters he not only visited Troja, where he later worked in the garden, but also Letná and Podskalí, climbed up to Vyšehrad, went to the public swimming school on the bank of the Vltava, rowed on the Vltava river, was responsible for the family factory in Žižkov etc. (cf. Kafka 1990, 1999–2005; Binder 1979; Wagenbach 2004; Koch 1995; Čermák 2001 etc.). He was also familiar with Prague's surroundings, as we know from his postcards to his friends and family.

The story told by Thieberger shows, however, that these are not the places that Kafka understands as Prague. He points to and writes his Prague with a slight movement of his finger. The small movement of Kafka's finger that stresses the words "contained in the small circle" ("im kleinen Kreis eingeschlossen sein") is also Franz Kafka's reading and narrating of Prague. Kafka's gesture and words show the opposition between the small German and German-speaking Jewish minority in Prague's Old Town and the "Great Prague", in which the "ethnic Czechs" had the twenty to one majority in most districts and the Czech nationalistic middle classes controlled the city hall.

Friedrich Thieberger's story of Kafka's index finger may be particularly appealing because it shows that Franz Kafka ascribes his space a semantic relevance. It is perhaps too simplistic to believe that Kafka's Prague is a *specific* "small" space, or as Paul Eisner phrased it, a "triple" ghetto, which entraps Kafka. In fact, Kafka never lived in a real Jewish ghetto. The Prague ghetto ceased to exit legally 1848 and was largely demolished and rebuilt in the context of urban modernization around 1900. Kafka obtained a standard education, had a good job in the public sphere and participated in German and partially also in Czech culture. Rather, Kafka's real ghetto was the fear of pogroms, about which he read and which he and his friend Max Brod experienced in reduced form in Prague. I think that neither Prague nor the fear of violence ever left his thoughts – no matter where

he actually was, in Vienna, Munich, Flüelen, Paris or Berlin. Kafka could answer the question in the Prager Presse newspaper: Why did you leave Prague? ("Warum haben Sie Prag verlassen?") (cf. KROLOP 2005: 89–102): 'I never left Prague', which could be understood to mean, 'I never lost my fear of the pogroms'. He found this fear ("strach") for example in Berlin, where he hoped to lose it.[4]

The strong discursive polarization of Germans and Czechs along perceived linguistic-national lines, as well as anti-German sentiments, were a contributing factor to the pogroms in Prague just as the language question provoked the Badeni crisis. The Czech-German fight over language occupied both Franz Kafka's and Max Brod's thoughts. While Max Brod was in Switzerland in August 1911, he noted the following in his diary:

> Im Männerbad. Sehr überfüllt. Aufschriften in unregelmäßig vielen Sprachen. – Lösung der Sprachenfrage in der Schweiz. Man verwirrt alles, so daß sich die Chauvinisten selbst nicht auskennen. Bald ist das Deutsche links, bald rechts, bald mit Französisch oder Italienisch verbunden oder mit beiden oder selbst englisch, bald fehlt es. In Flüelen war das Verbieten der Geleise: deutsch-italienisch. Das Langsamfahren der Autos: deutsch-französisch. – Überhaupt die Schweiz als Schule der Staatsmänner! (Brod in KAFKA 1994/Rtg: 123)

> In the mens' bathhouse. Very crowded. There are signs in an unusually large number of languages – the Swiss solution to the question of language. Everything is made confusing so that even a chauvinist doesn't know what's going on. First he finds German to the left, then to the right, German in connection with French or Italian or both or even with English, and German sometimes is missing completely. In Flüelen, it was prohibited in German-Italian to go on the train tracks. The slow passing of cars was in German-French. – Switzerland is certainly a school for statesmen!

Franz Kafka makes a laconic remark on the same topic:

> Max: Verwirrung der Sprachen als Lösung nationaler Schwierigkeiten. Der Chauvinist kennt sich nicht mehr aus (KAFKA 1990b/I: 950).

> Max: Confusion of Tongues - the solution to national problems. The chauvinist doesn't know what is going on anymore.

Kafka considers the language situation in Switzerland and the German-French fight over language to be a form of the Confusion of Tongues at Babel. And one of the reason for this interpretation is Kafka's own experience with the fight over language between nationalist Germans and Czechs in Bohemia. In the Old Testament, the story of the Tower of Babel represents the fragmentation of a linguistic, cultural and territorial whole into individual languages, "lands" (spaces) and ways of life:

> Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. [2] As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

> [3] They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. [4] Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves

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4   Franz Kafka to Josef David, October 3, 1923 – Cf. KAFKA (1974: 135n.).

a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. 6 The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

8 So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel - because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11: 1–9).

