Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have come here today to address you in the hopes of ‘stirring things up’—and not merely stirring up more interest in my own translation of a selection of Kafka’s stories, but even more importantly stirring up a greater concern for the underlying issues regarding translation and what this may mean for the humanities taken as a whole, i.e. not just literature as a field separate unto itself, but also including history, philosophy—and even ethics and jurisprudence. But, all the same, I will do my best to keep things short.¹

Translating an author such as Franz Kafka is, I believe, a very different thing than translating, say, scientific treatises or your typical translation work. Kafka’s writings are Kafka’s struggles with himself and with his times. Thus, as he is the—or at least one of the—first truly great writer(s) of ‘the modern age,’ the burden and importance of finding the right voice is for the translator no minor issue. It is my contention that the majority of translators have fallen into the trap of not appreciating this distinction sufficiently and, thus, although they may have written translations that are generally accurate, still they don’t ‘deliver Kafka’ anything like he comes through in German. And this, then, is simply accepted: serious students of Kafka recognize that to know Kafka one has to read him in German. The voice that Kafka uses in German, his style if you will, is simply taken over wholesale into the English as if it would work just the same in an entirely different place and time.

Kafka, too, had this tendency to “stir things up.” He didn’t shy away from using language in a revolutionary way which is apparent even on a grammatical level if one takes a close look at his description of the boss’ aide who is there at the station waiting for the five AM train and who is described as an “It-creature” near the beginning of Metamorphosis²: (quote endnoted #2)
That Kafka uses the neuter pronoun “Es” to refer to this aide who—per correct German—should be the masculine pronoun “Er,” I myself only realized how revolutionary this was when I showed the passage to a German friend and he told me that this JUST COULD NOT BE ALLOWED! All the same, there it stands: black on white on the page for all to see. Of course in general Kafka’s German is exceedingly well written. Like all of you I have always loved reading Kafka. In my case this really began in a serious way when I was lucky enough to be spending a year abroad as an undergraduate student at the University of Freiburg. Reading Kafka’s short stories was ever so much easier and more enjoyable than reading Kant or Heidigger. It was a source of happiness that I could ‘curl up in bed’ with Kafka’s short stories and, although I didn’t understand them nearly so well back then, all the same they were riveting: Kafka’s prose on the one hand is generally very simple, and yet at the same time it also must be described as elegant. One would like to make the English flow just as naturally and elegantly as the German—but this is no easy thing to do. I don’t recall having consciously thought about this but I believe that this aspect was ingrained in me: I disdained translating German into an English that neither sounded right nor flowed properly. To accomplish such a task it was necessary to remold the words, I was compelled to take liberties that may offend those of you who believe that the translator should, as it were: remain invisible and adhere closely to “the text.” For instance, whereas Kafka never uses italics and almost never uses any foreign words, I found myself doing both: practically every page of my translation has at least one word italicized and in the story—In the Penal Colony—I even went so far as to italicize an entire paragraph. This is the paragraph where the officer is screaming into the traveler’s ear as the torture machine has been set into motion and there is a terrible grating noise from a misaligned gear. I might note in passing how terribly torture grates against our modern sensibilities, that we all need to scream out as occasion warrants—and I felt that I needed the italics for my 2009 version. I think that Kafka did just as well without them, back then the ‘readership’ had more sensitivity to Kafka’s understated text, we Americans seem to require a “style” that is a bit more heavy-handed: we’re distracted all too easily due to the frantic pace of our modern lives.
And so my first transgression—if we shall call it that—is this major revamp of “style,” my finding the appropriate voice that fits well into English, as well as into the 21st century.

