Narrating Public Space: Franz Kafka in Nationalized Prague

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Narrating Public Space: Franz Kafka in Nationalized Prague

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in German Studies from The College of William and Mary

By

Jordan D. Wyner

Accepted for **Highest Honors**
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

Robert Leventhal, Director

Sibel Zandi-Sayek

Michael Cronin

Williamsburg, VA
April 23, 2019
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Abstract

This thesis analyzes Franz Kafka’s representation of public space by situating his short fiction in the context of how Prague’s public spaces transformed around the fin-de-siècle. During the Czech National Revival, the Czech educated and semi-educated middle-class sought to transform Prague from a nationally undifferentiated space, shared by both Czech- and German-speakers, to one exclusively promoting a Czech national identity. The German middle-class responded by also publicly expressing its own national identity and values. Indeed, middle-class civic society in nineteenth century and early-twentieth century Prague brought changes to urban space to create distinct spaces oriented around the language and symbols of German or Czech nationalism. In these pieces, Kafka responds to a host of themes defining public life that I have separated into three distinct, yet related pairs: belonging/unbelonging to public spaces and community, possession/purification of public spaces, and power/humiliation of ethnic groups. All three were constantly at play and at stake as Prague eventually became a distinctly Czech capital. “An Old Manuscript” (“Ein Altes Blatt”) essentially concentrates on the relationship between public space and group identity formation and, as a result, evokes not only the nationalization of Prague’s public spaces, but also the mirror-culture developing in the city as Czech and German nationalists increasingly mimicked each other in public life. “An Imperial Message” (“Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft”) and “The Burrow” (“Der Bau”) scrutinize the privileged position that German culture and identity held in the Austro-Hungarian Empire through the lens of imperial and nationalized spaces. Lastly, I will offer a reading of “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk” (“Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse”) as a narrative whose principle concern is the way nineteenth and twentieth century mass politics re-defined Prague’s public spaces.
Acknowledgements

I suppose it is best to start at the beginning. I am first of all indebted to Courtney Federle, who during my senior year of high school, gave me my first real introduction to the peculiar, haunting, and darkly funny writings of Franz Kafka. He assigned Kafka in his English course on global short fiction in order to, and I’m paraphrasing, “give the students a jolt.” That “jolt,” at least for me, has lasted approximately 4.5 years.

My immense gratitude is due to Robert Leventhal. When I enrolled in Prof. Leventhal’s upper-class seminar on Franz Kafka as a freshman, I frankly did not know what I was getting myself into. It was, however, one of the most rewarding experiences of my academic life. Prof. Leventhal’s gripping, contextualized, and thorough interpretations of Kafka’s novels and short fiction showed me a way to approach literature that was foundational for my passion for and commitment to learning not only about German-Jewish writers and thinkers, but also the multifarious meanings entangled in a work of textual or visual art. The class would nonetheless not have had the impact it did if it were not for the environment which Prof. Leventhal cultivated, in which students were encouraged to be inquisitive, challenge his readings, and assert their own insights. It was a difficult, yet greatly inspirational time for a first-year student. Over the years, Prof. Leventhal’s patience and generosity towards me (and all of his students for that matter), be it when he has fielded question after question, explained and re-explained nuanced concepts, fine-tuned my analysis, etc. has become a model in my mind of what a great educator is. I cannot thank him enough for teaching me the finer points of style, encouraging me to fully elaborate and clarify my ideas, and pushing me to stick to the level of the text and defend my interpretations.

I would be remiss if I did not express my profound thanks to Prof. Sibel Zandi-Sayek. I am lucky to have learned about the meaning and role of architecture from her. Her teaching on architectural histories and cultures radically changed my approach to the spaces of everyday life as well as cultural venues. Disabusing me of the impulse to take spaces for granted, she fostered in me a commitment to understanding how and why everyday spaces take the shape they do, what interests guide their creation, and how people can interact with spaces to negotiate their meaning. Personally, we have shared many long conversations in which her questions, advice, and reading recommendations – her knowledge of various historical discourses and their authors is quite astounding – have made my research projects better and have led me to achieve more insight than I would have without her.

This thesis would not have been possible without the various financial, emotional, and intellectual support of many individuals and organizations, including the Roy R. Charles Center, the Department of German Studies, my parents, Ammon Frederick-Harteis, Eric Asplund, Varvara Troitski, Adam Wyner and Sam Chertoff, Jake and Dani White, Sergio Ferrarese, and Charles Palermo, among others. Without their contributions, I would never have been able to return to the real spaces and places inhabited by Kafka, which proved invaluable for the development of my ideas. Kathleen Harris additionally deserves my gratitude. I am lucky to have enjoyed her companionship, conversational zest as well as the endless hours she has spent hearing about, refining, and helping me to realize my future aspirations.
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Introduction

Prague’s public spaces infiltrated the dreams of a young Franz Kafka. A diary entry from 1911 laid down this particular dream from the 7th or 8th of November: the monuments characterizing the Old Town Square (*Altstädtter Ring*), the historic center of Prague, are assembled (figure 2) in the forecourt of a small Emperor’s Palace. Kafka erects the imagined palace before the Church of Our Lady before Tyn (*Theinkirche*), which in reality lay on the east side of the square (figure 3). Some monuments Kafka had encountered firsthand, such as the Marian Column (*Mariensäule*) and the Dolphin Fountain (*Delphinbrunnen*) (figure 4). Others he had never seen, specifically the Krocín Fountain (*Krocín-Brunnen*) which had been removed in the 1860s, while others he would live to see. There are only premonitions of the controversial Jan Hus Memorial, represented in the dream by a plank fence surrounding its foundation. The author further reports finding himself a participant in a boisterous crowd from the mouth of *Niklassstraße* at the north side of the square to the *Kinsky-Palais*, the home of his Gymnasium situated next to the *Theinkirche* (figure 5). “Through sharp twists and slow fluctuations,” Kafka observes the Little Ring (*Kleiner Ring*) decorated with house façades, connected to the Old Town Square through a plaza-like extension from the Old Town City Hall (*Altstädtter Rathaus*) (figure 6). Before he began constructing public spaces in his literature, the imagined space of his dream was determined by the urban structures of daily life in Prague, prohibiting the free play of fantasy. Although he slightly re-arranged the forms from their actual placement, his subconscious internalized the historical architecture as given. The dream moreover betrays the penetration of a feature increasingly defining the way public spaces were used in his lifetime and one largely outside of his control, that is, the presence of the boisterous crowd. Kafka was indeed a son of the era of mass politics.
I relay this diary entry to demonstrate that Kafka was not only aware of, but also concerned with the interactions between people, place, and practice defining the spatial politics of fin-de-siècle Prague. It displays his attentiveness to both the historic forms of the city in addition to the ways they changed as a result of the rising nationalist mass politics. The Theinkirche, Mariensäule, Delphinbrunnen, Kleiner Ring, and Altstädtter Rathaus had long been staples of Prague’s built environment; the riotous masses dominating the square and the memorial to Jan Hus (figure 7), a key figure in the Bohemian Reformation revered by Czech nationalists, are two potent symbols of the nationalization of Prague’s public spaces.

Since the 1848 uprisings in the Habsburg lands, ethno- and linguo-nationalisms increasingly functioned as a popular form of expressing dissent from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while strengthening the varied, emerging ethnic identities of the imperial population. In Bohemia, this transnational movement drove the Czech National Revival, in which the Czech educated and semi-educated middle-class sought to transform Prague from a nationally undifferentiated space, shared by both Czech- and German-speakers, to one exclusively promoting a Czech national identity.1 Through various associations and by monopolizing power in the municipal government, Czech nationalists embraced a program of erecting statues and buildings whose iconography projected the national discourse visually in the image of the city.2 This nationalizing project exerted tremendous influence on urban infrastructure and design, as well as more mundane aspects of public spaces, including the erasure of German-language street signs in 1892.3 Accompanying changes to the built environment were transformations of how

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public spaces were and could be used. Funeral processions, demonstrations, parades, and of course riots were means by which groups re-coded public space, temporarily taking possession over them to claim it for their own national community. The German middle-class responded by also publicly expressing its own national identity and values. Indeed, both the German and Czech middle-classes became increasingly interested “in creating linguistically distinct spaces that would be dominated by the language and symbols of Czech and German nationalism.”

Middle-class civic society in late-nineteenth century Prague brought changes to urban space to present and pass on values to their publics, values that were above all guided by language-based nationalism. Public space offered not only a representation of national identity, but through experience promised to make it tangible for everyday Czech- and German-speakers as well.

It is within this Prague context, a city in which nationality had become the issue defining everyday life, that I understand Kafka as writing. A position which even Kafka thought himself as occupying. In 1902 he writes in a letter:

> Prague doesn’t let go … This old crone has claws. One has to yield, or else. We would have to set fire to it on two sides, at the Vyšehrad and at the Hradčany, then it would be possible for us to get away.

Kafka felt trapped between the opposition of the Slavonic Vyšehrad (Wysehrad), whose cemetery carried the remains of Czech national heroes, and the site of Prague’s Castle, the Hradčany (Hradshin), which at that time was often viewed as a symbol of Habsburg German authority. In the following chapters, I will re-assess a selection of Kafka’s texts which are informed by this struggle between the nationally-oriented Czech and German middle-classes to

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control the fate of Prague’s public spaces. In these pieces, Kafka responds to a host of themes defining public life that I have separated into three distinct, yet related pairs: belonging/unbelonging to public spaces and community, possession/purification of public spaces, and power/humiliation of ethnic groups. All three were constantly at play and at stake as Prague eventually became a distinctly Czech capital. “An Old Manuscript” (“Ein Altes Blatt”) parodies the nationalist historiographies mobilized during the nineteenth-century, which provided shape to nationalist iconographies contemporaneously molding the built environment. The text essentially concentrates on the relationship between public space and group identity formation and, as a result, evokes not only the nationalization of Prague’s public spaces, but also the mirror-culture developing in the city as Czech and German nationalists increasingly mimicked each other in public life. “An Imperial Message” (“Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft”) and “The Burrow” (“Der Bau”) scrutinize the privileged position that German culture and identity held in the Austro-Hungarian Empire through the lens of imperial and nationalized spaces. Lastly, I will offer a reading of “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk” (“Josefine, die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse”) as a narrative whose principle concern is the way nineteenth- and twentieth-century mass politics re-defined Prague’s public spaces.

What unifies these texts, and what makes them more necessary to analyze than other Kafka stories in light of the context I am applying, is that each revolve around the interplay between public spaces and the creation of ethnic/national identities, two inseparable factors setting the terms for everyday life in Kafka’s Prague. “An Old Manuscript” is attuned to how the conflict between two linguistically-defined national communities within a public space raises the thematic triad prompted by Prague’s nationalization and encountered daily by the urban inhabitants. Informing “An Imperial Message” and “The Burrow” is how Austrian or
Cisleithanian Germans conceived their identity and status within an exclusive space to which they viewed themselves belonging and how these self-made identities were either reinforced or frustrated in and by such spaces. And fundamentally at stake in “Josephine” is the way an ethnic group occupies public space to perform the nation.

Situating the analysis of Kafka’s texts in the context of Prague is nothing particularly new. Pavel Eisner’s 1950 work *Franz Kafka and Prague* was one of the first to attempt a serious contextualization of Kafka within Prague, spurring further efforts such as Christoph Stölzl’s *Kafkas Böses Böhmen* and Klaus Wagenbach’s numerous biographical works of the German-speaking Jewish author. Rather, the way in which this context will be applied in my study offers new avenues towards reading his work. All of the above are methodologically limited by their reliance solely on a social history of Prague and Bohemia. This thesis, in contrast, contextualizes Kafka in Prague through urban and architectural histories, which necessarily involve a look towards social history to understand why changes were brought to the built environment and how the Prague’s public responded thereto. Moreover, it expands upon a rising current of Kafka interpretation, pioneered by Marek Nekula, whose point of departure is the nationalization of Prague’s urban space.

This approach in fact expands upon another, which situates Kafka not in a nationalized Prague, but rather in a modernized one. A chapter from Andreas Huyssen’s *Miniature Metropolis* offers a representative example of this view’s generalizations: “Kafka’s Prague is … a typically modernizing city with its lights and shadows; its bustling street traffic and modern

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bureaucracies; its loneliness, coldness, and alienation; its ecstasies and terror.”

Huyssen’s “typically modernizing” Prague in fact denies the historical urban realities, recognizing Prague as just another instance of the modern European metropolis. That is, Prague is “modern” insofar as it offers the institutions of modern life – bureaucracy, modern urban traffic, new medias, a Haussmannized grid, etc. Indeed, Huyssen situates it as “a modern city in its own right” on par with Vienna, Berlin, and Paris. Yet Kafka did not know the spaces, the peoples, and their practices in Vienna, Berlin, or Paris as intimately as he knew Prague’s; his existence was not bound up with their fate. Moreover, modern public art and architecture itself had an altogether different reception in Prague in light of the intense nationalist conflicts between Czechs and Germans. Artists and designers struggled greatly with how to reconcile both modernism, which strived towards internationalism, and a way to legitimately express the spirit of the Czech nation. Since the 1895 Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague, which celebrated Czech exceptionality and originality in the name of strengthening national consciousness, a handful of architects, extraparliamentary organizations, commissions, and committees sought to preserve Prague’s architectural heritage from modern urban planning with noteworthy success. Indeed, much of Prague today owes its baroque character to the resistance of these concerned citizens to protect the architectural heritage of the “Czech” nation. It is thus inadequate to so briskly equate Prague’s modern spaces with those of other contemporary modern European capitals.

The problem is not that Prague was particularly non-modern during Kafka’s lifetime. Rather, Huyssen’s implication that Kafka’s favorite themes of “loneliness, coldness, and

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alienation” arose from these modern aspects of Prague is particularly short-sighted, especially given the abundance of material referring to the nationalist surge. What of the fierce historical conflicts of nationality and ethnicity emerging within and out of Empire? To suggest that they are outside modernity misses the point. They were integral to the formation of the modern nation-state and modern national cultures. And if we want to bring these conflicts into Prague’s spatiality – after all, that’s where they played out – then one must turn to how they articulated themselves in urban space. And if we are going to situate Kafka in Prague, as Huyssen and his cohorts genuinely desire, we have to cease buying into Kafka’s insistence on abstracting his locality. How was the bourgeois public sphere in Prague literally becoming shaped around his lifetime? What drives and interests had a hand in that process? And how did these consequential changes in physical space inform Kafka’s understanding of a “public space” itself? How does he communicate this conception in his literature? What can this conception ultimately tell us about these historical developments in Prague’s built environment?