The case of Bohemia was similar. Its territory was – or was perceived to be – divided into two exclusive (linguistic) worlds. Kafka returns to the motif of the Confusion of Tongues at Babel in September 1920 in his story the *City's Coat of Arms* ("Das Stadtwappen"). Some time earlier, in February, the Czechoslovak language law and constitution had added fuel to the fire of the "Babylonian" division of public life and linguistic-national blindness. The "Czechoslovak" language, either Czech or Slovak, became the official language of the new state. All other languages, especially German, were restricted in their use. The tender wound of language-based nationalism that had pained the Habsburg monarchy was suddenly torn open again.

It is not surprising, then, that Kafka viewed Prague as the Tower of Babel or vice versa:

[...] die zweite oder dritte Generation [erkannte] die Sinnlosigkeit des Himmelsturmbaues [...], doch war man schon viel zu sehr miteinander verbunden, um die Stadt zu verlassen. Alles was in dieser Stadt an Sagen und Liedern entstanden ist, ist erfüllt von der Sehnsucht nach einem prophezeiten Tag, an welchem die Stadt von einer Riesenfaust in fünf kurz aufeinander folgenden Schlägen zerschmettert werden wird. Deshalb hat auch die Stadt die Faust im Wappen (Kafka 1994/7: 147).

[...] the second or the third generation [recognized] that building a tower in order to storm heaven was futile [...], but the community was so closely knit, they didn't leave the city. All of the sagas and songs that arose in the city were full of longing for the prophesied day, when a huge fist would smite the city in five quick blows. This is also why the city has a fist in its coat of arms.

A huge gauntleted fist that can divide and destroy a city is in Prague's coat of arms. There are, it is true, some differences between Prague's coat of arms and Babel's coat of arms from the story. Prague's fist holds a sword, Babel's does not. The fist in Prague's coat of arms symbolizes defensive strength, the fist in Babel's coat of arms destruction (cf. also Zimmermann 1985: 64). These differences cannot however hide the intended parallelism. Consider for example a similar case: no one would ever maintain that in Kafka's story *The Stoker* ("Der Heizer"), the first chapter of the novel *The Man who Disappeared* ("Der Verschollene") also known as "Amerika"*,* the statue of the goddess of freedom ("Statue der Freiheitsgöttin")

holding a sword ("mit dem Schwert") is not an allusion to the Statue of Liberty in New York. The fact that the real statue is holding a burning torch does not detract from the parallelism.

Unlike the Bible, the languages in the story *The City's Coat of Arms* are made confusing and divided even before the Tower of Babel is built. Kafka mentions signposts ("Wegweiser") and translators ("Dolmetscher") for separate homeland associations ("Landsmannschaften"), as well as quarrels ("Streitigkeiten") and bloody fights ("blutige Kämpfe").[5] In other words, the new Babel is already divided. This is the next parallel to the divided, opposing Czech and German worlds in the Bohemian lands – especially in the capitol Prague, where the Czech and German societies existed next to each other, or more frequently fought against each other not only in the public discourse, controlled by the middle classes, but also fixed it in independent cultural and economic institutions and school systems.

Kafka had considered the true dimensions of the Tower of Babel's foundation three years earlier, in 1917, in his story *The Great Wall of China* ("Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer"). The foundation must be enormous due to the tower's height. The Tower of Babel was supposed to reach heaven, it is also the tower, from which heaven could be stormed. Kafka's word "Himmelsturmbau" could be read in two ways: Either as "Himmel-Sturm-Bau" or as "Himmels-Turm-Bau" (Kafka 1994/7: 143, 147; cf. also Zimmermann 1985: 62; Demetz 1997: 76–77). Kafka's own ivory tower, the Workers' Insurance Agency for the Kingdom of *Bohemia* in Prague reaching to the heaven of Bohemian government administration ("Statthalterei") and its "Bohemian" agenda, was supposed to be divided according to language into a German and Czech agency at this time (1917), to reinforce the stability of the entire state (cf. Nekula 2003a: 163–173), just as the Charles University (1882) and other institutions were divided some time earlier.

In Kafka's story *The Great Wall of China*, a scholar questions the reason for the Tower of Babel's destruction. He does not believe that the failure of the project was an act of providence, as it is presented in the Old Testament. He believes that the plan was doomed to fail due to the weakness of the foundation ("an der Schwäche des Fundamentes scheiterte und scheitern mußte"). He says:

> erst die große Mauer [d.h. die chinesische Mauer] (werde) zum erstenmal in der Menschenzeit ein sicheres Fundament für einen *neuen* Babelturm schaffen. Also zuerst die Mauer und dann den Turm (Kafka 1994/6: 69; curs. M.N.).