Another area where I think that I may contend that my translation differs in a major way from ‘the norm’ is this. I believe that it’s fair to say that most translations are done by academics, people who are recognized in their field as “knowing the material”—whereas in my case I find myself translating both Plato and Kafka because I want to know the material. That is I translate just as much for myself, to enhance my own understanding, as for everyone else: I am quite passionate about discovering just what it is that’s really behind these odd stories. The original title for this address was: “The Personal as the Key to Ontology.” Thus, the position which I’d like to defend is that “truth” exists primarily in the subjective world, or—to state this better: text always exists within the context of consciousness. Consciousness is something that—as the Greek scholars say: “likes to hide.” It is practically invisible and even speaking about it is somewhat of a challenge, it is very much like—to take an allusion from Kafka’s A Report to the Academy—jumping out of one’s own skin. And yet, to a certain extent this is precisely what a good translator has to do: He (or she) has to be in two different ‘places’ practically at the same time. In the particular case that we’re now considering: in Kafka’s Prague circa 1918 and in Philadelphia circa 2010. I take what Kafka was experiencing during this difficult time as being especially relevant for my understanding myself and my time: I take it very personally and think that it deserves our most earnest attention. When translating what I strive to do is to breathe in the German, and then that I make my attempt at exhaling English text that feels right, that expresses what Kafka was saying and that also “fits” our times.

Language is the Key to consciousness—and since I’m here addressing the Modern Language Association I take especial pleasure in reminding everyone of its essential relevance: that there is absolutely nothing that is more relevant for our species, homo sapiens—nothing more relevant than ‘being what we are’ and what we are we are in terms of consciousness: text and context are circular, each existing within the other. Mankind exists within this dynamic, right alongside of the physical evolution of our species we need to pay more attention to the evolution of consciousness: tell me “how” a person
thinks and I’ll tell you what kind of a person he or she is—or, as the hound expressed this same thought in *Investigations*: “this is how they thought, and so, that is how they got lost, so irretrievably lost.”

I have no qualms in admitting that my translation of Kafka is an *appropriation* of his short stories and this, if you will, may be labeled my second transgression: that for me translation is a re-birthing or a re-creation of the text within the context of our modern world. Now, it’s very nice that this English word, “appropriation,” is very close to the German “*Aufheben.*” I am not the first to remark that this word seems to mean two contradictory things: to destroy as well as to preserve. Thus, in appropriating Kafka’s stories appropriately I don’t mind destroying a great deal of the surface appearance so that I might better preserve the spirit that is behind the work, that which—for me at least—peeks out, as I’ve said, in-between the lines. There is, of course, a great danger here: that what I consider to be hidden there in-between the lines may not be in accord with what somebody else finds hidden. It is my contention that you can’t simply avoid this danger by “sticking close” to the German. Doing so simply ignores the whole problem of consciousness and delivers a text that may well please the scholars, but it is bound to mystify the English readership, those people who *don’t* know Kafka in German—and, beyond this, it doesn’t read so well, it has become ‘flattened out,’ it has lost its sheen.

Of course, everyone is somewhat mystified by Kafka anyway, but the Germans can overcome this mystification much more readily than we can—*unless* it should be the case that the translator actually has been correct in his reading: in his own interpretation or appropriation, if you will. Thus my so-called transgressions are both formal, as regards style, and substantive, as regards content. However, it is quite important to realize that what I’m talking about now happens with only a very small percentage of the total words—probably less than 2%—but that it is just this “spicing,” as it were, that can make all the difference: what would our holiday turkey’s stuffing taste like without the proper amounts of sage and thyme? Moreover and most importantly: “style and content” *only* exist within consciousness!