**Everyday Relations between Germans and Czechs in Prague**

How much insight do the many nationalist architectural/urban interventions and activities in Prague provide into everyday relations between Czechs and Germans? The answer is a bit complicated of course. In his research into the Prague German community and defense, Gary B. Cohen has noted how public life was organized around the German Casino, a matter which will be covered more extensively in the second chapter. In addition to the Casino, Germans constructed other distinct cultural venues for the performance of their nationality, such as the New German Theater (figure 8). It is tempting to settle on the assertion that daily life in fin-de-siècle Prague was marked by a division or virtual segregation of German and Czech nationalities. The intensity of the nationalist conflicts from the mid-1890s to the onset of the First World War,
particularly the violent outbursts in 1897, 1904–5, and 1908, could lead one to side with this thesis. Yet the argument that Prague public space was increasingly marked by a division of life, one adopted by Nancy Wingfield, overstates the extent to which everyday life became segregated based on nationality. While ethnic/national loyalty and identity dominated public discourse, they served to mainly color the many relationships, interactions, and exchanges between Prague’s multilingual residents. Although they carried a determining power, nationalisms in Prague did not necessarily lead to separation between nationalities, but rather constituted the context and set the parameters in which relationships between residents developed.

Germans and Czechs occupied numerous spaces together and continued to experience close contact with one another. Although both Germans and Czechs constructed linguistically-derived national cultures, most residents of Prague could understand both languages. On the Austrian census for everyday language (Umgangssprache), whose results the general public accepted as an affirmation of ethnic or national allegiance, even those who declared themselves as Czechs may have spoken daily a considerable amount of German. Indeed, this fluidity of linguistic boundaries in Prague, even as nationalist divisiveness accelerated, can be explained by multiple spheres of contact in everyday life. In the densely populated inner-city districts, Czech- and German-speakers lived ‘cheek by jowl.’ Native Czech-speakers would serve as maids in German households; German- and Czech-owned businesses often stood side by side; individual Czechs and Germans would continue to transact with each other despite nationalist calls for boycotts; Jewish and some Christian Czech business owners continued to provide bilingual signs or menus into the late 1890s; German proprietors relied on Czech-speaking employees; and, both

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14 Cohen, Politics of Ethnic Survival, 103.
15 Cohen, Politics of Ethnic Survival, 66 – 68.
16 Cohen, Politics of Ethnic Survival, 86.
Czechs and Germans were employed by most large enterprises.\textsuperscript{17} Outside of work environments, German- and Czech-speakers maintained close contact depending on their religious affiliation and living quarters. Cohen concludes that patterns of employment, commerce, education, and residence in Prague demonstrate that Germans had extensive and close dealings with Czechs in individual and private matters, whereas voluntary segregation was a feature of organized group and public affairs.\textsuperscript{18}

Nonetheless, nationalist tensions worsened divisions between the two national communities sharing Prague. Latent cultural differences were magnified by the Czech-German political strife in addition to creating new ones, evinced by new national music and verse, fashions in clothing, and the occasionally harsh counter-reactions thereto.\textsuperscript{19} School attendance between Czech- and German-speakers became increasingly segregated during the 19th century.\textsuperscript{20} By its end, once the division of the Charles-Ferdinand University into a German and Czech University was cemented in 1891, fewer students crossed national lines.\textsuperscript{21} Outside of education, Czech campaigns to boycott German- and Jewish-owned businesses, under the banner of “to each his own” (svuj k svému), intensified at the dawn of the century, a symptom of rising nationalist agitation.\textsuperscript{22} The urge to separate from Czechs among Germans reached its zenith in the early 1900s during the Los von Prag campaign, as the völkisch movement encouraged Germans to leave the city.\textsuperscript{23} The overall tendency of politics and organized social life in Prague, as Egon Kisch reported, was that citizens’ clubs, public swimming facilities, concerts, parks,

\textsuperscript{17} Cohen, \textit{Politics of Ethnic Survival}, 87, 93.
\textsuperscript{18} Cohen, \textit{Politics of Ethnic Survival}, 93, 100 – 102.
\textsuperscript{20} Cohen, \textit{Politics of Ethnic Survival}, 82.
\textsuperscript{22} Giustino, \textit{Tearing Down Prague’s Jewish Town}, 236.
playgrounds, and some streets, specifically the Czech-dominated Ferdinandallee/Ferdinandová and the German Am Graben/Na Príkope, were ethnically exclusive.²⁴

Peter Judson, offering a nuanced perspective, forwards the notion of an overarching “situational” nationalism in the Bohemian lands. Only certain events triggering nationalist strife, - the Badeni crisis for instance - brought out the starkest nationalist differentiation among the populace. In fact, in everyday life nationalist sympathies increasingly held sway. Judson is right to point out that nationalism was dependent on the situation; yet, as the Austro-Hungarian Empire raced towards its eventual collapse, the frequency and intensity of situations inviting nationalism amplified. Gary B. Cohen has noted that nationalist violence in Prague peaked in three waves after the riots of the 1897 Badeni crisis. Although the specific reasons changed based on the situation, the form taken by the violence remained consistent. In February 1904 and October 1908, thousands of Czech nationalist demonstrators gathered at Na Príkope, where German student fraternities held their Sunday processions, to assault the students and attack German schools, businesses, and individual Germans. In November 1905, Czech nationalist and Social Democratic demonstrators protesting for direct and equal suffrage assembled before the German Casino before rampaging against German and Jewish establishments.²⁵ Wingfield notes how efforts were taken by both German and Czech nationalists to exclusively claim public spaces for their nationalities. And it would be unfair to argue that these events did not leave their wounds; after a particularly intense period of nationalist conflict, public life could not simply return to its pace before the eruptions. After the Czech brutality against the pro-German concessions made by the monarchy to end German resistance to the Badeni laws, some German shopkeepers removed their German-language signs.

²⁴ Cohen, Politics of Ethnic Survival, 93.
Space was symbolically – and sometimes physically – cut up, so to say, yet what arguably made Prague’s public spaces so tense were the ways the urban inhabitants struggled over their meaning and use with each other through the practices occurring within them. The reality of sharing public spaces as opposed to remaining in divided spaces reinforced national consciousness. For instance, the Municipal House’s overshadowing of the German Casino on Am Graben/Na Príkope humiliated Germans’ status precisely because its vicinity to the Casino transformed it into a physical marker of the decline of German cultural and political power. If the Municipal House was situated in a segregated Czech area, with infrequent German traffic, it would totally lack its humiliating effect, failing to (1) reinforce national loyalty among Germans and (2) strengthen Czechs’ sense of triumph over their former “oppressors.” Similarly, Czech nationalists despised that German fraternity students would hold nationalist demonstrations. A quote from the Young Czech mayor Jan Podlipny to the city aldermen illuminates the nationalist frustration towards sharing space: “….in Czech Prague, on this Slavic soil, they dare to sing the Wacht am Rhein!” If the soil was not so Slavic, and the city not so Czech, the German student demonstrations would seem not so provocative. It was only through sustained contact with the other nationality, not a division of everyday life, that tensions became heightened.

Kafka in His City

How well was Kafka acquainted with Prague’s urban topography and nationalized spatial politics? In an oft-cited conversation with his Hebrew instructor Friedrich Thieburger, Kafka signaled out for significance the Altstadt and Josefstadt, the urban center of Prague east of the Moldau (Vltava) and northwest of the Neustadt, in structuring his urban experience: looking upon the Altständier Ring, he remarked, “Here was my Gymnasium, over there, facing us, my

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26 Cohen, Politics of Ethnic Survival, 175.
university, and just a bit further to the left, my office. This small space … encloses my entire life.”

Having never left Prague for an extended period of time until 1917, Kafka lived, worked, and studied at various locations within or around the *Altstädter Ring* his entire life. Although life in the *Altstädter Ring*, where Prague’s German-Jewish community was concentrated, had a profound impact, his diaries and letters betray a broader familiarity with Prague’s urban layout. According to Nekula:

Kafka worked in the Workers’ Insurance Agency for the Kingdom of Bohemia … on Na Poríčí street, attended the German New Theater in Vinohrady and the Czech National Theater …, climbed up Petřín hill, crossed the Charles Bridge to the Prague Castle … or to the Kampa island … not only visited Troja … but also Letná and Podskalí, climbed up to Vyšehrad, went to the public swimming school on the bank of the Vltava, … was responsible for the family factory in Žižkov, etc.

Yet which spaces Kafka was willing to identify as significant, and which ones he left unmentioned, tells us how he understood his city. The division between “this small space” (*im kleinen Kreis*) and the larger Prague revealed through correspondence and diaries correlate to the opposition between the shrinking German and German-speaking Jewish minority of Prague’s Old Town and “Greater Prague”, which “ethnic Czechs” dominated and over which the Czech nationalistic middle-class presided.

Conscious of the German-Czech strife structuring the urban environment, how did Kafka conceive of his own position as a German-speaking Jew raised in a rapidly “Czechisizing” society? His position, in fact, reflects the fluid identity of much of the city’s Jewish community. Torn between two opposing national camps, Jews occupied an in-between space, unable to

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assimilate fully to either group. Although Prague Jews, and most Czechs in fact, largely identified themselves with the German community, Kafka understood them as more chameleon-like: “German one day, Czech the next,” he wrote in a diary entry. He was writing about the generation of assimilated Jewish businessmen, such as his father, yet he shared that same fluidity in the exercise of his particular linguistic-cultural identity. By “in-between space” I am not implying that Prague’s Jews could move anonymously between either national camps whenever they pleased, essentially rising above the nationalist dogfights. If anything, Jews were more crippled by their fluidity than privileged: the ability to switch between both German and Czech meant not that they belonged to both, but to neither. Without a distinct national community of their own, Jews became double-victims; inhabiting a social reality determined by 19th century theories of language-based nationalism, Jews – accused of eternally existing in the nations of others – were prohibited from accessing either the German or Czech national spirits. In this context, occupying an in-between space between competing national communities necessitated a non-national existence.

Kafka’s struggles with forging a linguistic-national identity over his life led him to assert a similar conclusion. His linguistic destiny seems to have been settled in his household. Exposed to both Czech and German languages from a young age, he would not have been able to immediately recognize that they represented two increasingly hostile cultures. According to Reiner Stach, switching between Czech and German occurred frequently in Kafka’s home due to his parents’ bilingualism. Despite his use of primarily German at home, Hermann Kafka listed the *Umgangssprache* of his family as Czech in the 1890, 1900, and 1910 censuses. Moreover,

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the Kafkas’ maids were composed of Catholic Czech women who spoke little German, furthering the young Franz’s exposure. For a variety of reasons – be it a Jewish loyalty to Austria, the status of German as the lingua franca of the Austrian Empire, a sign of education, and it’s promise of a future high-level career – Hermann Kafka sent his son to a German-language Gymnasium in Prague, where he met students with similar religious, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Nonetheless, Kafka learned Czech at home and even attended lessons in elementary school so as to distinguish it clearly from German. As he grew older, Kafka was introduced to both Czech and German national canons. While at university, Kafka joined the German-oriented Lese-und Redehalle, in which he could explore his avid love of German literature. Before the collapse of the Empire, Kafka’s employment at the Worker’s Accident Insurance Institute was conducted primarily in German, although he diligently studied Czech for use in his office and eventually had to switch to working entirely in Czech after the founding of the Czechoslovak state. Even though Kafka could read and write fluently in Czech, he still preferred the use of German. His mastery of the German language was such that it has been characterized by the absence of any local dialect influences, preserving its insularity and purity.

At the least, Kafka seems to have been able to move between German and Czech languages with a degree of ease. According to 19th century nationalist theories of language, what Kafka’s parents could not pass down to him, however, was the Volksgeist which inhabited each individual language. The cold result: though Kafka may have spoken German and Czech, public discourse at the time prevented him from belonging to the people and national culture

35 Stach, Kafka, 134.
36 Stach, Kafka, 134.
rooted in those languages. Such an arbitrary, yet powerful prohibition is arguably the origins of Kafka’s alienation from both national communities in Prague. According to Christoph Stölzl, Kafka, to an extent, internalized the anti-Semitism of his generation. Exposed to anti-Semitism in specific and völkisch, racialist nationalism in general through everyday discrimination, Zionism, publications, German university students, and organized group life, Kafka felt that his Jewishness prohibited him from using German legitimately. In a letter to Max Brod, Kafka expressed his view that German-Jewish literature constituted a theft of “[German] property,” a genre which “had stolen the German child out of its cradle.” Even if Kafka was writing ironically – with a smile on his face as it were – theft is theft; at a fundamental level, Kafka accepted that the German language did not belong to the Jews. Stölzl also demonstrates how Kafka’s precise phrasing in the letter mimics the rhetoric of contemporary anti-Semitic writers; although he could employ a purified German, Kafka could never be considered “German.” The Czech national community offered no refuge. As both a German and a Jew, Czechs would have identified him with alien forces oppressing them in their own land. During riots, Jewish businesses and homes were often brutalized by Czech nationalist protestors.

If there was one group to whom Kafka could have belonged it would have been the small Prague Zionist organization Bar Kochba. Betraying a commitment to the trend among Jews to assimilate to German culture, Kafka had been a member of the Lese- und Redeohalle der deutschen Studenten at university. In opposition to assimilationism, the Bar Kochba through its organ Selbstwehr theorized Zionism as a means of securing the present and future of the Jewish

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people and making *Judentum* a vigorous force. Since 1911, Kafka had been in contact with *Bar Kochba* and sustained an interest in the publications of *Selbstwehr*, even having his stories included in some editions. According to Hartmut Binder, reading *Selbstwehr* enlarged Kafka’s knowledge of Jewish problems and strengthened in him a warm feeling for modern trends of a national Jewish revival. Indeed, Binder traces Kafka’s growth of a Jewish *Volksgfühl* in his story “Investigations of a Dog” (*Forschungen eines Hundes*); if the literary community of dogs reflects an actual community of Jews, by merely living in a Jewish society, one acquires an inkling of the possibilities of belonging to a *Volkstum*. A possibility for Kafka that was withheld by other national groups.