> it is the Great Wall of China that will serve as a stable foundation for a *new* Tower of Babel for the first time in the history of humankind. First the wall and then the tower.

In the context of the story, the narrator's doubts about the scholar's assertions are logical and understandable:

5   Kafka (1994/7: 143–144). For more about the differences between the Bible and Kafka cf. Zimmermann (1985: 61–62).

> Das Buch war damals in aller Hände, aber ich gestehe ein, daß ich noch heute nicht genau begreife, wie er sich diesen Turmbau dachte. Die Mauer, die doch nicht einmal einen Kreis, sondern nur eine Art Viertel und Halbkreise bildete, sollte das Fundament eines Turmes abgeben? (Kafka 1994/6: 69)

> Everybody had his hands on the [scholar's] book then, but I have to admit that even today I don't exactly understand how he envisioned building the tower. How could the wall that isn't even a circle, but rather a kind of quarter and half circles, serve as the tower's foundation?

How could the Great Wall serve as a foundation for the Tower of Babel in light of its shape?

When we read this story in the context of Czech-German linguistic-national division in Bohemia and consider that the "Great Wall" was a common metaphor for this division, the Great Wall appears to be a real, not a grotesque foundation for the *new* Tower of Babel:

> Stavěl-li kdo čínskou zeď, nebyli jsme to my. Pravda je, že někteří naši duchové, pozorujíce nebezpečí, které by mohlo vzniknouti pro českou kulturu z jednostranného takového vlivu kultury německé, hleděli čeliti tomuto nebezpečí přibližováním našeho národa kultuře románské a slovanské. [...] Nenávisti k německé kultuře u nás nebylo, byl zde jen instiktivní a zdravý pud sebezachování. Jakmile, obklíčeni sousedem mohutnějším a nepoměrně početnějším, poddali bychom se výhradně jeho vlivu, jeho kultuře, jeho duchu, jakmile bychom se stali česky mluvícími Němci, záhy by bylo veta po naší národní existenci vůbec. Styk, ano; podlehnutí, ne (Dyk 1914: 332; cf. also Krolop 2005).

> If anyone built the Great Wall, it wasn't us. It is true that some of our intellectual leaders led us to be closer to Roman and Slavic culture because they recognized the danger of the German mind's influence on Czech culture [...] But there was no hatred of German culture in our country, there was only a healthy instinct for survival. Our nation would already have ceased to exist and we would become Czech-speaking Germans, had we accepted the influence, the culture and the mind of our neighbor without reservation. We say yes to have contacts, but we say no to surrender.

This is the Czech writer Viktor Dyk's reply in *Lumír* to Franz Werfel's article *Glosse zu einer Wedekind-Feier*, published in April 18th 1913 in the newspaper *Prager Tagblatt*. Viktor Dyk was already well known to Brod and Kafka in 1910. Czechs and most Germans knew of Dyk's strong nationalism and his phrase "Vím, úkol náš je Čechy počeštiti anebo zahynout" [I know our task is to either make Bohemia Czech or to die] (cf. Podiven 1991: 364).

In this light, the idea of the Great Wall as the Tower of Babel's foundation appears logical, if we read the Great Wall as a metaphor for division along linguistic and national lines, as was usual in contemporary discourse. The linguistic boundary between German and Czech in Bohemia of this time can now be understood territorially and functionally as a great wall that both Czechs and Germans were intensively building. The division of nations will in fact follow according to language and its foundations. The story of the Confusion of Tongues at Babel, which leads

to the division of the world into different countries, also reflects this separation. In Bohemia this resulted – or better to say should result – in the division of the once homogenous Bohemian society into two isolated German and Czech societies. Although, in the Bible, this full division comes only after divine intervention, in Prague it was constructed by nationalists, who sought to define national territories by language and deny any form of transition. For example, a map drawn by Boháč in 1916 does not show linguistically mixed regions; continual transition is suppressed in favor of clear linguistic borders. Of course, there were no such clear borders in everyday linguistic practice, nor did they have any institutional or territorial reality. But they were, to various degrees, "under construction" in the individual and official spheres, and in different territories. In this light, we can understand one of the narrator's somewhat absurd assertions about the Great Wall of China: it was built in parts, separate sections that did not form a whole. And we can also understand why Kafka refused this Czech/Slavic-German polarization and the monolingual interpretation of the world and one's – or better to say Odradek's –identity in the story *Cares of a Family Man* ("Die Sorge des Hausvaters"), although the alternative Jewish identity seems for Kafka not without problems (cf. Nekula 2006), as we will see also later.