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Some examples are now in order. Naturally, it is quite impossible to do justice to the issues that I have raised above in the brief time that has been allotted to me. I can only throw out some particularly problematic words or phrases and then it becomes the responsibility of you academics to delve into the *minutae*. Indeed, as regards this delving into the *minutae*, to be perfectly honest with you: I find the whole exercise as being rather distasteful since it is *all too easy* to argue about “this word” or “that phrase”—and for me all of the words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, stories and, indeed, the entire book has to be taken as a whole. All the same, it is still incumbent upon me that I venture into this analysis and so with the *proviso* that what follows is just a few “for instances”—here goes:

In Kafka’s breakthrough story, *The Judgment*, it is a critical point made by “the father” that he is “*herrlich verbunden*” with “the friend.” Already with just these six words it should be apparent how tricky languages are. German very much allows such distancing, that you may very well say: “the father.” In English one would never refer to one’s father as “the father.” And so, it seems unavoidable: either one writes in an English that is perverted, or one loses this natural distancing. There only remains the one other possibility: one does one’s best at finding something that’s *somewhat* comparable, it won’t be “the same”⁶ and it may require a great deal of ingenuity. But rather than this separation, let’s turn to the more important conundrum, how is the translator to deal with this intimate connection: that *the father and the friend* are “*herrlich verbunden*”? I translate this by stretching it out, a technique that I employ frequently, translating it:

“I’m also in league with your friend, a holy alliance...” ⁷️

The “*Herr*” (in *herrlich*) is such a simple, commonly occurring word—and yet there are numerous connotations in German that tax the translator’s ingenuity to the utmost. The adjective “*herrlich*” can be rechristened in German to become yet another noun, “*Herrlichkeit*,” a word that means splendor or magnificence—or it can become a verb, *verherrlicht*, a word that means glorified, ‘raised up.’ The closest parallel is our English word lord, but then the German is much more fluid: Mr., sir and lord are all possibilities, they all overlap in “*Herr*.” In Kafka’s last novel, *The Castle*, the hero K. finds himself
trying to get beyond the peasants in the village as he aspires to reach
the ‘Herren’ in the Castle. His greatest opportunity arrives as he
stumbles into Bürgel’s room in the Herrenhof, the lodging that is
used by ‘the elites’ or the ‘higher-ups’ when they happen to be
staying down below in the village. Bürgel tells K. that he is the
‘Verbindungs-sekretär’—the official who is most responsible for
connecting the village affairs to the ‘goings on’ up above. If you
translate this quite correctly as ‘liaison’ then you lose the overt
connection {Bund} that is so critical. For German readers all of these
relations are somewhat transparent; in English they have generally
been made obscure at the best, one easily loses the deeper level and
the whole chapter becomes merely a parody on bureaucracy; Bürgel's
angelic function tends to be more difficult to spot amidst his
seemingly inane ramblings, the English readers are more mystified
than enlightened. But it is all very nuanced. Equally important,
though not nearly so obvious as what I’ve labeled as being my
transgressions, is finding the properly nuanced words, to take just a
few examples that demonstrate this difference—the difference of
being merely “accurate” from being true in this hidden way (by
reading in-between the lines)—taken also from K.’s meeting with
Bürgel:

rather than “liaison,” “intermediate secretary” {p.176};
rather than “gentlemen,” “the elite” or “higher-ups” {pp. 173, 181, 177};
rather than “nighttime interrogations (or discussions),”
“nocturnal deliberations” {pp. 176, 179-181};
rather than “shallow,” “insipid” {p. 177};
rather than “disappointments,” “hard knocks” {pp. 178, 189}
rather than “How suicidal happiness can be,”
“How is it possible for happiness to commit such
self-sacrifice, indeed it’s suicide.” {p.189}

Perhaps these minor changes may seem to be nothing—and taken in
isolation each really is minor—but taken together and within the
entire context all of these little nuances do go a long way, and they
also go hand in hand with my so called transgressions. And then too,
simply by placing this critically important chapter from The Castle
right in-between Kafka’s late short stories, The Burrow and Investi-
gations of a Dog, I’m hoping that certain ‘thematic’ touches will be
made more apparent. The silence of the burrow is similar to the
silence of the passage leading to Bürgel’s room; the sleeping/dreaming/waking issues that are found in all of these stories also might clue one in to what’s hidden.