Yet with Jewish nationalism Kafka too wrestled, most intensely over the issue of Eastern European Jewish culture. Whereas the editors of *Selbstwehr* viewed the “decadence” of Eastern European Jewish culture as an obstacle to surmount, Kafka rather recognized its anti-territoriality. If we take Kafka’s reflections on language as a reflection on nationalism – reasonable considering that nationalism was primarily language-based in fin-de-siècle Prague – then his thoughts on the Yiddish language suggest a non- or anti-national outlook. In his 1912 memorandum on the Yiddish language and its meaning for Prague Jews, his “Introductory Talk on the Yiddish Language” given at the Jewish Town Hall, Kafka crystallizes his position. Kafka’s opening definition of Yiddish has relevance for the Jewish position in the greater language conflicts of Bohemia as it carried implications for the territorialization of language. Kafka defines Yiddish as “brief and rapid,” in a state of “continuous flux,” solely containing foreign words that do not remain static in the language. Yiddish seizes and contains “[great]
migrations” through “German, Hebrew, French, English, Slavonic, Dutch, Romanian, and even Latin.” The language of Yiddish is thus the territorial shifts across Europe of the Jews themselves, never still in one area for too long. Rather than an international language, Yiddish is the opposite – a language of nationlessness, the lack of groundedness in any one territory. In that regard, Yiddish becomes an “anti-territory,” thus separating Kafka and Prague Jews from the territorializations or nationalizations of language to which Czechs and Germans succumbed.

His hope for Prague’s German-speaking Jewish community was that it not embrace assimilation to either camp, or even conceive of its own nationalist alternative, but fundamentally accept the eternal absence of a nation in Jewish life.

If Kafka’s Jewishness positions him both within and without German-Czech communities, and above all, as a subject without a nation, then he emerges as a non-national boundary-crosser, one who navigated between/around/through Prague’s nationalized spatial politics outside of the politics of both national camps. A city-walker, in the sense of De Certeau: faced with ideologically imposed spaces laid down by architects and planners, Kafka’s Judaism enhanced his ability to negotiate such spaces. Here, negotiation entails that Kafka, based on his awareness of Prague’s nationalized public discourse, could perceive how each group responded to the spatial iconographical/semiotic incursions. As a Jewish boundary-crosser, Kafka serves as a superb witness to the nationalist conflicts: his existence was staked in the outcome indeed, yet what he knew of nationalist causes was their limitations, their violent and dangerous consequences – among their products belong alienation and merely a fabricated belonging.

Neither a true believer nor a fellow traveler, Kafka’s literature scrutinizing nationalized public

47 Spector, *Prague Territories*, 89.
spaces originate from a non- or anti-national perspective. When we read the relevant fiction, we receive a critical eye towards the ways nationalism forges identity through public space, and the implications therefrom.
I. (Re-)Writing History through Public Space: “Ein Altes Blatt” and the Genesis of National Identity

The narrative of “Ein Altes Blatt” centers on a group of armed nomads’ invasion of a capital city and their occupation of the square before the Emperor’s palace. The narrator, a modest shoemaker, whose business among others lines the square, provides a brief report on the conflict between nomads and townsfolk. The seemingly innocent and sympathetic account of the increasingly distressed cobbler conveys, on its surface, a past society near its abyss. The cobbler’s representation is the vehicle through which Kafka identifies public space as the pre-eminent stage of nationalist conflicts. Indeed, this role played by public space is the point of departure for Kafka to illuminate the German-Czech construction of self and other, to address the agency of Empire in shaping nationalist conflicts, and to critically re-write Bohemian historiography of the nineteenth century.

The oppositional identities of the townsfolk and nomads should be read critically with Prague’s spatial politics in mind, that is, whether a national community can be considered a nation with history. Consequently, my analysis is particularly attentive to the relationship between language, cultural development, territory, and identity.\(^{48}\) Whereas Kafka ascribes to the nomads a basic nature (\textit{Natur}) and type (\textit{Art}), the townsfolk exhibit a refined way of life (\textit{Lebensweise}). The very presence of the nomads acts as a catalyst for the narrator to solidify the group identity of the townsfolk in opposition. At the beginning, the narrator admits that only once the nomads had appeared do the townsfolk concern themselves with the defense of their Vaterland.\(^{49}\) Without the enemies of the Vaterland, Kafka notes, there is no impetus to realize

\(^{48}\) In my argument, I discuss the essential nature and identity of both townsfolk and nomads. I do not think it is necessary to differentiate between essence and group identity since, during Kafka’s lifetime, both were equally constructed as elements to define national character.

the *Vaterland* as such. Whereas the nomads perform their identity in public space, the narrator and townsfolks’ identity develop as a reaction to the public spectacle. In contrast to the nomads, the townsfolk are an example of an apparently civilized people. If we put things in *fin-de-siècle* terms – as Kafka’s original readers would have understood them – the townsfolk appear as a nation with history; 19th century historiography in Bohemia did not disembark from the Enlightenment conviction that history was the history of civilization interpreted in terms of progress through developmental stages.⁵⁰ A nation with history then was one which disclosed signs of development towards achieving a state of “civilization.” In Bohemia, having gained and led civilization had long been a status reserved exclusively for German culture and society. Even before the *Vormärz*, German-language historians constructed Germandom as a civilizing force: Germans in Bohemia were more productive and better workers, cultivated reason and industry, and influenced the *Bildung* of Slavic Bohemia in the spheres of court, church, and urban/technological progress, so they wrote.⁵¹ German-speakers’ claim to have been responsible for such progress in a certain territory further legitimized their civilized identity.

The townsfolk reflect the civility with which a nation with history (and territory) was characterized before and during the *fin-de-siècle*. In the opening lines, the narrator writes that the townsfolk have concerned themselves with daily work, instead of their country’s defense. Additionally, we learn of the existence of several other shop owners besides the narrator; the commercial world of business and transaction is a part of their everyday existence. That they

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⁵¹ I have in mind Johann Anton Ritter von Riegger’s *Skizze einer statistischen Landeskunde Böhmens* (1795), František Martin Pelcl’s “Geschichte der Deutschen und ihrer Sprache in Böhmen” in *Abhandlungen der Böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Prag* (1788), and the anonymously written German brochure “Die österreichischen Länder und Völker” (1833).
have participated in urban progress is clear from the start as they already inhabit and control a capital city before the nomads’ arrival. Unlike their nomadic enemies, they maintain the cleanliness of public space and live presumably in typical residences (*Wohnhäuser*). Brief mention is made of their institutions and an Emperor’s palace is described, suggesting the development of some sophisticated form of governance and political hierarchy.52

The town square serves as the stage upon which the nomads act out the essence of their people, offering a striking rebut to the townsfolks’ life-form. The narrator reports that the nomads cannot help but behave according to their nature (“ihrer Natur entprechen”). To even their bizarre gestures, particularly their grimaces which are followed by turning up the whites of their eyes and foaming at their mouths, the narrator apparently does not take offence; he recognizes this behavior because it fits their type (“weil es so ihre Art ist”).53 Thus, from the narrator’s view, what is reported about them constitutes their essential nature; and, to put it bluntly, they are portrayed as a veritable community of *Naturmenschen*. They camp under an open sky as they loathe *Wohnhäuser*; their persistent sharpening of swords, whittling of arrows, and practice of horsemanship indicate that they are people of violent conflict opposed to peace; under their occupation, the square, kept nervously clean and quiet by the townsfolk, devolves into a stable; their language is received as a horrid equivalent to the screams of jackdaws; theft from the townsfolk is a common practice; and, they consume a butcher’s ox like wild animals and eat side by side with their horses.54 From the narrator’s position within his shop, looking through his window upon the square, the nomads’ behavior accords to a primal way of life – they confront him as an uncivilized, uncultured, undisciplined, and animalistic/naturalistic people.

Kafka reinforces that point, writing “Unsere Lebensweise, unsere Einrichtungen sind ihnen ebenso unbegreiflich wie gleichgültig.” Not only can the nomads not conceive of a Lebensweise (“unbegreiflich”), but they are even indifferent to the notion (“gleichgültig”).

Although the nomads as a single group are positioned firmly outside of the nation-with-history model, the subtleties of Kafka’s German suggest their potential to develop into a nation with history. The narrator makes it a point to emphasize the nomads’ inability to comprehend a developed language as well as the lack of their own. “Sprachen kann man mit den Nomaden nicht,” he writes, to which he adds “ja sie haben kaum eine eigene [Sprache].” (“One cannot speak with the nomads, indeed they hardly have their own [language].”) Yet the nomads do not suffer from some eternal prohibition of language. To the contrary, “Unter einander verständigen sie sich ähnlich wie Dohlen.” (“Among each other they understand themselves similar to jackdaws.”) Even if their language is no more evolved than the elementary articulations of jackdaws, the narrator at least realizes that they are, in fact, able to understand each other.

Moreover, the use of “unter einander” portrays the nomads as an exclusive, distinguishable, and cohesive group; among each other, linguistic communication is not only within their reach, but apparently achieved also. It would be additionally improper to speak of the nomads as a homeless unit, Nomaden though they may be named. The narrator himself identifies a linear territorial trajectory followed by the nomads, from the frontier to the capital city. (“sie [sind] bis in die Hauptstadt gedrungen, die doch sehr weit von der Grenze entfernt ist.”) As more and more nomads arrive, it is clear precisely where and of what they will make their home.

The connection drawn between language and territory, and particularly how that relationship constructs nationhood, should not go unmentioned. Kafka here problematizes the nationalized reading of language and nation circulating through public discourse since the beginning of the nineteenth-century. In Bohemia, language became increasingly identified with both homeland and nation to the exclusion of those who did not inherit that language. The works of Josef Jungmann and his colleagues were particularly instrumental for popularizing this position. In an article for the Czech Herald, Jan Nejedly defined one’s homeland as “the mother tongue and customs of [one’s] nation,” distinguishable from all other nations. In his “Conversations on the Czech Language,” Jungmann built upon Nejedly’s contribution: “it is impossible to conceive of a homeland without a nation, and a nation without its own language” (emphasis added).

If we understand these Czech nationalists as writing within the Enlightenment discourse of a history of nations as a history of unique ethnic wholes that had occupied a certain territory long enough for it to be “theirs,” then the movement of Kafka’s nomads towards nationalization makes sense. The nomads exhibit a unique mother tongue, not to mention unique customs, and through spatial conquest achieve for themselves a homeland. In this effort, they have constituted themselves as a distinct nation (or betray signs towards nationness, nationality, nationhood). Yet Kafka re-writes the relationship between language and nation: there is not some latent relation between a Volkssprache and a pre-existing territory; rather, a “nation” must fight over the territories of language. What Kafka notes about the constructed relationship between language and nation is the role played by spatial conquest in cementing it.

60 Agnew, “Czechs, Germans, Bohemians,” 62.
Kafka’s text unveils an understanding of public space as the site of a conflict which revolves around the performance of group character and identity within and through its confines. Furthermore, it bears upon the historical realities of Prague’s nationalization into which Kafka was born and which he witnessed violently intensify. The occupation of the city’s spaces through iconographical and semiotic incursions, re-interpreted here as behavioral, referring to a cohesive, yet constructed national identity was a means by which ethnic groups became a nation with history. The point is precisely that the nomads are developing into a nation with history by diminishing the Lebensweise of the townsfolk, conquering their city, and finding a place for their Natur to develop in its wake. To supplement our reading, then, we must refer more substantially to the Prague context in which nationalist ideologies shaped and were shaped by public urban spaces. The invasion of the Hauptstadt by an “outsider” ethnic force raises, generally, the question of Prague’s nationalized spatial politics and, specifically, the Czechification of public spaces. Just as the nomads perform their people’s essence by occupying public space – their acts have an audience, after all – Prague’s public spaces from the late-nineteenth to the early-twentieth centuries served as the arena within which primarily Czechs visualized their national identity in urban forms and won for their nation a history. In both cases, the public expression of nationality constitutes a form of spatial possession and conquest. Yet if it were merely a form of possession, Kafka’s analysis would rub off as all too one-dimensional. Rather, Kafka’s short text calls attention to the multi-faceted dynamics defining Prague’s nationalized spatial politics: alongside possession, one must also consider purification; with belonging, alienation; and, with power, humiliation. These spatial politics are examined in Kafka’s microcosm, the constructed town square of “Ein Altes Blatt.”

The Nationalization of Prague’s Public Spaces
In this section, I will attempt to sketch a vision of Prague that is, in contradistinction to Huyssen’s, finely tuned to the historical urban realities. It will balance discussions of forms molding public space – monuments, buildings, and bridges – with the related practices. I concentrate on the representational structures and spatial practices which served to nationalize public space as opposed to more general artistic/architectural trends simultaneously shaping Prague. Indeed, the former exerted the most dominance in asserting Prague’s spatial order as well as ruling Prague’s public discourse through newspapers and public events. The Prague public-sphere, or Öffentlichkeit, would have been more concerned, and was made to be more concerned with, a structure or practice expressing national identity than the work of private, commissioned avant-garde artists and architects. No one was getting beaten to death over Cubist apartments.