Against the metaphoric backdrop of the Great Wall, the division along linguistic lines – a linguistic border inside Bohemia – can be seen as large enough to serve as the foundation for a new "Tower of Babel", which means language-based national separatism. It is also large enough to serve as the foundation for the "new" tower to storm heaven ("Himmelsturmbau"), to destroy the "old" divine order, the Austrian empire, the Bohemian government and state. In all of these cases (Babel, "Great Austria" (cf. Kafka 1994/6: 64), Bohemia) we see the forced linguistic-national division of a once homogenous territorial whole. However, this division was already partially given in the historical foundations of the multilingual Austrian empire.[6]

If the metaphorical Great Wall of the inner linguistic border is the foundation on which the division, the Tower of Babel, is metaphorically built, then the whole Bohemian lands would be included in this Tower of Babel. The word "city"

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6   Kafka also connects his writing process with the motif of the Tower of Babel. He understands his writing as a construction of the Tower of Babel. He didn't, of course, conceive his texts as integrally constructed novels, which we know from the 19th century. His texts are horizontally scattered fragments, as is typical for modern texts (Rilke's "Die Aufzeichnung des Malte Laurids Brigge"). We also find such fragments in the the Tower of Babel's sprawling foundation, which is formed by the partially built Great Wall as mentioned in Kafka's text *The Great Wall of China*. Nor does the castle in Kafka's text *The Castle* appear in the unified form of a castle (with a tower); rather it is scattered throughout buildings in the village.

("Stadt") in Kafka's story *City's Coat of Arms* may thus be read as "state" ("Staat"). This is not only a pars-pro-toto figure (city for state), which is commonly associated with capital cities. Kafka also frequently applies this strategy of naming and reading to signal, for example, that the officials "Sordini" and "Sortini" in the novel *The Castle* can be understood as the same person. We saw this reading strategy also in the story *The Great Wall of China* with the words "Himmels-Turm-Bau" and "Himmel-Sturm-Bau".[7]

The metaphorical Great Wall, the division along linguistic and national lines, and Babylonian fragmentation divided the Bohemian Lands both territorially and functionally. It is irrelevant whether Kafka recalls the "city" ("Stadt") as the old Habsburg "state" ("Staat") or if he meant the new Czechoslovak "state" ("Staat"). The second interpretation seems to be more probable when one considers that the story was written in 1920 in the future tense. Czechoslovakia, just like the Habsburg state, will collapse as a result of its linguistically oriented nationalism. Its destruction "by a huge fist in five short blows" will also be anticipated by many Germans in Czechoslovakia with great "longing" ("Sehnsucht").[8] This longing after self-destruction may be unhealthy. But in a letter to Max Brod, Kafka connected his own states of anxiety with the motif of the Tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues when he mentioned his "inner Tower of Babel": „…in einem Stockwerk des [seines, M.N.] innern babylonischen Turmes…" (Brod/Kafka 1989/2: 159)[9]. Incidentally, Kafka considered this anxiety to be the real reason for his illness in 1917, which was accompanied by serious thoughts about suicide. After the crisis in his relationship with Milena Jesenská and in connection with the pogroms in 1918 and 1920, these states of anxiety culminated in a nervous breakdown.

The Prague that Kafka knew so well and considered a new Babel was "smashed" by the linguistic-national division of public life and space in his lifetime. It was not necessary to wait long for this fateful "blow". Both public life and public spaces in Prague gradually became a part of the linguistic-national discourse in the second half of the 19th century. The destruction and division of the whole of Bohemian society territorially and functionally along a supposed linguistic border was only more "visible" in ideologically loaded public space. Public space in Prague – squares, streets and hills – was defined by monuments loaded with language-based, indeed monolingual, ideology: a monument to Josef Jungmann and the Czech National Theater on Národní avenue, monuments of ur-slavic heroes on the Palacký Bridge, graves of Czech cultural leaders in the Slavic pantheon Slavín

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7   To the Czech-German double reading of the name "Klamm" in the novel *The Castle* cf. Zimmermann 2000 and of the name "Odradek" in the story *Cares of a Family Man* cf. Nekula 2002.

8   We can also naturally read it as a longing for the apocalypse, after which the new messianic world should arise (cf. Zimmermann 1985).