Indeed, we ‘moderns’ seem to be seeking out some place where we might sleep comfortably, we’re all so tired out by the demands of our fractured lives. Who even has the time anymore to discover that Kafka, like Plato, can often be read upon two levels simultaneously—and how is the lowly translator supposed to remain faithful to both levels without doing damage to either the higher or the lower? Man’s striving to get to “Erlanger,” to be awake in the fullest sense, that we might re-connect to the “hidden opportunities.” Bürgel puts it thus:

“there do occur instances that are pregnant with opportunity, opportunities that hardly have any connection at all to the world you know, seemingly coming from right out of the blue—it might simply be a word or a glance or even some sign of trust, through any of these more is capable of being attained than you might ever attain through your own initiative—even by all the hard work done in an entire life. I am certain of it, that’s just how it is.”  

{p. 178}

Or, as stated by the hound in Investigations:

“Now and again we hear a word that subtly winks at us, a hint of what once was possible...but dogs back then weren’t, and please excuse the expression, so doggone doggish, so confoundedly submissive as we are nowadays...”

{p. 218}

And so one easily ties Bürgel’s encouraging speech in The Castle to the dog’s woeful lament in Investigations—and both of these may be tied together with being “herrlich verbunden”: being close to our true home, our source and our goal, not the ‘otherness’ that runs rampant in our current lives.

And it is worth knowing that the “higher ups” can become concerned about our travails and that they would do everything possible to assist us if only we could attain the ‘state of being’ needed to connect. It was Plato who rather hilariously defined man as a “featherless biped” in his late dialogue, The Statesman. In Kafka’s Investigations of a Dog, the unnamed hero of the story discovers through fasting that
his limbs have become “plumed” [federt]—this is the closest that he’s been able to come to arriving at his goal... and he’s really not sure of much of anything having to do with his oddball investigations, into this seemingly hopeless pursuit of his: discovering just what it is that really nourishes dogdom—and discovering whither the earth obtains such “substance”—?

So, I was going to explore this little phrase “herrlich verbunden” and you can see how everything in translation can be connected to everything else. I hope that my jaunt into Kafka and Plato will be helpful to Americans and others who read Kafka and Plato in English, people who would like to fathom these great authors who, I believe, have depths that are hard to plummet. Of course, it is incumbent upon all of you to judge my more personal approach to ontology and translation: whether or not there may be something sensible in this platonic passion for “re-birthing”—a key term that Plato explores in one of his greatest dialogues: Theaetetus—the dialogue that explores “what knowing is.” Naturally, I make no apologies for my predilection for philosophy and I hope that Kafka will gain more students in my chosen field: he’s really so much more interesting than Kant and Heidigger, and also more pleasant to read though not necessarily much easier to understand in the fullest sense.

In closing I would like to voice my deep gratitude to my wife, Usha, for all of her patience; and also to Walter Sokel for all of his considerate help. None of us exist in a vacuum, we’re all dependent upon one another despite the alienation which Kafka managed to put his finger on most adroitly.

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1 In the interest of keeping within the time frame but still arguing my points sufficiently, I have placed a fair amount of background material in the endnotes below. Anyone who would like additional information is invited to peruse my website at:

http://home.earthlink.net/~ushaphil/

which also has links to my Kafka and Plato translations: www.authorhouse.com

2 << Und selbst wenn er den Zug einholte, ein Donnerwetter des Chefs war nicht zu vermeiden, denn der Geschäftsdiener hatte beim Fünfzehnzehntzug gewartet und die Meldung von seiner Versäumnis längst erstattet. Es war eine Kreatur des Chefs, ohne Rückgrat und Verstand. >>
“Now I already know everything I need” the traveler announced to the officer as the officer made his way back to him. “Except for the most important thing of all” he responded, and taking him by the arm he used his other hand to point up into the heights. “Up there in the inscriber is where all of the inner workings take place—it’s from there that the harrow’s motions are determined; and then the precise movements of the gears are programmed by the renderings of our former commander. Here they are,” and he pulled a few pages from out of his leather case—“but unfortunately I can’t ever let them be handled by anyone but myself. These are the most precious of documents that have been entrusted to me. Why don’t you have a seat and I’ll show them to you from here, you’ll be able to see everything perfectly well.” He then held up the top page. The traveler would have been more than happy to express some recognition of what was being shown to him but all that he saw was a labyrinth of lines that crisscrossed one another to such an extent that it was barely possible to make out a bit of white space in a few areas on the page. “Read it” said the officer. “I can’t” replied the traveler. “But it’s just as clear as day” the officer responded. “It’s certainly done very artistically,” said the traveler, attempting to avoid saying anything of substance—“but I can’t decipher it.” “Yes,” the officer replied and he chuckled to himself as he put the pages back into their leather case—“this isn’t the beautiful script that’s presented to first graders. You have to study it diligently over a longer period of time. I don’t have any doubts that you’d understand it too, eventually. It’s just not allowable that it would be a simpler sort of writing... after all, it’s not supposed to kill right off, rather on the average it takes somewhere around twelve hours, but then it’s during the sixth hour when the turning point becomes evident, it’s all been calculated. There have to be many layers of ornamental writing that surround the core, the essential letters making up this script. The actual writing encompasses just a small area around the midsection, all of the rest of the body is simply used for various ornate embellishments. Are you there yet?—do you admire the dignity of the work that the harrow and, indeed, the whole of this apparatus performs? Now watch this!” He sprung up upon the ladder, turned one of the gears and called down: “Heads up!—step back to the side”—and everything started up into motion. If it hadn’t been for the grating noise of the misaligned gear it would have been magnificent {herrlich}. As if the officer would still have been surprised by this noise he raised up his fist and shook it... but then by way of apology he spread his arms out toward the traveler and hurriedly made his way down so that he too might observe the motion of the contraption from ground level. But still, there was something else that wasn’t quite right, something that only he could notice—he climbed up the ladder once more, grabbed something within the innards of the inscriber with both of his hands and then finally, so that he might get down as expeditiously as possible, rather than using the ladder he made use of one of the brass poles to slide down—down he slid and so that he might be heard above the grating noise and greatly animated he screamed out right into the traveler’s ear: “Do you see what’s happening?—the harrow has begun its process of writing, once it has made its first pass over the back of the man so the cotton wadding rolls the man slowly over a little to the side so that another portion of his back becomes accessible... and at the same time the places where the script was inscribed come into contact with the wadding which, due to the especial preparation of the cotton the bleeding is curbed and the area is prepared for the next pass when the writing will go deeper still. And watch the edge of the harrow, these scrappers on the edge have the function of removing any cotton that might remain in the wounds, it automatically cleans itself, tossing all of the fragments right into the ditch. This all happens in concert so that the harrow is continuously given another spot
upon which it performs its work—the waltz of ever deepening chastening. And so it goes, the script is slowly inscribed ever and ever deeper over the course of twelve long hours. For the first six hours the prisoner lives pretty much as he did before, only he suffers from the pain of the needles. After two hours the felt stub is removed since the man hasn’t the strength left that he might cry out. Here at the topside of the bed there’s a specially heated bowl into which a warm porridge is placed, the prisoner is able to feed himself by extending his tongue, this is completely at his own discretion. There hasn’t been a single instance of anyone refusing his porridge—and I’ve seen scores of executions, they all scoop it right up—an example of the humane measures that typify our former commander. Only during the sixth hour does the prisoner lose all desire for food. Normally I kneel down here in the front to observe this phenomenon. Hardly anyone swallows their last bite, they simply turn it in their mouths once or twice and then spit it into the ditch. That’s when I have to be especially quick on my toes, otherwise it hits me right in the face. A deep stillness descends upon the man during this sixth hour—the turning point! Understanding never fails to dawn, and even upon the dumbest of people. It starts with his eyes and then broadens out over the entire face. It’s a spectacle that might well seduce you, enticing you to place yourself beneath the harrow. But there’s nothing else happening other than this dawning realization of what’s encoded in the writing, the prisoner puckers up his lips as if he would be listening as intently as possible. You saw the writing yourself, it’s not very easy to decipher even if you can examine it with your eyes, but our man is decoding it through his wounds. Indeed, it’s a great deal of work, it requires a full six hours before reaching its climax. At that point the harrow finally spears him right through and then ejects him into the ditch where he lands splat upon the bloody water and the mess of wadding. And then, that’s the end of the judicial proceedings; it only remains for the soldier and me to scrape up the mess and dispose it.”