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In the European modern architectural cultures of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the city emerged as the protagonist of history. In multiethnic, multinational, multilingual, and multireligious Austria-Hungary, nationality came to dominate everyday life: all the social, economic, and political problems of a modernizing society were recast by the nationalities question.62 In mid-nineteenth century Prague, whose urban bourgeoisie was primarily composed of German-speakers, and thus a ‘nation with history’, urban space became contested by the lingual-cultural Czech nation, which was accused of lacking an independent politico-national history, yet aspired to national self-determination. The intellectual leaders of

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this ascending “nation” viewed the city as the site where history had already been and could be made again.63

The dominant ideological paradigms, or those which seek dominance, visualize themselves in the form of representative artifacts or objects – statues, buildings, bridges, etc. – whose representative power is supplemented by the practices occurring around them.64 Through an iconographic and linguistic transformation of urban space, the educated Czech nationalist middle-class sought to re-code Prague’s public spaces from reflecting what they viewed as a Habsburg (German) dominance to a “reborn” Czech national identity. Urban space became a fertile soil for developing a collective national memory: demonstrations, burials, anniversaries, and riots as well as buildings projects which reflected a national ideology cultivated shared memories and common values. This point holds true for both German and Czech national camps, even though the former was primary a reaction to the latter after 1848.65 These events and the symbolic architecture as their stage inscribed a national narrative and discourse into the urban landscape itself.66 Put simply, architecture promised permanence. By filling the city with a nationalist iconography, architecture offered a tangible sign of an intangible concept; through building and practice, real, lived experience strengthened a nationalist-driven conception of Bohemian history.67

In the early-nineteenth century, Czech nationalists made their first attempts to institute Prague as a primordial space to which Czechs exclusively belonged, and from which non-Czechs

63 Blau, “City as Protagonist,” 15.
were excluded. These involved the forging of Czech national myths to re-code Prague as Slavic and remove its associations with Habsburg rule and Germandom. In 1818, Vaclav Hanka, a Czech philologist, claimed to have discovered medieval manuscripts of poetry, which provided Prague a foundational myth rooted in Slavic identity. In short, the “Green Mountain Manuscript” represents Vyšehrad as the center of a Slavic ‘Lebensraum’ and the seat of the supreme ‘folk’ court, with Prague as an extension of this core. In the discursive reality of the Manuscript, Czechs possessed the city as a result of an imagined originary belonging to it, when in reality none of the Bohemian Lands were under the auspices of a hegemonic Czech national consciousness. Although later exposed as a forgery, the Manuscript and its Slavic reading of Prague was published successively from 1829 onwards, adapted into histories of Czech literature, mobilized as an icon in funeral processions, spread rapidly through the print media and political speeches, used in Czech textbooks, and re-staged in the opera at the National Theater. This Slavic narrative further influenced the decoration of Prague’s public spaces, including the decoration of the National Theater, National Museum as well as the statue program on the Palacky Bridge. The Manuscript and its large influence on public discourse aided Prague’s re-fashioning from a provincial Habsburg center, including both German- and Czech-speakers, to the primordial center of “Czechdom.” As I demonstrate later, non-Czechs in the city were consequently re-evaluated as foreign or impure elements.

Nonetheless, Prague was not some blank canvas upon which the Czech nationalist middle-class could paint its image; rather, they had to contend with the legacies of pre-existing representative icons and the ruling discourse they invoked. The Jesuit counter-reformation of

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69 Nekula, “Prague Funerals,” 38.
Bohemia brought opulent baroque art and architecture to Prague, which would later serve as a sign of embarrassment for Czech nationalists as it evoked “Czech” losses in the Thirty Years War. In light of Hanka’s “discovery,” Czech nationalists changed interpretations of monuments while adding new ones to reinforce their understanding of Bohemian history in the public discourse. Pro-Habsburg iconography, such as the Marian column and monuments to Charles IV, Francis I, and Austrian Field Marshal Radetzky filling Prague’s public spaces were largely re-interpreted as explicit signs of German domination and lordship over the Czech people. Here, Czech nationalists imagined themselves as the humiliated ones to call attention to the excessive power of German culture and language in “their” home, hoping to inspire everyday Czechs to overcome their national repression. For instance, Frantisek Palacky, the most influential Czech historiographer of the nineteenth-century, and Thomas Masaryk understood the Charles bridge’s iconography as representing the alleged re-catholicization (Germanization) of the Bohemian Lands after the Battle of the White Mountain and therefore a sign of darkness in Czech history. These new interpretations implied rather loudly that the German presence in Prague did not belong there, no matter how long German-speakers had been historically present in the city.

The Slavic reading of Prague in literature, newspapers, and national funerals prefaced such a reading in monuments and other representational forms. At this stage in Prague’s urban history, Czech nationalists assumed the task of symbolically possessing public spaces through the imposition, temporary or permanent, of nationalist iconography; spatial conquest was a means of expressing the increasing power of the Czech middle-class. The 1861 funeral procession of Vaclav Hanka was the point of departure for the gradual domination of Prague

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73 Nekula, “Constructing Slavic Prague,” 36.
urban space by Czech national symbols. By demonstrating the cultural autonomy of a democratic Czech nation and calling attention to the Czech Volk, the commemorative act opposed itself to the culture of German ethnicity: albeit temporally, it removed German iconography from urban public space. Hanka’s funeral was a tool of narrowing and exclusion to assert Czech belonging to and possession of Prague public space, while emphasizing German unbelonging to that space.

The route itself narrated Prague as a Slavic space with the accompaniment of a symbolic and literal Czech presence. The procession began in the courtyard of the Patriotic, later National, Museum, proceeding through Prikopy, later Jungmann, Street towards Charles Square and thus the 14th century Slavic monastery founded by Charles IV, ending in the cathedral at the ‘ancient Vyšehrad.’ According to the newspaper Bohemia, all these spaces were connected with a living chain of people. In fact, the Czech public assembled on Prague’s balconies and roofs and in its streets to insert themselves as an integral part of the procession, which one newspaper understood as representing the entire Czech nation. The route was additionally overladen with Czech symbols – Czech songs were sung at the coffin, the national red-white-and-blue tricolor displayed, the laurels decorating the hearse referred to “vítesláva” in Czech, or “Slavic victory.” Hanka’s funeral perfected a model for the “funeral rally” which would grow into a paradigm for future national memorials and commemorations, emphasizing the Czech multitude and homogeneity, the Czech language, national tricolors and banners, and the inclusion/marking of nationally relevant places, such as Vyšehrad, the Museum, and later the National Theater (figure 9). Hence, why Kafka would have thought of Vyšehrad as a Czech space, surely among others.

74 Nekula, “Prague Funerals,” 39, 47.
75 Nekula, “Prague Funerals,” 36.
76 Nekula, “Constructing Slavic Prague,” 30 – 32.
77 Nekula, “Prague Funerals,” 45.
After Hanka’s funeral, the efforts of various voluntary associations, municipal committees and commissions unleashed a building program to iconographically/linguistically transform the city. The very next year the Svatabor Association was founded to construct a tomb for Hanka (1863) at the Vyšehrad cemetery in addition to supporting the monument to Josef Jungmann (1873 – 78), one of the creators of the modern Czech language, in the city center at Ferdinand (later National) Boulevard (figure 10). Monuments funded by Svatabor contained the association’s emblem, a visible marker for their semantic interconnection which joined individual national monuments into an organic whole.

Even without the Svatabor emblem, other monuments became interlinked through a shared symbolic language, possessing urban space in the name of Czech culture by integrating public spaces nationally. The design and construction of the Palacky Bridge (1876), connecting Smíchov and Podskalí, further enhanced Czech iconography in the national discourse dominating Prague (figure 11). The Bridge itself was built out of stone in the Czech national colors, named for Palacky, and decorated with four statue-groups whose figures were based of Slavic mythical heroes and whose stories were elaborated in Hanka’s manuscripts. The final completion of the National Theater in 1883 signaled one of the grandest iconographical pronouncements of Czech national identity ordering Prague’s urban landscape (figure 12). Called the Cathedral of National Rebirth, the Theater served as a counter to the German national theater as a venue for theatrical events produced in the Czech language. The structure’s ability to communicate a nationalist message rested on its commission, which resulted from the contributions of both major cities and

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79 Nekula, “Prague Funerals,” 47.
80 Nekula, “Prager Brücken,” 173.
small villages in the Czech lands, its neo-Renaissance idiom, equated with the re-birth of the 
Czech nation, and paintings and sculpture within the building which conveyed the national 
mythology.\textsuperscript{82}

Similar to the Palacky Bridge, the building included statues of Slavic mythical heroes 
from the forged Manuscripts along its side. The foyer, exposed to the public and best suited to 
disperse the message of national rebirth, showcased a large cycle of paintings illustrating mythic 
scenes from the imagined Czech past.\textsuperscript{83} Moreover, lunettes in the foyer depicted the pilgrimage 
of Slavic heroes along territorial borders, further defining the Bohemian lands as a Czech nation. 
To eradicate any remaining uncertainty as to whom this building belonged, the words \textit{Národ} 
\textit{Sobe}, meaning the \textit{Volk} unto itself, are inscribed above the performance space.\textsuperscript{84} As if to fulfill 
that statement, “Theater Trains” were organized to transport rural peasants to Prague for 
theatrical performances, allowing the building to accrue a sacred status for the Czech people over 
time.\textsuperscript{85}

Alongside the Palacky Bridge and National Theater, the monumentality of Wenceslas 
Square inspired awe in the face of Czech national iconography (figure 13). The placement of the 
statue to Saint Wenceslas in 1890 before the National Museum (figure 14) were part of an effort 
among the middle-class cultural and political leadership, specifically the Bohemian Academy of 
Arts, Humanities, and Sciences, to produce the Square as a national sacred space that could 
foster emotional bonds between Czech-speakers and “the nation”.\textsuperscript{86} The historicist statue, 
moreover, acknowledges the presence of a Bohemian dynasty before the Habsburgs. Situated

\textsuperscript{82} Alofsin, \textit{When Buildings Speak}, 30. 
\textsuperscript{83} Alofsin, \textit{When Buildings Speak}, 34 – 37. 
\textsuperscript{84} Nekula, “Die nationale Kodierung,” 71. 
\textsuperscript{85} Alofsin, \textit{When Buildings Speak}, 42. 
\textsuperscript{86} Paces, \textit{Prague Panoramas}, 2, 56.
before the National Museum, an impressive neo-Renaissance domed structure serving as a “secular cathedral” to Bohemian regionalism and Czech nationalism, the monument was a necessary element, dramatizing the steady topographical rise and further orientating the city’s most traversed area around a distinct Czech national identity.87

From 1893 to 1913, Prague’s Czech-dominated city government planned and implemented the most ambitious urban re-design program of the fin-de-siècle, the Finis Ghetto plan (figure 15). Its aim, underlain with anti-German and anti-Semitic sentiment, was to modernize the Old Town by demolishing large sections of the former Jewish ghetto (figures 16-18), erecting luxurious middle-class apartments, and laying down a more Hausmannized grid. Catharine Gustino’s Tearing Down Prague’s Jewish Town (2003) extensively covers this process, called the “sanitation” of Josefov. Despite rhetoric emphasizing better public hygiene, the demolition of Josefov and resulting expulsion of its poor residents was an effort led by the wealthy, middle-class members of city hall to strengthen the Czech identity of Prague. Concerned about perceptions of Czech backwardness and orientalism, the newly modernized area with richly ornamented apartments for wealthy, middle-class businesses and families, was built in part to reverse such preconceptions.88 Additionally, the new wide, tree-lined boulevards of Josefov continued the nationalization of public spaces: Mikuláš (after World War I, Paris) Boulevard provided easier access to the Old Town Square, enabling passers-by to behold the planned Hus memorial from multiple angles and allowing its creator, Ladislav Šaloun, the opportunity to produce more ambitious, complex designs (figure 19).89

87 Paces, Prague Panoramas, 56 – 60.
88 Cathleen M. Giustino, “Prague,” in Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires: Planning in Central and Southeastern Europe, ed. by Emily Gunzburger Makas et al. (Routledge, 2010), 162.
89 Paces, Prague Panoramas, 39.
Before the advent of the First World War, the city’s political and cultural leadership continued to erect representational structures celebrating the Czech national culture. Construction of the Municipal House (figure 20) lasted from 1905 to 1912 at the site of the former Royal Palace and in opposition to the German Casino, the gathering place for the liberal German middle-class in Prague. The House both represented Czech artistic talent, containing a nationalist mosaic on its façade by Karel Špillar in addition to other works by Ladislav Šaloun, Alfons Mucha, and Jan Preisler, and served as dedication to the Czech Volk. The proximity to the German Casino was not accidental, but rather a deliberate attempt by the builders ensuring that the nationalist building overshadowed its German counterpart. The Municipal House signals another effort by Czech nationalists to symbolically pronounce the decline of German power in the city; it was a use of Czech power to humiliate the ever-shrinking German ethnic minority.

In 1912 and 1915, the Palacky and Jan Hus monuments to the respective critical figures in Czech history were unveiled. Constructed at the Vltava River Embankment looking towards the Palacky Bridge, the Palacky monument (figure 21) celebrated the revered historian whose writings over-exaggerated the nationalist element in the Czech past. Its literal proximity to the Palacky Bridge and its semiotic or textual proximity to the Jan Hus memorial (Palacky’s histories celebrated the Hussite era as the golden age in Czech history) again iconographically unified public spaces to claim Prague as distinctly Czech. Like the Municipal House, the Jan Hus memorial (figure 22) was knowingly located in a site that would conflict with the presence of German national identity. In the centrally-located Old Town Square, the Jan Hus memorial stood across from the towering Marian Column, seen at that time as a potent symbol of Habsburg

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90 Nekula, “Die nationale Kodierung,” 78.
92 Paces, Prague Panoramas, 63 – 68.
(German) rule. When designing the memorial, Ladislav Šaloun responded to the design of the Column: the dark bronze and granite countered the white sandstone of the Column, while its massive horizontality rivalled the vertical, rising baroque pillar. Its subject matter of Czech national suffering and redemption of course inherently challenged the regime represented by the Marian Column.

These “major” transformations of the built environment were reflected in more banal, yet still powerful means of re-coding Prague. As nationalist structures appeared around the city, the decoration of Prague’s homes became nationalized as well, often containing iconographical references to other sources embodying Czech national identity, such as the St. Wenzel’s Choral and the National Theater. The Czech architect Antonín Wiehl incorporated the Czech neo-Renaissance style in his fin-de-siècle apartment buildings, for example. After the Czech-controlled municipality removed German street names in 1892, they replaced them with Czech counterparts (but by no means translations) and, to decorate the street signs, adopted the Czechoslovak red-white-and-blue protest colors. Accordingly, new areas incorporated into the official city limits, for instance Žižkov, were given Czech names, as well as the streets and squares within them. These semiotic incursions by naming spaces and objects, parts of the city, expressed the increasing Czech possession of space, while other iconographical incursions symbolically unified and concentrated the power of the imagined nation through a coherent and interconnected urban space.

To serve that effort, German attempts to claim public spaces were repeatedly hindered by the Czech national movement: a proposed monument to Mozart in the city and plans for a new

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95 Nekula, “Die nationale Koderiung,” 74 – 76.
German university were never realized; the New German Theater was overshadowed by the National Museum, while the German House met a similar fate once the Municipal House was completed; and, German preservationists encountered difficulties from Czech officials renovating existing German spaces. What projects were prioritized and approved by the city government, and for whom, enhanced one group’s control over it, while alienating and humiliating the other. With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I, Czechs were more aggressive in their efforts to purify supposedly foreign elements in the city. The Marian Column was torn down by a mob in 1919 and monuments to the former Emperor Franz Joseph and Field Marshal Joseph Radetzky were removed from their former locations in public spaces. Even – or of course! – the National Museum cleansed its pantheon of busts and statues of pieces depicting Franz Joseph I and his wife after 1918.