9   Cf. Franz Kafka to Max Brod, August 29, 1917.

on Vyšehrad hill, the monument to František Palacký on the bank of the Vltava river, the monument to Jan Hus on Old Town Square, the monument to Saint Wenceslas on Wenceslas Square etc. (cf. Nekula 2003b, 2004; Marek 1995, 2004; Hojda/Pokorný 1997; Prahl 1999). Some historic monuments were now read as national monuments, as in the case of the Charles Bridge, the Prague Castle and Vyšehrad. In the second part of the 19th century, public space in Bohemia was occupied by two contradictory projects of Czech (Slavic) and German nationalism. This ideological content of Prague's public spaces, which were now dominated by new or semantically reloaded historic monuments, is reflected also in the following sentences Kafka wrote in 1902:

> Prag läßt nicht los. Uns beide nicht. Dieses Mütterchen hat *Krallen*. Da muss man sich fügen oder –. An zwei Stellen müßten wir es anzünden, am Vyšehrad und am Hradschin, dann wäre es möglich, daß wir loskommen (Kafka 1958: 14; curs. M.N.).[10]

> Prague doesn't let go of us. Neither one of us. This mother has *claws*. We have to submit or –. We would have to set fire to it in two places, at Vyšehrad and at the Prague Castle, then we might get away.

We can recognize two elements in this quote. Prague appears as a mythic siren,[11] and Prague's Castle and Vyšehrad hill are placed in a semantic opposition. The "Czech" (Slavic) Vyšehrad can be seen as an opposition to the Prague Castle, which at this time was often a symbol for official (Habsburg, "German") authority.

Vyšehrad is a large hill in Prague over the Vltava river. Since the time of national rebirth in the 1820s it has been understood as a Slavic, Czech icon. In the *Green-Mountain Manuscript* ("Zelenohorský rukopis"), it was closely associated with Libuše, a female ancestor of the Přemyslid (Slavic/Czech) dynasty and of the Bohemian, Slavic/Czech state, who prophesied the coming fame ("sláva"!) of Slavic Prague. Both the first Přemyslid king Vratislav and some later Přemyslid princes reigned from Vyšehrad. As Kafka wrote in his letter to Oskar Pollak, the royal cathedral and crypt had been already renovated in the gothic, anti-baroque style and decorated with frescos with Slavic motifs. That is also why the Czech Slavín was built on Vyšehrad. The Slavín is the pantheon of famous Czech "martyrs", in which they meet the Slavic goddess Sláva (fame), similar to Walhalla near Regensburg where Germanic "heroes" meet.

This emphasis on Czech "martyrs" against German "heroes" is conscious and worthy of comment. The Czech writer Julius Zeyer – who was incidentally the first person buried in Slavín's crypt in 1901 – clearly expressed the myth of Czech national rebirth when he saw a parallel between the suffering after the battle of White Mountain in 1620 and the rebirth of the monolingual Czech nation in the

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10 Franz Kafka to Oskar Pollak, December 20th 1902.

11 See especially the word "claws" ("Krallen") in this letter and in the later written story *The Silence of the Sirens* ("Das Schweigen der Sirenen"). – Cf. also Reffet (2003).

19th century and the resurrection of Christ. The people buried in the crypt Slavín will be reborn too, but they won't live by and in Christ; rather they will live by and in their (Czech) language. The inscription on the crypt reads literally: „Ač zemřeli – ještě mluví" (Although they have died, they still *speak* [not "live", as Christians would say, M.N.]). Already in 1861, the tombstone of Václav Hanka was decorated at the same place with a similar inscription that reflects the same monolinguistic (Czech) ideology of rebirth: „Národy nehasnou, dokud jazyk žije" (Nations will not die as long as their language continues to live). Kafka knew the modern myth of Czech rebirth and the Czech pantheon Slavín quite well. This ideology confronted him not only at Slavín itself but also early at school in his Czech courses, in the German high school on the Old Town Square, as well as in other contexts. Franz Kafka also repeatedly visited the foyer of the Czech National Theater (cf. Nekula 2003a), where the wall paintings also depict the myth. After a glorious life depicted on the frescos, where a "heroic Czech martyr" defends the borders of "Czech" territory against foreign ("German") enemies, he comes to his final resting place (pantheon), which is called Žalov (a place of sorrow and pain). Kafka placed the Czech Slavín in the same category. In connection with the Czech pantheon on Vyšehrad, he recalled a grave stone statue called *Žal* (sorrow; pain) created by František Bílek (1872–1941) (cf. Brod/Kafka 1989: 401; Nekula 2003b).