The traveler had turned his ear toward the officer and was standing there with his hands in his pockets observing the contraption doing its work. The condemned man was watching too, only he lacked any understanding for what was happening.

4 The Latin means: ‘like wisdom,’ i.e. not wisdom, but headed that way...

5 Essential Kafka, [from: Investigations of a Dog or On Substance] pp: 215-219: We are those who suffer underneath the weight of silence, this silence that presses upon us from all sides. We’re gasping for breath, starving for substance—though others seem to get by just fine in their mute existence, indeed, this may only apparently be so just as it was with the musical hounds who seemed to be making music in all calmness but who, if you observed them closely enough, were actually quite excited, but then these seemings are strong, one would like to get the better of them but, alas, that’s much easier said than done. And so, how is it that my bed fellows go about taking care of themselves? What do they attempt to do so that their lives might be balanced out, that this pressure be relieved? Well, who knows?—it probably differs: every dog for himself. I’ve made my attempt via this path of questioning, at least during my youth and early manhood. Perhaps, then, I should take my cue from the great questioners, these would be my ‘brothers in spirit.’ And so despite my reluctance to look anywhere else other than within, I overcame myself and for a goodly while I turned myself to those who are most famed for their questioning. I had to overcome myself also because it wasn’t simply knowing all the questions, what I really wanted was answers! Those who can only ask questions, and particularly if they’re asking questions that I can’t answer, toward these I
found that I had a strong antipathy—arrgh, this only makes matters worse. And how many of the younger generation are there who don’t simply relish this diversion of asking unanswerable questions, how can one even figure out which questions from the plenitude of all possible questions are the ones that are right? One question sounds much the same as the next, it’s the intent that is hiding beneath the question that’s most important, and often enough the questioner doesn’t even himself know what this hidden agenda is. Taken in an absolute sense asking questions is certainly an essential part of our canine nature, and when everybody is asking questions which are cascading every which way all over the place, well it seems to me that this is just another devilish way of obscuring the traces of that questioner who is actually asking the right questions, the old needle in a haystack dilemma. No, beneath the young whipper snappers I’ll never be able to find my soul mate, and then beneath those who are past their prime and are being ruled by silence, to which group I myself now belong, how on earth am I supposed to find him here! So what’s the point of all this questioning, it hasn’t done me a bit of good, I’m more lost now than I ever was before and I’m no longer so fond of some ancient, pug-nosed rascal reminding me of just how little I know: “that at least now I might recognize just how little dogdom comprehends, how lost we are”—I’ve been overly conscious of this pretty much right from the start. What I’d like most of all is to be found! My soul mates, still assuming that I have some, are presumably far cleverer than me and they’ve discovered some other device, some means that’s superior and which makes life bearable, though indeed, if I might state my own opinion of all of this: perhaps such a device is helpful in really extreme cases, that it’s calming, soothing, allows one to sleep a little better and perhaps it transforms one’s sort {artverwandeln}, but all the same it’s generally just as incapable as everything that I’ve tried since despite having searched far and wide I haven’t found anyone who can truly claim success. I fear that success is the very last trait that I might expect to find in someone who is of my type. But then, where are they, where are my soul mates? Yes, that is my lament, that’s it precisely. Where are they? Everywhere and nowhere. Perhaps my neighbor who lives just around the corner, we’re often exchanging greetings and he sometimes comes over and pays me a visit, I never visit him. Is he someone of my sort? I really don’t know, I can’t say that I’ve recognized anything that would lead me to believe him to be my sort, but still it is possible. It may be possible but it’s difficult imagining anything that’s so unlikely; so long as he’s far away I’m quite able to play with my fancies and then there are many traits that seem to indicate a fair amount of kinship, but once he’s present and standing there right in front of me all of my discoveries suddenly appear ludicrous. An older hound, a bit smaller than me and I’m just approaching on being average, short brown hair, a tired head that tends to hang down, he also drags his feet and in particular his left hind leg, the result of some illness. I’m closer to him than I am to anyone else, it’s been quite some time since I’ve been social, I’m really glad that I still manage to suffer through putting up with him and whenever he wraps up his visits I always