All of the above examples illustrate in various ways how Prague’s spatial politics were instituted in daily urban life. Early attempts to re-code Prague, such as the Hanka’s Manuscripts and his funeral, asserted that Czechs had an originary belonging to the city’s spaces. As a result, pre-existing public monuments erected under Habsburg rule became re-understood as foreign or strange. The rhetoric of Czech nationalism sought to eradicate Germans’ sense of belonging to Prague as a tactic to humiliate them and gain power for the nationalist cause. As other representational structures adopting a Czech iconography not only emerged in various public spaces, but also maintained an iconographical and semiotic dialogue with each other, Czechs could seize possession of public spaces for their national identity, essentially fulfilling the primordial promise of belonging. Once the Czech middle-class achieved dominance in the municipal government, architecture and urban design projects were fully subjected to their needs.

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nationalist concerns. Which projects were or were not realized and where enabled Czech nationalists to visualize their rising power in urban space in opposition to the fading power of the former German elite, often staging the latter’s humiliation publicly. After the creation of the Czechoslovak nation-state, those Habsburg “German” monuments were removed, either violently or peacefully, from public spaces as a means of achieving a pure Czech nation.

Despite the erasure of “German” monuments and language signs from public view, the aim was never to create a distinctly segregated city, although certain spaces were inhabited by exclusively Czech- or German-speakers. Czech attempts to alienate Germans from public space would have failed if Germans did not have contact with the spaces from which they were alienated. The removal of German language street signs illuminates the matter. The point was not to wholly exclude Germans from public spaces – in fact, most German-speakers would have been able to understand the Czech signs – but rather to express Czech domination of the city and develop or reinforce a sense of alienation among Germans.98 The humiliation that came along with having street signs in one’s native tongue removed, made conscious that one’s presence is now “strange” or “impure,” could only be effectual if the targets of such semiotic incursions were present in fought-over spaces. It is only humiliating if they must be forced to contend with the new reality that Prague is no longer their city, that the space they inhabit is subject to the wishes of another, oppositional group. Accordingly, the abundance of Czech iconography in the city, and the lesser amount of German national symbols in comparison, as well as the relative difficulty Germans had funding and constructing their own national spaces as opposed to Czechs, complements the work of Czech-only street signs on a larger scale.

Although Kafka abstracts from the precise locality in which Prague’s spatial politics unfold, he does not abstract the politics itself. In “Ein Altes Blatt,” the townsfolk occupy public space originally, as natives with a sense of history and belonging, while the nomads, a foreign element, bring disruption to their everyday life. By demonstrating what strikes the narrator as a cohesive group identity, the nomads conquer space: they change its use so that the square becomes an assertion of nomadic identity, rather than that of the townsfolk. As a result, the native townsfolk become alienated from their presumably primordial Land; whereas the nomads freely, not to mention shamelessly, inhabit space, subjecting it to their Natur and Art and expressing their power, the townsfolk’s interaction with space is radically changed. Public space, instead of serving as a conduit for performing a civil Lebensweise, transforms, or devolves, into a site of bestiality, primitivism, and subjugation to nomadic will. Now, entering the town square could lead to injury from wild horses and the lashes of whips. Space can no longer provide a forum for the townsfolks’ language as speech with the nomads is impossible and communication between townsfolk is largely restricted. Most detrimentally, one can experience total fear within private spaces entirely due to the goings-on in the town square. The narrator details one painful scene in which the nomads wild consumption of the butcher’s ox produces such screams from the animal that he cowers on the shop-floor, “head muffled in all the clothes and rugs and pillows [he] had.”

At this point, even he wishes to create barriers between himself and his town; the nomads have turned him against his own space. That the life-form in the Hauptstadt is now one of disorder entails that the townsfolk no longer belong to it. They cannot preserve or interact with it in a manner suiting their formerly cohesive and civilized linguistic community, a cypher

for nationhood and a linguistically-based “national” identity. Rather than the possessors of public space, they are victims of a new possession.

Once the nomads usurp belonging to public space, the townsfolk – without power, unable to re-assert themselves – encounter utter humiliation. In addition to the new terrors they face, they are forced into a servility to the nomads; they tolerate theft and give money to the butcher so that the nomads never lose a steady supply of meat. Thus, their humiliation even takes the form of enabling the ongoing pollution of their Lebensweise. Their coercion into indirectly aiding this pollution only serves to prove the point. Furthermore, the townsfolks’ humiliation is correlated to the nomads’ power; their suffering is a direct cause of the nomads’ assertion of expanding control over space and what can occur in it.

Purification processes have a hand to play as well in instituting the spatial politics. Public space witnesses an eradication of the old order – out of the once clean square arises a true stable (“[sie] haben einen wahren Stall gemacht”). The chief political representative of this order, der Kaiser, cannot even seem to exert it anymore, simply containing himself to the corridors of his palace. Simultaneously, the townsfolk yearn for the restoration of the old order and destruction of the new (“Wie lange werden wir diese Last und Qual ertragen?”). In short, they wish for the re-constitution of their Lebensweise in public space, a demand for purifying themselves of the nomads. Kafka understands spatial purification as a negative process, that is, one which necessitates removal of an undesirable or even despised element.

Kafka questions the spatial politics of Prague within the imagined space of the tale. To summarize: nomadic spatial possession dismantles the old imperial power; the Bevölkerung is alienated from their own (proper) territory; under a new order, they confront humiliation;

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although they demand purification of space, they and their Lebensweise are, in fact, caught in the process of becoming purified from space itself. Nevertheless, Kafka’s spatial politics identify a third agent which shaped its nationalized referent, that is, the role of Empire and state bureaucratic structures. Kafka encountered nationalisms as ideological practices that were fundamentally bound up with the state. From a historical perspective, Pieter Judson has framed the phenomenon well: “Nation and empire constituted each other in terms created by and for each other.”  

In other words, nationalisms in Austro-Hungary developed in response to and operated within the imperial institutional, legal, and constitutional structures of Empire; emerging concepts of nationhood in the late-nineteenth century were indebted to spaces for them created by Empire.

The issue of a bilingual bureaucracy in Bohemia illustrates the point. As a reaction to the 1897 Badeni ordinances, by which the Austrian Minister mandated the equality of Czech and German languages for the Cisleithanian civil service, a year-long political crisis assumed the form of ethnic violence, popular demonstrations, and protest riots in Prague and other Bohemian towns. Nationalist mobilization in and through urban public spaces became the means by which nationalists communicated with Empire. Most of the initial opposition came from Germans who refused to employ the ‘barbaric Czech idiom’ and therefore interpreted the laws as anti-German.  

Once Bohemian German protest Volkstage and conferences, as well as riots, eventually led to the resignation of Badeni, four days of urban violence erupted in Prague. All national and political demonstrations in the capital occurred either at Wenceslas Square or Am

103 Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 274.
Graben. The Germans’ celebrational march to the Deutsches Haus on Am Graben was interrupted by brawling between Czech and German students; draped in national symbols, Czech demonstrators smashed the windows of the New German Theater and the Deutsches Haus, as well as those of the Grand Hotel and Café Continental; business and homes identified as German or Jewish were looted; and, synagogues were not spared from the nationalist fury. After day four, martial law was declared in the city as extra troops arrived. Although the outcome favored the German position, the crisis exemplified how competing nationalist groups sought legitimacy from the state and petitioned to have their rights recognized through spatial mobilization. At this time, nationalist hopes for their ideal political and social order could not be achieved without imperial recognition.

In “Ein Altes Blatt,” Kafka points to the decay of imperial structures and power as the multiplier of nationalisms for it creates both the Volk and its enemies. Kafka opens the narrative with a passive construction to indicate that Empire has neglected its duties: “Es ist, als wäre viel vernachlässigt worden in der Verteidigung unseres Vaterlandes.” (“It is as though much has been neglected in the defense of our Fatherland.”) The narrator notes that the Vaterland has not been well defended, yet the passive grammatical construction shifts the responsibility to a larger body, transferring fault from townsfolk to Kaiser. Later in the narrative, we learn of an impotent imperial power: the palace gate remains closed, the guards hide behind lattice windows, the Kaiser, who typically removes himself by living in the innermost garden, is literally blocked from intervening. He can only view the goings-on with a sunken head. Kafka here textualizes a connection between imperial decay and the nomads’ arrival – “Der kaiserliche Palast hat die

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106 Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints*, 51 – 55, 70 – 73
Nomaden angelockt.”109 (“The imperial palace has allured the nomads.”) In other words, it is not for nothing that the nomads chose the *Haupstadt* for their new home. Moreover, placing responsibility for the nomads’ arrival upon the *Kaiser’s* palace, in contrast to the individual *Kaiser*, ascribes guilt to the very structures of imperial rule. The *Kaiser’s* complicity is nevertheless copied by the townsfolk since they provide the nomads with a frequent source of meat, after all.

If the powerlessness of the *Kaiser* brought the nomads, then so too did it create the conditions for the townsfolk to realize themselves as a distinct *Volk* in response. The *Kaiser*, according to our narrator, cannot prevent the devolution of customs in public space; rather, the responsibility to save the *Vaterland* is trusted to the craftsman and business-people of the nation (“*Uns Handwerken und Geschäftsleuten … anvertraut*”).110 The nation will only be redeemed by the efforts of everyday people, not a political elite; put another way, the *Vaterland* is entrusted to the common man for the survival of the national spirit infusing it, which in this case is one of a civilized people forged by culture, language, and common spirit. By the tale’s end, the narrator begins to conceive of his people as a national *Volk* with a distinct essence whose continuance is dependent upon such *Volk*. They exhibit a sense of *völkisch* unity by collecting money to support the *Fleischhauer*, who must deliver meat to the nomads.111 Written in 1919, Kafka’s text emerged after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy; he foresees how stronger national cultures arise from the rubble of Empire. Kafka’s “Blatt” clarifies Prague’s spatial politics: nationalisms laying claims to space did not emerge from some ether, but their existence is rather made possible by the inadequacies of dynastic rule.

The Nationalist Mirror-Culture of fin-de-siècle Prague

Informed by the context of German-Czech nationalist conflict, Ein Altes Blatt was written for and published in time for the Prague public to access. Accordingly, I propose that the text must be read with even more attention to how Kafka’s immediate audience would have understood the narrative. How does the text integrate the competing nationalist positions of Germans and Czechs? Kafka urges the reader to concentrate on the notion that German and Czech national identities actually reflected each other, rather than forging two wholly distinct understandings of self and other. The various means through which German and Czech nationalists mimicked each other in daily life I refer to as Prague’s nationalist mirror-culture, a notion explored most prominently by Vladimír Macura who noted Czechs imitation of and dependence on the German model for their own cultural development. The ambiguity of the narrator’s position in constructing national identity, in fact, textualizes this mirror-culture within the abstracted locality of the story. I will offer two readings of the text in light of both German and Czech positions.

If one is not careful, “Ein Altes Blatt” could simply read as a description, albeit an exaggerated one, of the Prague German perspective. I have already noted how the townsfolk represent a nation with history and that, at least in Austrian Cisleithania, German people, culture, and society was accepted as composing such a nation. Yet what of the issue of decline? The narrator states that each morning more nomads arrive. Not only does the cultural power of the townsfolk fade, but so too their physical presence. Should the nomadic occupation continue – it surely shows no signs of reversal – the townsfolk population faces at best a minority-status, and at worst extinction. Similarly, since the mid-nineteenth century the demographics of Prague had

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112 Agnew, “Czechs, Germans, Bohemians,” 68.
been changing increasingly in favor of Czechs. In 1857, more than one-third of citizens considered themselves primarily German-speakers; by 1910, however, only 7% of the urban population could be considered German-speakers. Once Czechs controlled nearly all of the local government by the mid-1880s, pushing out Germans which had staffed its bureaucracies since the Thirty Years War, the eventual social and political transformation of Bohemian society to Czech society was virtually inevitable.\textsuperscript{114} To aid that effort, immigrants to the city overwhelmingly came from Czech-speaking regions in Bohemia as Prague experienced industrial and population growth in the late-nineteenth century; in 1900, 93% percent of Prague’s immigrants were likely native Czech speakers, further condemning the Germans of Prague to minority-status.\textsuperscript{115} Outside the city hall in Old Town, Czech officials erected an ethnic “thermometer” measuring the relative sizes of the Czech and German population in 1889 to celebrate the decline of Germans and their language.\textsuperscript{116} Indeed, what one finds in the text – namely, Bourdieu’s thesis that the transformation of urban public space represents that of modern society – was present in everyday life as Prague’s public spaces became more and more coated in Czech national symbols.\textsuperscript{117}

Even the narrator’s underlying fear that the existence of the townsfolk is threatened by the nomads was reflected in Germans’ concerns. In 1884, spokesmen for the German community, whose middle-class felt unable to control their own future now outside governmental bodies, expressed that Czech adversaries were a menace to their existence, according to Gary B. Cohen’s research. Some contemporary commentators even asserted that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Cohen, \textit{The Politics of Ethnic Survival}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Cohen, \textit{Politics of Ethnic Survival}, 72.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Cohen, \textit{Politics of Ethnic Survival}, 65.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Nekula, “Constructing Slavic Prague,” 36.
\end{itemize}
Czechs simply wished to extinguish the capitals’ German minority. Likewise, German community leaders in Bohemia espoused views of Slavic languages and peoples as less developed, semi-barbarians against which German language and culture served as a barrier. The creation of a Czech/Slavic Other compounded as Germans considered them uncivilized, uncultured, even ‘Asian.’ The pervasiveness of this racist attitude can be seen in Ewald Baum’s 1908 article announcing that the Czech body structure betrays not a Slavic, but rather a Mongolian character. Such obnoxious beliefs were supported by German historiography in Bohemia which had ascribed to Czech peasants a rebellious and backward character, one cut off ‘by its language’ from the benefits of civilization.