We now come to the second part of the opposition, to the second place Kafka wanted to set on fire. Hradčany, the Castle District, is a large hill in Prague overlooking the Vltava river. The emperor from Vienna resided here during his visits in Prague. The Castle was therefore a symbol for official (Habsburg, "German") authority until 1918. Kafka, like other Germans living in Prague and most Czechs of the time, considered the Prague Castle (Hradčany) to be the emperor's castle ("císařský hrad")[12]. In similar fashion, the Czech National Theater, a symbol of a successful Czech national rebirth, must be understood with respect to its national iconography and political program (autonomy for Bohemia, equality for Germans and Czechs) as antipodal to the Prague Castle. The roof of the Czech National Theater could be read as an allusion to the roof of the Belvedere on the other side of the river bank near the Prague Castle. The Czech National Theater with its monolingual ideology thus stands in Prague space in a semantic opposition to the Prague Castle. An opposition intended by František Palacký and his son in law František Ladislav Rieger, who supported to place the theater on this place.

These two hills loaded with national, monolingual semantics, Vyšehrad with the Czech/Slavic pantheon Slavín on the right and Hradčany with the Prague (emperor's) Castle on the left bank of the Vltava, enclose the city of Prague, which Kafka sketched with a slight movement of his index finger as

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12 Cf. Franz Kafka to Růženka Hejná (Wettenglová), September 1917. – Cf. Kafka (2005) and Nekula (2003a, 2003b, 2006).

a small circle in which he feels trapped. Kafka, who also constructs an inter-textual connection between Prague (with "claws") and sirens (with "claws") in the story *The Silence of Sirens*, perceived Prague as a siren that he cannot escape. This mythic reading of Prague allows us to understand these two hills in Prague as Scylla and Charybdis, between which Odysseus has to navigate in the *Odyssey* when he was escaping from the mythic sirens.

Thus, as the myth of Scylla and Charybdis teaches us that escape is impos-sible. It is impossible to escape the siren Prague, who encircles the narrator and appears misleadingly pleasant but at the same time represents the fear of the violence and pogroms. It is just as impossible to escape from Scylla and Charybdis as from the German and Czech battle over language with its monolingual ideology that dominated public discourse, institutions and space in Bohemia and Prague. The only way out is an act of desperation: to set fire to Prague as Kafka proposed in the letter to Oskar Pollak. Without Odysseus's tricks, the only other alternative is to sink into the body of water between Scylla and Charybdis. Kafka describes this submersion into water in the story *The Judgement* ("Das Urteil", 1912/1917), which I will return to later.

But we can already see, Kafka not only reflects, but also decidedly rejects the national polarization along linguistic lines, the German-Czech fight for language and national annexation of public space. In a letter to Max Brod, Kafka evaluates a monument with a very strong nationalistic program. His rejection of it is motivated not by the monument's subject but by its lack of aesthetic value, which is replaced by a nationalistic program:

> Wenn es möglich wäre diese Schande und mutwillig-sinnlose Verarmung Prags und Böhmens zu beseitigen, daß mittelmäßige Arbeiten wie der Hus von Šaloun oder miserab-le wie der Palacký von Sucharda ehrenvoll aufgestellt werden [...] (Brod/Kafka 1989/2: 395).[13]

> If it were only possible to eliminate the willful and deliberately senseless impoverishment of Prague and Bohemia, where mediocre works such as Šaloun's monument to Hus or Sucharda's monument to Palacký are honorably erected […].

The monument to František Palacký and the Palacký Bridge were, by their topic, placement and iconography, not only a reflection and expression of Czech na-tional ideology, but also public places where monolingual national agitation could be staged and motivated. Palacký was a nineteenth-century Czech historian and leader at the Czech national movement; the monument to him was erected in 1912 during the 6th meeting of the patriotic Sokol gymnastics movement in Prague.[14]

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13 Franz Kafka to Max Brod, July 30, 1922.

14 In his public inaugural address on the monument to Palacký, Karel Kramář, a very im-portant Czech politician of the 19th and 20th century, called for equality of Czechs and Germans in Bohemia and for legal autonomy of Bohemia. Cf. also Hojda/Pokorný

The Palacký Bridge was built from stone in the Czechoslovak colors of protest (white-red-blue), named after Palacký and adorned with statues of ur-slavic "heroes". Early Slavic (Czech) history and the present are thus connected. On one of the Palacký Bridge's bridgeheads stands a statue of the mythical Libuše and Přemysl, on the other, a monument to František Palacký. In discussing the *Green-Mountain Manuscript*, Palacký described Libuše's time as one of autonomous and democratic Slavic paganism that preceded the arrival of western Christianity from Germanic Bavaria and Saxony. He projected the values of cultural and political autonomy and democratic equality into Libuše's era, as well as into the era of Hussitism and Reformation. According to Palacký these values define the course of Czech history and thus lay out the political program for contemporary Czech politics (from Libuše's era through the era of Hussitism to the national rebirth and present time). So Palacký's name became in this special and simplified sense a program for Czech national politics based on a monolingual national ideology and territorial claims ("Čechy Čechům", the Bohemian/Czech Lands for Czechs, cf. also frescos in the National Theater).