call out the friendliest things to him as he schlepps off, indeed it’s not due to love, rather this is a way I have of expressing anger toward myself, I feel nothing but disgust as I watch him go his way: eccch—how he creeps along with the one rear leg dragging behind and his posterior which is far too small. Sometimes it seems that I just want to make fun of myself when I go out of my way to call him my “soul mate”—for that’s how I address him in my thought. In our discussions there’s really nothing that he says that would indicate some tie of kinship; indeed he is one clever hound and in comparison to the local yokels his education is way above par, though that’s not really saying all that much... and it is true, there’s quite a bit that I might learn from him, but am I particularly concerned about cleverness and having a well-rounded education? I really don’t think so. Our
discussions generally pertain to local matters and it’s a continual source of amazement for me—indeed my reclusive lifestyle allows me to overlook a great deal—how much presence of mind is required even for just your average hound dog, how much insight one needs just to keep up with the pack and eke out a miserly existence these days, that one doesn’t become just another heap of road kill upon the highway of life. Naturally science and technology are replete with advice and instructions in their fat “How to” manuals... but to really immerse yourself in whatever field you just happen to choose, well, it’s no minor task just understanding the main tenets and getting a firm grasp of all of the fundamentals, and then once one has gotten this far along, that’s when matters start getting really hairy, namely that one applies one’s understanding to the local situation—your own particular time and place—and when it comes to doing this there’s just nowhere to turn to for help: almost every hour brings up another wrinkle in the fabric that you have to deal with, and it seems that each piece of real estate has innumerable wrinkles and all of them requiring some special attention. That anyone has settled in for the duration upon some plot of land and thinks that he’s got all of his ducks in a row, well this just doesn’t happen, not even me and I manage to make do on less and less with every passing day. And all of this never ending effort, to what purpose? Really, just so that one might hunker down ever the more in silence {zu vergraben in Schweigen}, that nobody shall ever be able to pull you out of your entrenchment. Now, we’re always hearing about the advancement of civilization throughout the ages and what seems to lie behind all of this bravado is the never-ending progress that’s being made in the sciences. Certainly, our scientific knowledge is always advancing onward, it is quite unstoppable, indeed it’s even advancing with ever greater speed, faster and faster!—but what’s there to be so proud about in this? It’s like someone being proud because with each passing day he’s getting closer and closer to death. That’s a very natural thing and besides this it’s something that strikes me as being odious, even harrowing. I don’t see anything that would give cause for celebration, I only see disintegration, collapse. And don’t misunderstand me, I’m not meaning to intend with this that earlier generations were essentially better than us, they were only younger. That was their big advantage, their faculty of thought {Gedächtnis} wasn’t so over-strained as ours is today, there weren’t so many words in the dictionary, it would have been an easier matter to get someone to talk and even if this never did happen, the possibility was greater. In fact it’s just this greater potential that we find so appealing when we listen to the ancient tales, tales that in all truth are rather naïve, this excites us, such simple-mindedness. Now and again we hear a word that subtly winks at us, a hint of what once was possible, and we’d like to jump up for joy if only it weren’t for the hard reality, the burden of generations the weight of which drags us down, pressing so heavily upon us. No, despite everything against which I’m so critically disposed in the current generation, the earlier generations were not any better than ours, indeed from a certain standpoint they were much worse and weaker. It’s not as if there were miracles being performed on all of the back roads and that anyone with the desire might go out and experience some wonder. But dogs back then weren’t, and please excuse the expression, so doggone doggish, so confoundedly submissive as we are nowadays; our society hadn’t so much rigidity, the word of truth could still take hold, give substance to our constructs, turn things around, assert itself differently depending upon the needs, it was even able to transform itself into its opposite—and the word was yet there, at least it was close-by, hovering upon the tip of the tongue, everybody could experience it and where, oh where has it gone to today?—today one might grasp ever so deeply into the entrails of our existence and still, still one comes out empty-handed. It may be true that our generation is lost and beyond all hope but all the same, we are more innocent, we haven’t sinned nearly as much in comparison