Nonetheless, no matter how unique or superior Germans’ felt their national character to be, Czechs forged a reflective national identity: they too understood themselves as a civilized people whose existence was threatened by the forces of barbarism. As Czech nationalists sought to counter ethnic stereotypes from German sources, Czech national culture attempted to liberate itself from Germanness by imitating and equaling Germans; there was an effort to make Czech versions of everything of which Germans boasted – Czech national culture mirrored German high culture. The effort to parallel German identity originated in Czech historiography. In Palacky’s influential history of Bohemia, he wrote that not only had Czechs settled an empty land, but also were the first to build a state and civilization which functioned on the same basic principles as modern institutions and civic society. Hanka’s forged manuscripts helped Palacky to ground early Czech society as different from the one depicted in German sources.

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119 Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints*, 34.  
120 Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints*, 133.  
121 Agnew, “Czechs, Germans, Bohemians,” 58.  
122 Agnew, “Czechs, Germans, Bohemians,” 68.  
Claiming to be older than the *Niebelungenlied*, the manuscripts celebrated the Slavic people for their peace-loving qualities, loyalty, fraternity, and defense of customs and moral values; simultaneously, the manuscripts portrayed medieval Germans as aggressive, yet cowardly invaders, whose feudal system and principle of subjection is contrasted to the high cultural level of early Czechs.\(^{124}\) Palacky’s ancient Czech civilization, given life by Hanka’s “discovery,” apparently embraced the values of nineteenth-century liberalism, which until then had largely been a project reserved for Austrian German officialdom. Palacky’s popularizers and imitators then fixed this grandiose vision of Czech history into the Czech historical imagination. \(^{125}\)

In Prague’s public spaces, Czech nationalists reinforced this view of their history through representational structures. Nationalist architecture borrowed the formal language of imperial architecture to assert the civilization of Czechs. Following the impetus of Vienna’s new Ringstrasse, the more autonomous municipal councils of Austria-Hungary erected grand public buildings, especially new theaters and opera houses, in historicist styles; the surface intention of such projects was to project the municipality’s greatness and the town’s particular achievements, yet the buildings amounted to a visual statement of commonality and uniformity within the Empire.\(^{126}\) The Austrian firm Fellner and Helmer handled the construction of many theaters, concert halls, palaces, hotels, and apartments across the Empire in the common style.\(^{127}\)

Considering the national identities of Prague, we can add that the municipality also adopted the historicist architectural vocabulary of Austro-Hungary to appropriate its civilized sensibility for the Czech nation. In his design for the National Theater, Josef Zítek drew on the Wiener Staatsoper’s U-shaped form situated around a public circulation system as well as other theaters

\(^{124}\) Agnew, “Czechs, Germans, Bohemians,” 68 – 69.
\(^{125}\) Agnew, “Czechs, Germans, Bohemians,” 69.
\(^{126}\) Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 345.
\(^{127}\) Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 345.
in German-speaking regions; to cultivate a Czech element, Zitek incorporated the national imagery of Prague and Christian iconography found in baroque churches throughout the Czech lands, settling on a neo-Renaissance design. The National Museum, completed in the late nineteenth-century, similarly harnessed the historicist language of neo-Renaissance architecture for the same nationalist purposes. For a well-traveled cosmopolitan such as Kafka, the irony would have been apparent: the ubiquitous historicist urban architecture of the Empire suggesting national uniqueness, at least in building design, was illusory.

Public exhibitions and works in Prague complemented the task of public buildings in asserting the Czech nation’s rightful belonging to civilization. From May to August 1891, “One Hundred Years of Progress” was celebrated at Prague’s Provincial Jubilee Exhibition, featuring the science and technology of machines as the main evidence of progress in Bohemia. Bedrich Münzberger’s Industrial Palace (figure 23) dominating the exhibition site at Stromovka Park evoked the forward march of progress by juxtaposing baroque curves alongside the straight lines of modern iron and glass construction. A clock-tower crowned past and present architectural forms as the symbol of the future. The exhibition explicitly advanced the progress and civilization of an exclusively Czech nation, especially once German middle-class leaders boycotted the event. This reading of the event became reinforced through Czech-language newspapers informing the public. Furthermore, Cathleen Giustino’s work has demonstrated that the entire Finis Ghetto effort extended the Exhibition’s aims – to bolster Czech’s understanding of themselves as bringers of civilization and progress. Ghetto clearance belonged to the wider development of die aktive Stadt in Austro-Hungary as municipalities sought to bring

129 Cathleen M. Giustino, Tearing Down Prague’s Jewish Town (East European Monographs, 2003), 65.
130 Giustino, Tearing Down Prague’s Jewish Town, 66 – 67.
public hygiene and transportation to improve urban life.\textsuperscript{131} That type of urban renewal usurped the task previously belonging to the German-dominated bureaucracy, one which gave substance to the claims Germans made about their role as civilizers.

Even the imperial orientation of Austrian German identity Czechs attempted to imitate. Of course, this effort was made in part for purposes of political appeasement. At a celebratory meeting of the city council before the December 1898 official jubilee, Young Czech mayor Jan Podlipny praised \textit{Kaiser} Franz Josef for his contributions not only to Czech national and political development, but also for its spiritual and material betterment.\textsuperscript{132} Podlipny’s remarks, although likely motivated by a desire to appear grateful before the official celebrations in Prague, demonstrate that Czechs recognized the godhead of the imperial state as a savior, or at the least one who could save the Czech nation from German ‘tyranny.’ This particular outlook on the dynastic head had, in fact, lingered since the 1880s after Franz Josef emerged as a grandfatherly figure, watching over imperial society, of unprecedented popularity to the peoples of Austro-Hungary.\textsuperscript{133} This perspective is in fact similar to how the townsfolk view their \textit{Kaiser} as a savior insofar as they look to him to drive away the nomads (“Der kaiserliche Palast … versteht es aber nicht, [die Nomaden] wieder zu vertreiben”).\textsuperscript{134} But the efforts to create a bond between the Czech national community and empire on par with that of the Germans did not stop there. For many years, Czech publicists boasted of a stronger primordial connection to Austria than Germans. An example from the newspaper \textit{Pokrok} (Progress) should suffice:

\begin{quote}
we [the Czechs], the roots of Austria, are fixed deeper in the soil than you [the Germans], the branches and leaves. Three centuries ago the agreement of our
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{131} Giustino, \textit{Tearing Down Prague’s Jewish Town}, 8.
\textsuperscript{132} Wingfield, \textit{Flag Wars and Stone Saints}, 112.
\textsuperscript{133} Judson, \textit{The Habsburg Empire}, 341.
\textsuperscript{134} Kafka, “Ein Altes Blatt,” 309.
\end{flushright}
nation created this empire … [and] the continuance of this empire … will depend on our agreement.¹³⁵

Not only did Czechs construct a primordial belonging to Austria as well as Bohemia, but also claimed that empire was dependent upon their nation for survival. Thus, Czechs infused their national identity with an imperial Austrian element, which could serve as a code for modernity, culture, and civilization.

Similar to Cisleithanian Germans, Czechs claimed to occupy a state of civilization while denigrating their national enemy as vicious alien oppressors. In this case, among the national enemies of the Czech nation Jews counted just as much as Germans due to the high acculturation of Jews to the German community. Especially in Prague, Jews constituted a major portion of the German-language minority. Jews living in the Old and New Town accounted for around two-thirds of all those who reported German as their *Umgangssprache* between the 1890 and 1910 census.¹³⁶ Moreover, nearly half of the German-speaking residents in the inner city were Jewish in 1900.¹³⁷ As users of the German-language, both German-Jews and ethnic Germans became identified with forces of Czech national suppression. Over time, Czech nationalists associated the German language with ‘arrogant stupidity, despising the language of [the Czech] fatherland, denigrating its customs, rites, and efforts … [boasting of stupidity] with a foreigner’s words.’¹³⁸ Indeed, the image of the German/German-Jewish Other as a barbaric outsider enabled their dehumanization in public discourse. In his “To the Czech Language,” Antonin Puchmajer attacked Germans as the ‘cruel foreigner’ who drove Czechs out of ‘offices, schools, councils, the theater,’ well in line with images of Germans as colonizers of Bohemia.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Štaif, “The Image of the Other,” 93.
threatened the existence of Czechs in everyday life, colonizing their nation, then Jews were allies of the alien forces oppressing Czechs in their own land.\textsuperscript{140} Czech cartoonists popularized hatred against and fear of Germans in local media by caricaturing them as wild boars, crocodiles, dragons, tigers, and wolves; moreover, they collapsed Germans and Jews into a single non-Slavic enemy, using Hebrew letters to identify the German Casino in cartoons.\textsuperscript{141} In contrast to civilized Czechs, Germans and German-Jews were reduced to monstrous and intolerable foreign elements, their lack of civility matched by their lack of humanity.

With these German and Czech mirroring constructions of Self and Other in mind, it becomes apparent how the narrator simultaneously represents both German and Czech positions. As the creator of national identity in the text, the narrator presents a perspective that, within the Prague context, was mobilized in both national camps; both German and Czech readers could adopt the outlook of the narrator. Kafka thus reveals how both nationalist views, founded upon the same essential beliefs about a civilized self against a hostile, uncivilized, even un-human other, become interchangeable. Furthermore, the radically opposed behaviors of the townsfolk and nomads parody the exaggerations Germans and Czechs would advance when emphasizing their own civilized identity and denigrating the other. The text even portrays how each group held a similar understanding of the state’s role in nationalist conflict; the townsfolk are disappointed by the \textit{Kaiser} yet hope to receive imperial aid. At the end of the monarchical reign, both Czechs and Germans could have legitimately claimed to have been either abandoned or saved by the Empire at various times. Nationalist myths are not unique to a national culture, but from Kafka’s stance featured a more universal form in the creation of national collective memories in Bohemia.

\textsuperscript{141} Wingfield, \textit{Flag Wars and Stone Saints}, 51 – 52.
Ein Altes Blatt and National Historiography in Bohemia

The discipline responsible for bringing the nationality question to the fore in the Prague Alltagsleben was history. Nationalist narratives concerning deep, conflict-laden national divisions and their apparently historic roots pervaded public discussion in the nineteenth-century. Competing historical arguments for either Czech or German supremacy in Bohemia were dispersed in public life, informing popular histories, polemics in the press, caricatures, and street songs; moreover, they were visualized in the architecture and statue program of Prague and mobilized in nationalist demonstrations. As nationalist tensions heightened after 1848, historical facts occupied a subordinate position to the desired ideological effects. In “Ein Altes Blatt,” Kafka articulates the fundamental pillars of this historical scholarship, which relied upon national origins myths to construct ethnic identity and conflict, while formulating his own contributions to and criticisms of Bohemian history.

Regarding the form, “Ein Altes Blatt” challenges claims of representing history as age-old. Although I find Eva Horn’s assertion that “Ein Altes Blatt” is “nichts als ein Überbleibsel aus einer unvordenklichen Vorzeit” (“nothing than a vestige from an immemorial prehistory”) to be quite an exaggeration, she appropriately calls attention to the sense that the text is intended to be read as a document of a past age. Leaving it at that – accepting the setting as some prehistorical scenario – misses the point however. The “Blatt” no doubt functions as the last recorded history of an age-old, vanished society, yet it resists divorce from distinctly modern issues, that is, the creation and expression of national identity in the public-sphere. In this regard,

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142 I agree with Štaif, who writes: “The development of historiography in the Bohemian Lands in the nineteenth century confirmed that it was precisely this discipline that had a major impact on modern process of nation creation, the emergence of the modern ‘imagined community’” (98).
143 Cohen, Politics of Ethnic Survival, 3.
144 Štaif, “The Image of the Other,” 92.
the text is related to other modern histories claiming a pure representation of a bygone era. Consider Palacky’s history of Bohemia based on Hanka’s forged manuscripts – his glorious medieval, Slavic Bohemia before the German arrival was itself based on invented pieces of literature motivated by the nineteenth-century romantic impulse to forge a national community as well as the political impulse towards liberal democracy.¹⁴⁷ “Ein Altes Blatt” is not so old or pre-historical, but rather raises how written histories are infused with modern concerns. If “Ein Altes Blatt” contains Kafka’s reflections on history, then it understands historical scholarship as a literature which communicates above all its own temporality; in other words, the texts’ own “situatedness” in time and place as opposed to the alleged “eternity” of its contents.

Regarding substance, Kafka’s “Ein Altes Blatt” reduces historically articulated nationalist myths to their fundamental form. Providing the origin of a conflict between two ethnic groups, Kafka mimics the eternal struggle between Germans and Czechs theorized by historians.

Published after the 1848 uprising, Frantisek Palacky’s Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě included a new preface in which he presented to the reading public the ‘continuous encounter and struggle between Slavic and German culture’ as the driving force of Bohemian history. In the ensuing text, Germans appear as perpetual rivals during times of peace and direct enemies in times of war.¹⁴⁸ Frantisek Palacky’s negative characterization of Germans achieved considerable long-term influence, disseminating the image of the hostile German Other that survived in the Czech mentality even after Hanka’s manuscripts, upon which he relied, were exposed as forgeries.¹⁴⁹ Although German society in Bohemia lacked a central figure or text authoritatively defining their national history akin to the Czech Palacky, Ludwig Schlesinger’s

¹⁴⁷ Agnew, “Czechs, Germans, Bohemians,” 69.
1869 *Geschichte Böhmen* is the closest popular historiographical work solidifying the Bohemian German national historical consciousness. It serves as an artifact of arguments which had incrementally entered the Bohemian German historical outlook. Beginning with the Christianization of the Bohemian Lands during the Counter-Reformation, Schlesinger characterizes Czechs in Bohemian history as cultural followers, national competitors, and direct political enemies of Germans.\textsuperscript{150} The struggle implied by Schlesinger as age-old would have been relatable to his contemporary readers. That German language and culture faced a siege from “colonizing” Czechs was a narrative on full display at numerous statue unveilings of Joseph II across Bohemia and it received even more legitimacy whenever Czechs attacked either German-speakers or representations of Germandom, such as monuments, communal buildings, and theatres.\textsuperscript{151}

Kafka’s text additionally incorporates not only how Bohemian historiography understood history itself, but also how it conceived of its function as a discipline. The struggle between townsfolk and nomads textualizes the contemporaneous notion of history – though it originated in the Enlightenment – as a history of nations, considered unique ethnic wholes with territory. While the townsfolk and their customs already occupy a territory, the nomads should be understood as an ethnic group who are on the verge of territorializing their emerging culture. In the process, the townsfolk encounter what would have been understood as national oppression by which their language and customs can no longer be expressed in public space, their own territory. Since the townsfolk realize themselves as a national Volk in response to nomadic bestiality as well as the Kaiser’s inability to intervene, “Ein Altes Blatt” coalesces with Czech historical scholarship’s motive to reinforce national consciousness in the present.