The Palacký Bridge, the second Stone Bridge in Prague after the Charles Bridge, became engaged in a polemical dialogue with the Charles Bridge by way of its iconography. The statues on the Charles Bridge and consequently the bridge as a whole were read in this time as an icon for recatholicization after the Battle of White Mountain (1620), for domination by the Catholic Habsburg dynasty (or foreign government), for the empire (Reich) and for German culture. This is why Germans could identify with this bridge and why it was unacceptable for 19th century Czech national ideology (František Palacký, Jaroslav Goll, Tomáš G. Masaryk).[15] This ideology built on an anti-Catholic, protestant (democratic) understanding of a "national rebirth" that had overcome the nation's "death" (period of darkness) after the Battle of White Mountain and the subsequent recatholicization and Germanization.

Similar to Vyšehrad and Hradčany, the bridges display opposing iconographies. Franz Kafka must have been aware of this on his walks through Prague. Like other Germans and other German-speaking Jews, he (cf. ENGEL 1995) began his walks at the Charles Bridge, crossed over to the dominantly German Lesser Town with its monument to the Austrian marshal Radetzky (which was torn down after 1918), and walked up to the Prague Castle. By contrast, Czechs from the

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(1997: 102). "Sokol" is a sports club. In the 19th century it was a large organization for nationalistic Czechs with some cultural goals (books, papers, readings...). At least in the 19th century it also had a clear paramilitary character.

15 Cf. NEKULA (2004). "German" professors commissioned a statue for the Emperor Charles IV on the bridgehead of the Charles Bridge in 1848 and thus gave Charles IV a role in the national discourse of the 19th century.

New Town or the dominantly Czech suburbs of Nusle or Podskalí would go for walks to Vyšehrad, and if they went there from the Czech district of Smíchov, they would cross the Palacký Bridge.

In this context, the bridge motif ending Kafka's story *The Judgement* deserves particular attention. Kafka wrote this story in September 1912, only two months after the monument to Palacký was placed at the head of Palacký Bridge. At roughly the same time, Kafka wrote his skeptical reflections on the battle over language in Bohemia (census 1910, diaries 1911). It was also briefly after his Jewish rebirth (1911/1912). Kafka's story, which contains a number of biographical references, should therefore not only be read as a polemic with his father's program of assimilation, but due to the bridge motif also as a polemic with German and Czech linguistic-national self-portrayals.

Hartmut Binder identified the bridge in the story *The Judgement* as the Svatopluk Čech Bridge, which was built between 1905 and 1908 (cf. Binder 1979). For Kafka's contemporaries this bridge symbolized an opening to the rebuilt Jewish ghetto, a connection to the banks of modernity. Kafka, however, associates this bridge with failure and suicide. While the statues on the Charles and Palacký Bridge embody opposing fossilized national programs, which German and Czech nationalist students 'loudly' defended in street fights and were ostentatiously presented in the iconography of the bridges, the fleeting shadow of a suicidal person quietly darts over the "Jewish" bridge of *The Judgment*. In almost "never-ending traffic", he falls "quietly" from the bridge railing into the river (cf. Kafka 1994/1: 52). In contrast to his father, Kafka was aware of the irreconcilability of national ideologies (expressed for example by the bridges), aware of the impossibility of unconditional unilateral loyalty and complete assimilation in the Czech or German world as well as of the unacceptability of his father's assimilatory concept. Nor did he see the alternative, contradictory plan of Zionism as a solution. In view of intensity of the the national conflict, Kafka and other Jews suffered from a feeling of hopelessness and inevitable failure.[16] The Jews were sinking between the Scylla and Charybdis of German and Czech nationalism.

After a wave of anti-Semitic pogroms, which periodically swept Prague between 1918 and 1920, Kafka expresses the dismal prospects for a Jewish existence between two hostile nations in a letter to Milena Jesenská:

> Die ganzen Nachmittage bin ich jetzt auf den Gassen und bade im Judenhaß. ‚Prašivé plemeno' habe ich jetzt einmal die Juden nennen hören (KAFKA 1998: 288).

> I spend all my afternoons in the streets and bathe in the hatred of Jews. I have now heard Jews called a 'dirty breed'.