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with the earlier generations. The hesitation of my fellow hounds is something for which I have a great deal of understanding, it’s not even hesitation any more, it’s the forgetting of a dream that was dreamt eons ago and has already been forgotten for eons, who could possibly be upset at us that we can’t remember what our forefather’s forefathers—going back thousands upon thousands of nights—were not capable of remembering. But even this hesitation of our forefathers is something that I believe I can understand, we probably wouldn’t have done things any better, I’d almost like to say: *Thank goodness it wasn’t us;* we’re not the ones who are responsible for all of the guilt *{Schuld}* that we have to bear, rather it was them, the previous generations who were at fault for the black night in which we now find ourselves, rushing headlong in innocent voicelessness toward death, pervaded by this hush of our silent weeping. As our forefathers lost the way they were hardly likely to have been aware that their missteps would lead to an eternal state of being lost, they saw where the two roads crossed, indeed they saw it quite distinctly *{förmlich},* it would have been an easy thing to retrace their steps at any time that they might choose and if they hesitated to do so then it was only so that they might go along a bit further, they wanted to enjoy this new experience of living like dogs just awhile longer, it wasn’t even truly a dog’s life yet and still it appeared as such a beautiful existence, it was intoxicating, how much better might it yet become just around that bend, let’s press onward for a little while longer—*this is how they thought*—and so, that is *how* they got lost, so irretrievably lost. They didn’t realize what we are able to surmise when we look back over the course of history: that the soul is transformed more easily than the surface of life makes evident and that they, just as soon as they had begun to enjoy their lives as dogs, already back then their soul had become deeply attached to its hound dog existence, it was already an old dog’s soul and they weren’t really anywhere near to the point where they had strayed off course, their belief of this junction being nearby was an illusion and they wanted to wallow in this mirage as dogs get their joy in seeing everything in life from their own perspective.”

6 How could it be “the same”—my whole contention is that this searching after literalness is a chimera, a reflection of the limitations of our spirit. The letter to the Laodiceans in *Revelations,* I would maintain, describes this illness that runs rampant throughout our times. Naturally, *that* the seven churches in Asia could possibly relate to the stages of humanity’s evolutionary development, this certainly goes against the grain of our current *way of seeing.* On the other hand...

7 *Essential Kafka,* p. 18: “Stay where you are, I don’t need you! You’re thinking that your powers would suffice to approach me and that you’re just holding back for your own reasons. *If only* you weren’t fooling yourself all too much! I’m still the stronger of the two of us. Were I to be all alone then perhaps I’d be the one who would have to withdraw from the battle but mother still lends me her strength, and I’m also in league with your friend, a holy alliance *{herrlich verbunden}*-I’ve even gotten all of your correspondence right here in my pocket!”

“He’s even got pockets in his nightshirt!”—Georg exclaimed, and he thought that this subtle ridicule would turn the tables. His thought left him just as quickly as it had come, he couldn’t hold fast to anything, his memory was a sieve.