\textsuperscript{150} Štaif, “The Image of the Other,” 94.
\textsuperscript{151} Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints*, 3, 11 – 12, 133 – 4.
This task was given equal weight with history’s other role as a source of instruction on the strengths and weakness of national character. Kafka writes that from the “stillen, immer ängstlich rein gehaltenen Platz” the nomads produce “einen wahren [true] Stall,” thus suggesting that the nomads have excavated the truth lurking beneath the seemingly civilized and cultured urban space. The text, rather than merely decrying the nomads’ behavior, criticizes the “life-form” of the townsfolk. The narrator’s brief history clearly displays signs of remorse regarding the townsfolks’ contentment with their civilized, cultured Lebensweise; out of the resulting sense of self-superiority they did not concern themselves with their Vaterland’s defense. The weakness of the townsfolk and their civil society is mirrored by the decay of their overarching imperial state, which has invited the destruction of the townsfolk. The structures of the state have failed to hold at bay the forces of nationalisms. The sentinels who once marched ceremonially hide behind barred windows, paralleling the Kaiser’s decision to primarily live in the palace’s innermost garden. The emptiness of imperial reality is nicely articulated by the image of the palace gate: “Das Tor bleibt verschlossen.” (“The gate remains sealed.”) Kafka makes a correction to Bohemian historical scholarship: to those who understood the German-Czech conflict as age-old, Kafka wishes to point out the modern history of the Habsburgerreich in national-driven strife.

In the final lines, Kafka articulates that the fatal weakness of the townsfolk rests in a misunderstanding on the part of the state. The narrator writes: “Uns Handwerken und Geschäftsleuten ist die Rettung des Vaterlands anvertraut; wir sind aber einer solchen Aufgabe nicht gewachsen; haben uns doch auch nie gerühmt, dessen fähig zu sein. Ein Mißverständnis

152 Štaif, “The Image of the Other,” 85 – 89.
ist es, und wir gehen daran zugrunde."

He clarifies that it is a misunderstanding (Mißverständnis) to consider that the Volk can redeem the Vaterland from nomadic tyranny; they neither grew with (gewachsen) such a responsibility (Aufgabe) nor had they ever lauded (gerühmt) their capability (fähig) of it. Although the responsibility should lie in imperial power, so implies the narrator, the whole Empire has only created the conflict without the ability, or will, to solve it, rendering it a mere shell of its former authority. The ruin of the townsfolk and their Lebensweise is thus due to the Kaiser’s misunderstanding. Having wrongly entrusted the Vaterland’s defense to the townsfolk, he has made them suffer because of it. Such a misunderstanding would have been all too familiar to Germans and Czechs who, in the perceived absence of imperial protection, instituted their own forms of community defense. By inscribing this misunderstanding within the discourse of Bohemian histories, Kafka translates an ethnic group’s relation to the imperial state as a matter of national identity.

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II. Digging into the Soil: [Cisleithanian] Germans between Imperial and *Völkisch* Identity$^{156}$

Since the eighteenth-century, the Jewish community in Bohemia had long favored acculturation to German society and culture in response to Joseph II’s liberal *Toleranzpatent*. This phenomena of Central European Jewish cultural development and its reasons have been well-studied.$^{157}$ I raise this fact now primarily as a clarification for Kafka’s intense scrutiny of the precise ways Germans constructed their identity before and during the *fin-de-siècle*. A Bohemian German-Jewish writer and civil servant of the German-dominated, imperial inner administration, Kafka would have been all too familiar with the tension between the imperial and national(ist) poles, around which German identity in Bohemia revolved between the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In his fiction, Kafka is attuned to the way certain spatialities either reinforce or frustrate the identity a group forms for itself. At bottom, “Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft” centers on the triadic relation between monarch (center), imperial administration, and imperial subject (periphery) to scrutinize imperial German identity. His investigation emphasizes Austro-Hungary’s civilizing mission and its obstacles, the privilege which Germans ascribed to themselves, and the decay of Empire. The vast imperial space meanwhile serves as the stage upon which the contradictions of German identity unfold. With “Der Bau,” Kafka is concerned with the transformation of German identity from its imperial, that

$^{156}$ The development of German national identity during the nineteenth-century should not be treated as monolithic. Due to the dissemination of the German language across Europe, the national identity of Germans evolved differently in different places, though overlaps of course existed. When I discuss German national identity in this chapter, I primarily refer to German identity in Cisleithania, the Austrian-administered section of Austro-Hungary, of which Bohemia consisted of a large portion. These were Germans, who despite their disconnection from the German nation-state nevertheless identified with a shared definition of Germanness. One aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how this definition emerged and evolved in Cisleithania.

is multinational, roots into something more overtly nationalistic, inseparable from the private, enclosed, and labyrinthine space of the burrow. The narrator, a creature responsible for the burrow’s construction, is the vehicle through which Kafka demonstrates how elements of the imperial orientation remained and became revised in its nationalist form. While matters of civilizing and privilege do not disappear, Kafka identifies spatial segregation, blood-and-soil thinking as well as the creation of a national enemy as new components of Bohemian German identity ripe for criticism, and parody.

**Imperial Dreams**

The fulfillment of a simple task, the delivery of a message from the *Kaiser*, is the point of departure for Kafka to probe imperial order. The parable begins with a direct, second-person address to the inferior imperial subject, the recipient of the *Kaiser*’s message:

Der Kaiser … hat Dir, dem Einzelnen, dem jämmerlichen Untertanen, dem winzig vor der kaiserlichen Sonne in die fernste Ferne geflüchteten Schatten, gerade Dir hat der Kaiser von seinem Sterbebett aus eine Botschaft gesendet.\(^{158}\)

The Emperor … has sent a message to you, the humble subject, the insignificant shadow cowering in the remotest distance before the imperial sun; the Emperor from his deathbed has sent a message to you alone.\(^{159}\)

Kafka applies particular emphasis to assessing the lowness of the subject before the *Kaiser*. The “to you” (*Dir*) is nothing more than a despicable or pathetic underling (“dem jämmerlichen Untertanen”), a minuscule, having-fled shadow before the imperial sun (“dem winzig vor der kaiserlichen Sonne … gelüchteten Schatten”). Similar to “Ein Altes Blatt,” Kafka notes the distance between capital and frontier: the subject resides in the remotest distance (“in die fernste

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Ferne”), whereas the Kaiser rests in the “Residenzstadt,” the royal capital. Kafka even goes so far as to describe the Sun as “kaiserlich” (imperial). Precisely from his deathbed does the Kaiser, the one who initiates a responsibility that must be fulfilled bureaucratically, send a message to “dem jämmerlichen Untertanen,” the absolutely peripheral being of Empire. This urgent and significant message – the Kaiser indeed asks his messenger to repeat it before setting off – from the center of imperial power to the subjugated one, at such a critical time sets in motion a farce of imperial administration and its aims.

The transmission of the message across the Empire is Kafka’s device for addressing the Austrian state’s mission to civilize its farther regions. Indeed, the historical relation between center and periphery in Austro-Hungary was framed in terms of civilizational differences. Ernst von Schwarzer’s paen to Austrian absolutism, published in 1857, is useful as a singular example embracing and disseminating this perspective among German liberals. Geld und Gut in Neuösterreich argued that Austria’s political centralization, supplemented with the liberal cultural ideology of Schwarzer’s generation, helped ‘the eastern peoples [of Austria] to make even greater progress, and to jump over whole developmental periods.’ The success Schwarzer ascribed to Austrian state activism was entirely due to Alexander von Bach’s bureaucratic architecture for Franz Joseph’s authoritarian regime. Without state organs which could “intervene positively and as rapidly and efficiently as possible in every corner of empire,” the civilizing mission lauded by Schwarzer could not be realized. This Habsburg project renewed itself through anthropological exhibitions and public architecture celebrating the cultures of Empire as well as educational and cultural/technical advances, such as the inauguration of the

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162 Judson, The Habsburg Empire, 223.
German-language Franz-Josephs-Universität Czernowitz in 1875. Furthermore, a condescending assumption of the instrumental superiority of German culture fueled the Austrian state’s belief in the perfectibility of the non-German Völker of Empire. The Kaiser’s Botschaft should then be understood within this larger context: the “message” sent from the center to the periphery was not so much a call, but an imperial intervention intended to develop the periphery in the (self-)image of the civilized center.

If the message refers to this ambitious project, then the messenger is the one who carries it out, crystallizing the imperial German self-image as a privileged nation of civilizers. As the language of the inner administration, German was used for inter-bureaucratic communication between the crownlands and Vienna; in other words, through this language alone would the eastern peoples of the Empire attain a state of civilization. The high status accorded to German language and culture, which was raised during my discussion of Prague’s mirror-culture, came to be perceived as a privilege exercised by an entire, albeit imagined, nation rather than certain educated speakers of German. Pieter Judson introduces the example of Habsburg bureaucrats in Galicia scorned as “Germans” and accused of Germanization, even though many nevertheless came from Czech-speaking backgrounds.

What insight does Kafka’s messenger (Bote) lend into the self-image of this imagined nation of imperial Germans? The messenger receives his assignment at a grand, ceremonial moment as the Kaiser dies:

Und vor der ganzen Zuschauerschaft seines Todes–alle hindernden Wände werden niedergebrochen und auf den weit und hoch sich schwingenden Freitreppen stehen im Ring die Großen des Reichs–vor allen diesen hat er den Boten abgefertigt.

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164 Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 224 – 225
165 Kafka, “Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft,” 305.
[And] before the assembled spectators of his death—all the obstructing walls have been broken down, and on the spacious and loftily mounting open staircases stand in a ring the great princes of Empire—before all these he has delivered his message.166

The messenger receives the honor of carrying out the final wish of the dying Kaiser; the prestige of this assignment is quite weighty since not only was it delivered before the entire audience of the Kaiser’s death (“vor der ganzen Zuschauerschaft”), but also before the greatest of the Empire, who stand in a ring on an expansive and loftily mounting flight of stairs.

Complementing this regal space is the erasure of all the obstructing walls (“alle hindernden Wände werden niedergebrochen”), which both signifies the death of the Kaiser, while initiating the messenger into a vast space free of obstacles.

At this stage of the text does a key contradiction that Kafka associates with imperial Germanness emerge. The messenger is again the victim of a misunderstanding, yet, unlike the townsfolk of “Ein Altes Blatt,” it is he who has misunderstood, not the Kaiser. Precisely as the ultimate figure of imperial rule perishes, as imperial walls begin to crumble, does the messenger receive a promise of privilege, a promise that Kafka signals to be false. Despite the oncoming collapse of imperial authority, the messenger sets off “auf den Weg” (“on the way”).167 He will serve the Kaiser even if there is no Kaiser to serve. Kafka describes the messenger as a powerful, tireless man (“ein kräftiger, unermüdlicher Mann”) who physically mediates and navigates through various peoples and places (“einmal diesen, einmal den andern Arm vorstreckend schafft er sich Bahn durch die Menge”).168 Parodying the self-image of imperial Germans, the messenger is the one who brings imperial prestige and superiority to and through imperial peoples and spaces. Even his banging on the door of the subject is described as lordly (“herrliche

166 Kafka, “An Imperial Message,” 5.
Schlagen seiner Fäuste”).169 Should he encounter resistance, the messenger merely points to the sign of the sun on his breast so that “[er] kommt leicht vorwärts, wie kein anderer.” (“he comes easily forward, like no other.”)170 Supposedly belonging fully to the vastness of Empire, the imperial badge assures to make his way easier, like no other. Yet Kafka suggests that the messenger can more easily traverse not only a physical distance, but also a civilizational gap by including vorwärts in the context of imperial administration.

The sense that no other person or group of people could access imperial spaces (or a high civilized state) as easily as Germans was enshrined in their self-made Staatsvolk identity. As a “people of the state,” Germans perceived their language as interregional and international, securing it a status above the mere regional languages of Empire, such as Czech.171 This conception of German identity, favored by liberals and centralists during the 1860s, asserted that German nationalism could not be equated with that of Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, etc., precisely because acculturating to German culture and society bonded one to the aims of the multinational, multiethnic, imperial state. Through German-language education and participation in their high cultural traditions, one abandoned the sectarian pursuit of nationalism, earning the privilege of serving the interests of the entire imperial state apparatus. Although the success of Czech nationalists led Germans to gradually substitute their privileged Staatsvolk identity for the nationalism of their “unworthy opponents,” Joseph Roth, after Austro-Hungary’s collapse, managed to articulate finely the promise of belonging to the Staatsvolk: “I was just as much at

171 Judson, The Habsburg Empire, 297
home in Zlotograd as I was in Sipolje or Vienna.”\textsuperscript{172} Entirely like the messenger, if one promotes the interests of the imperial state, then one is conceivably “at home” anywhere in its territories.