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16 Georg Bendemann's plan failed in a way similar to the plan of his former friend, who was not even able to become a part of the "Colony of his countrymen", that is the Jews. (Cf. Kafka 1994/1: 39).

Kafka knew the topography and the iconography of Prague's bridges exceptionally well. In May 1920 he writes in a letter to Milena Jesenská:

> Vor einigen Jahren war ich viel im Seelentränker (maňas) auf der Moldau, ich ruderte hinauf und fuhr dann ganz ausgestreckt mit der Strömung hinunter, unter den Brücken durch (KAFKA 1998: 21).

> A few years ago I often spent time in a small boat (maňas) on the Vltava, I rowed upstream and then floated back with the current, completely stretched out, and passed under the bridges.

When he sees the bridges from underneath, he sees them not only from the under side, but he also sees the other side of the ideologies that hide behind iconography. The Jewish prohibition of pictures is combined here with the knowledge of the ideological content of Prague's historic and new monuments.

Kafka was quite aware of the ideological functions and the effects of national iconographies in public space. In the 19th century, these iconographies made prominent use of monuments. He wrote:

> Zwei Knaben saßen auf der Quaimauer und spielten Würfel. Ein Mann las eine Zeitung auf den Stufen eines Denkmals im Schatten des säbelschwingenden Helden. Ein Mädchen am Brunnen füllte Wasser in ihre Bütte. Ein Obstverkäufer lag neben seiner Ware und blickte auf den See hinaus. [...] Ein alter Mann in Cylinderhut mit Trauerband kam eine der schmalen stark abfallenden Gäßchen, die zum Hafen führten herab. Er blickte aufmerksam umher, alles bekümmerte ihn, der Anblick von Unrat in einem Winkel ließ ihn das Gesicht verzerren, auf den Stufen des Denkmals lagen Obstschalen, er schob sie im Vorübergehn mit seinem Stock hinunter (KAFKA 1994/6: 40–41).

> Two young boys sat on the quay wall and played dice. A man read a newspaper on the steps of a monument, in the shade of a saber-wielding hero. A girl filled her tub with water at the well. A fruit seller laid next to his goods and looked out to the lake. […] An old man wearing a top hat with a black band walked down one of the narrow, steep lanes that led to the harbor. He looked around observantly, everything troubled him: some filth in a corner caused him to make a face, there were fruit peels on the monument's steps. As he walked by, he shoved them off with his cane.

The monument is an unmarked, semantically "dead" and empty part of everyday life: two boys play around a monument, fruit peels lie on its steps. But at the same time, the ideological semantics of the monument are potentially present and can be – and were in Prague reality repeatedly – recalled by newspaper which a man in Kafka's story reads "on the steps a monument" "in the shade of a hero". The dead monument threatens to wake up; its hero seems to move and to wield his saber. Kafka experienced this "saber-wielding" quite directly. In 1915, the monument to Jan Hus was erected demonstratively in front of the Marian Column on the Old Town Square. Everyday Franz Kafka was confronted with this monument (cf. also F. Kafka to M. Brod, July 30, 1922), which was charged with Czech national ideology, because it was erected in front of his father's shop. In November 1918,

the Marian Column was demolished by a mob. It had been erected after the Thirty Years' War as a token of gratitude for the defense of Prague against the Protestant Swedes in 1648. In the 19th century, it became a symbol of the Habsburg victory and of the "Czech downfall" and the time of darkness after the Battle of White Mountain. It was therefore destroyed soon after Czechoslovakia was founded. The foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic and this "Column incident" were followed by anti-German pogroms against Jews.

The small circle that Kafka traced with his index finger and in which the fear of pogroms entrapped him could not be recognized explicitly in his texts. The space that Kafka draws in his "Prague texts" is not a circle, not an icon of both an enclosed ghetto and a homogenous familiar place or refuge. Instead of a circle, Kafka draws a space (or city) that has been divided and destroyed: Babel, destined to be smitten; the Scylla and Charybdis of Hradčany (Prague Castle) and Vyšehrad; the Charles and Palacký Bridge, between which the wide rift is expanding. Kafka sees a fault line caused by Czech-German militant language-based nationalism in this "smashed", destroyed, divided city, where he spent his life. The fault was beginning to open in the 20th century and would swallow the Jewish community in Prague, Bohemia and other countries. Kafka knows that this fault is opening not only in Bohemia and not only for Jews. So, he translated the special Czech-German division, which operated with national language-based myths, in a more common Greek mythology to show the mythological character of the nationalism and the universality of the division through militant nationalism. His stories are thus both: universal and Praguian.

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