However, it is precisely this allegedly unlimited belonging that Kafka targets for scrutiny. The messenger points to a badge whose source of authority has perished; it is an empty symbol, meaningless for everyone except its bearer. The messenger will be unable to fulfill his duty because of obstruction from the many peoples of Empire as well as the omnipresent imperial structures. Immediately after narrating how the messenger’s way is easier, Kafka pivots:

\begin{quote}
Aber die Menge ist so groß; ihre Wohnstätten nehmen kein Ende … wie nutzlos müht er sich ab; immer noch zwängt er sich durch die Gemächer des innersten Palastes; niemals wird er sie überwinden; und gelänge ihm dies, nichts wäre gewonnen; die Treppen hinab müßte er sich kämpfen; und gelänge ihm dies, nichts wäre gewonnen; die Höfe wären zu durchmessen; und nach den Höfen der zweite umschließende Palast; und so weiter durch Jahntausende…\textsuperscript{173}
\end{quote}

But the multitudes are so vast; their dwellings have no end … how [uselessly] does he wear out his strength; still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them; and if he succeeded in that nothing would be [won]; he must next fight his way down the stair; and if he succeeded … nothing would be [won]; the courts would still have to be crossed; and after the courts the second outer palace; and once more stairs and courts; and once more another palace; and so on for thousands of years …\textsuperscript{174}

Even within the royal palace, the crowd (“die Menge”) is too large, their dwelling houses taking no end. That the Empire cannot prevent its many Völker from occupying this interior, exclusive space, having permitted the establishment of dwelling sites (“Wohnstätten”), counts as another sign of the former’s impotence. The messenger likewise has lost the ability to effectively mediate

\textsuperscript{173} Kafka, “Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft,” 305-6.
\textsuperscript{174} Kafka, “An Imperial Message”, 5.
with imperial subjects. Still more problematic for the messenger are the numerous imperial structures through which the messenger must journey to deliver the message. Uselessly he toils through the rooms of the innermost palace, never able to overcome them (“wie nutzlos müht er sich ab; immer noch zwängt er sich durch die Gemächer des innersten Palastes; niemals wird er sie überwinden”). Even if he did – and it is clear he does not – nothing would be won; still the messenger must descend the stairs, then traverse the distance posed by the imperial courts, and after that the courts of the second surrounding palace, and again stairs and courts and a palace, and so on for centuries. Kafka’s verbs emphasize the struggle with imperial space the messenger’s task entails: he worms his way through the inner palace (“zwängt er sich durch die Gemächer”); movement through them counts as an overcoming (“niemals wird er sie überwinden”); and, he does not climb stairs but rather fights his way down them (“Treppen hinab müßte er sich kämpfen”).

Precisely at the source of his privilege, does the imperial messenger not belong, struggling against imperial space itself. The one whose way is made “easier” by the imperial badge must struggle to even climb stairs. His privilege does not secure his status as some master of the imperial dominion, but rather constitutes a promise frustrated by imperial peoples and spaces. In fact, Kafka grants the “[jämmerlicher Untertan]” more of an ability to move through imperial spaces than the ennobled messenger. The imperial subject is introduced as the “vor der kaiserlichen Sonne in die fernste Ferne gelüchteten Schatten,” that is, a shadow that has already flown (“gelüchteten Schatten”). Using the accusative after the two-way preposition “in,” Kafka clarifies that the shadow has flown into or towards the remotest distance (“in die fernste Ferne”) in front of the imperial (“kaiserlich”) sun. In stark contrast, should the messenger reach an open field, how would he fly (“Öffnete sich freies Feld, wie würde er fliegen”). The point, however, is
precisely that he will neither reach such a field nor fly once he gets there, whereas the subject has already flown. This reversal of privilege, from administrator to subject, again sets forth the collapse of imperial authority in the context of spatial movement.

The hindrances to the messenger’s movement are, in fact, the tangible results of the imperial civilizing mission itself. Blocking his way are the numerous courts, palaces, and stairs that comprise the imperial complex, although “numerous” hardly captures the extent of their expansiveness. After providing a brief overview of the messenger’s overwhelmingly tedious route, Kafka writes:

… und so weiter durch Jahrtausende; und stürzte er endlich aus dem äußersten Tor—aber niemals, niemals kann es geschehen—liegt erst die Residenzstadt vor ihm…\textsuperscript{175}

… and so on for [centuries]; and if at last he should burst through the outermost gate— but never, never can that happen—the imperial capital would lie before him…\textsuperscript{176}

It would take the messenger centuries to finally overcome the repeating edifices of imperial rule; even if he would reach the outermost gate he would still have the entire Residenzstadt to cross, and Kafka is clear that “never, never can it occur” (“niemals, niemals kann es geschehen”). The messenger, who cannot make it through the chambers of the innermost palace let alone arrive at the remotest distance of Empire, runs up against the infinite multiplication of imperial structures. The vastness of imperial space, comprised of the numberless buildings and complexes through which rule is administered, prevents the message’s arrival at the periphery.

The fundamental paralysis of the messenger – he is stuck after barely even starting – should be read as Kafka’s criticisms of the vast Austrian imperial bureaucracy, which he served during his tenure at the Worker’s Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia. As

\textsuperscript{175} Kafka, Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft, pp. 305 – 306
\textsuperscript{176} Kafka, An Imperial Message, pp. 5.
communication and transportation infrastructures rapidly modernized around 1880, the functions of the imperial state changed to suit the needs and desires of its citizens. The Austro-Hungarian government responded to expanding infrastructures and public entitlements, including railway, telegraph, and postal development, public schooling, welfare benefits, work and health insurance, etc., by increasing the number of bureaucrats to oversee these new responsibilities, and then more bureaucrats to oversee the efficacy of those bureaucrats. The state expanded into the everyday lives of imperial subjects as bureaucracy birthed more bureaucracy, from the local town hall to the imperial ministry, instituting a “maze of legal standards from workplace safety to public health to transportation to conditions of emigration.” Contemporaneous to the expansion of bureaucracies was the triumph of historicist public buildings across the imperial lands, tying provincial centers from Graz to Prague to Zagreb to Budapest to Czernowitz together under an architecturally-based imperial uniformity of neo-Renaissance, neo-Baroque, and neo-Classical styles (figures 24–6). In the smaller settlements, one could find a coffee house, tobacconist shop, or a railway station adorned with either the Habsburg color scheme or insignia. The legal power of Empire was, thus, supplemented by an equally vast and dominant visual power. Again, Roth is helpful when understanding the effect of this process: “even landscapes, fields, nations, races … of the most widely differing sorts are bound to submit to the perfectly natural dominion of a powerful force with the ability to bring near what is remote, to domesticate what is foreign and to unite what seems to be flying apart.” Broad imperial interventions to achieve a modern civilization is a form of domination, assimilating the peripheries to the center. In Kafka’s text, written after the monarchy had collapsed, the Empire’s

178 Ibid., pp. 345 – 346.
179 Ibid., pp. 347.
180 Roth, Emperor’s Tomb, pp. 38 – 39.
attempt to intervene across its boundaries, indicated by the presence of uniform, ubiquitous structures tied to imperial power, is responsible for the messenger’s stasis. In other words, the imperial desire to intervene everywhere leads to an inability to do so anywhere.

Kafka again describes an imperial power that has lost all meaning. The Kaiser, in his final order, assigned a task for an imperial subject characterized by the demeaning adjective jämmerlich. That his last wish was spent on a despicable subject is not a sign that the Kaiser exercises special regard for his citizens, but rather that he cannot conceive of a more meaningful task, emphasizing his limited powers. Moreover, he assigned a meaningless task that could not even be completed – the Empire can no longer fulfill a basic postal assignment. Having emanated from a dead man, the message itself serves as the symbolic kernel of imperial emptiness; after all, neither the reader nor the Untertan will ever learn of its substance. Furthermore, if the messenger were to ever see the Residenzstadt, his view would be rather apocalyptic: “die Mitte der Welt, hochgeschüttet voll ihres Bodensatzes” (“the center of the world, crammed to bursting with its own sediment”).181 The royal capital is nothing more than a visual representation of imperial wreckage.

The narrative fundamentally levels a peripheral challenge to the center. At the texts’ end, Kafka establishes that the preceding failure, that is, the inability of the messenger to ever reach the subject, was merely the daydream of the Untertan, who merely dreamt the narrative to themselves by their window one evening. (“Du aber sitzt an Deinem Fenster und erträumst sie Dir, wenn der Abend kommt.”)182 The subject parodies Empire, subjugating it, in fact, to mockery by revealing imperial contradictions. In the private mind, the subject subtly reverses the typical power dynamics between center and periphery, to which he calls attention in the opening

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lines. Only the Untertan’s dream of Empire has any reality; the Empire itself is on its deathbed. Kafka reveals that, in fact, the center of imperial rule, the Kaiser and his bureaucratic organs, is under the thumb of its remote subjects. Through dreaming, the subject finds that the retreat from the vast expanse of imperial space is a retreat further into it. Kafka defines imperial subjectivity, by which the subject carves out a private, personal space before “der kaiserlichen Sonne,” as the transitory criticisms of Empire one makes to themselves and ascribes to that subjectivity more reality than Empire could possess. Kafka therefore identifies the peripheral power of nations as that which will emerge from the ruins of the imperial center.

Written in the year after Franz Joseph’s death and near the monarchy’s end, the text focuses on its consequences for Germans in Austrian-administered Cisleithania. As the Volk of the imperial state, Germans are represented in “Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft” as victims of their own creation. An empire of their making has left peoples and structures over which they can no longer preside; phrased differently, imperial peoples and spaces now frustrate the movement of the Staatvolk, rather than submit to it. Their cosmopolitan self-image as civilizers whose imperial loyalty and service grants them belonging to a transnational homeland lacks substance without an imperial head of state, or even a state itself. The dependence of German group identity on imperial authority and structures has limited their place of belonging so severely that Kafka interprets it as stasis. Yet Kafka may not have been convinced that liberal Germans were ready to abandon their old imperial-orientation completely. By leaving the messenger in the innermost chamber of the Kaiser’s palace, Kafka hints at the nostalgia for the monarchy exhibited by contemporary Germans who held themselves close to a dead regime.

Entering the Burrow
Any reader is welcome to conceive of a precise Gesamtplan for the burrow (Bau). The defensive narration, however, renders it extremely difficult to discern the exact layout of the creature’s construction. The narrative unfolds from a perspective urgently justifying itself to a doubly implied you, itself and the reader. The tone reflects an increasingly concerning paranoia and anxiety in light of its decaying condition; and, it swiftly grows apparent that the creature’s troubled mental life is the only real expression of torment. Completed about a decade after his participation in university fraternities, Kafka parodies the psychology of nationalist group life closest to his locale – the völkisch nationalism inseparable from the lingering imperial loyalties of the German-speaking minority. The text scrutinizes the relationship nationalists built with their own space, performed as that between a builder and its construction. The self-segregation made possible by the burrow is the point of departure for Kafka to scrutinize how national spaces maintain their exclusivity. His focus on the creature’s self-image, however, preserves the tether between völkisch nationalism and its imperial referent. It is precisely his point to identify that the latter laid the groundwork for the former in German group life.

I find it likely that Kafka saw through the distinctions that German liberals and nationalists sought to draw between themselves. As I will demonstrate in this section, the narrator of “Der Bau” caricatures elements of both imperial (liberal) and national iterations of German identity. With that in mind, hopefully it becomes clearer why Kafka leaves his “animal type” vague; only sparse references are made to its similarity with moles, that is, the forehead. The uncertainty of the narrator’s “type” contrasts with the presence of other animals in the text, to whom distinct types are ascribed, Waldmäusen (forest-mice) to identify but one. If animal types do act as some correlate for ethnicity, then it is curious why this narrator, who offers such a
strong parody of the nationalist outlook, declines to unabashedly identify its type. On the one hand, Kafka could be stressing that group identity falls under the liberal rubric of universal perfectibility of peoples. Namely, that if one adheres to the German middle-class values of education, reason, property, and culture, a lack of “German” blood is no obstacle to identification with Germandom. Yet that reading ignores the clear presence of blood-and-soil thinking employed by the narrator to enhance its connection to der Bau. It’s altogether more likely that Kafka sought to emphasize that the zealousness of nationalism functions to conceal feelings of ethnic ambiguity or uncertainty.

What Kafka’s literary text expresses about the interaction between imperial and national identities was, in fact, not too far from the historical transformation of German society in Prague. In the century before the First World War, German group life in Prague strongly maintained a liberal, middle-class, and exclusive orientation loyal to imperial rule. Indeed, the German-speaking community of Prague had long held an elevated social, political, and economic status before 1848. Primarily aristocrats, state officials, army officers, the higher clergy, professionals, wealthier merchants, and manufacturers in Prague were German-speaking, or had been educated in German and conducted their affairs in the language. The sense that the German-speaking community occupied a separate position from the rest of Bohemian society can be seen in its earliest attempts to establish a communal group life. Founded as a response to the Czech nationalist unrest during 1848, the “Association of Germans from Bohemia … for the Preservation of their Nationality” enshrined the German self-image as a separate element in the Bohemian lands.

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middle-class, liberal character; its closeness to the German Liberal Party demonstrates the persistence of a belief in the civilizing mission of German language and culture, even as the German-speaking community increasingly became a minority.\textsuperscript{186}

Voluntary associations, specifically the \textit{Deutsches Haus} (figure 27), demonstrate how Prague Germans understood their identity and represented it to their fellow \textit{Pragers}. From the start of ethnic differentiation, Germans embraced their self-image as an elite of property and culture as well as a belief in their superiority above Czechs.\textsuperscript{187} After Czech nationalists assumed control over formerly shared organizations by 1860, such as the Society for the Bohemian Museum, the Royal Bohemian Society for the Sciences, and the Manufacturing Society, Germans either forced Czechs out of existing groups or founded their own exclusively German organizations, many of which revolved around the activities and leadership of the \textit{Deutsches Haus}. As the center of German associational life in Prague, the \textit{Deutsches Haus} on Am Graben/Na Prikope (figure 28) served as a general-purpose social club in addition to providing German associations direction, financial support, and meeting spaces. However, the directors and membership practices of the \textit{Haus} convey its attachment to the existing middle-class, liberal character of an influential portion of Prague’s Germans. Those who underwrote the \textit{Haus}, or Casino, were all prosperous professionals and many had ties to the German Liberal Party, including publisher Heinrich Mercy, the lawyer Dr. Moriz Raudnitz, and Franz Schmeykal, to name a few. The Casino’s directors had worked as lawyers, merchants, manufacturers, professors, and state officials.\textsuperscript{188} In the \textit{Politics of Ethnic Survival}, Gary B. Cohen analyzed membership records of the Casino and concluded that, as the nineteenth-century dragged on,

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\textsuperscript{188} Cohen, \textit{The Politics of Ethnic Survival}, 53.
\end{flushright}
while Casino membership became even more strongly middle-class, a rift between the upper- and lower-strata of the German community widened. In fact, Cohen ascribes the German community’s decline to the unwavering liberal, middle-class orientation of its group life, which refused to integrate lower-class Germans.

Czech nationalists were not the only source of opposition against which the German liberal community had to contend; representing a coalition of small farmers, skilled workers, and the urban lower-classes, the völkisch movement won initial support in the Bohemian borderlands before leaving its mark on German group life in Prague. As a substitute for the old understanding of Germanness rooted in German-language education, the liberal political ideology, and conscious German identification, radical German nationalists conceived of a new one based on blood and descent. An already exclusive group in Cisleithania was made more so by the nationalist emphasis on biology and genetics. Although in the 1880s leaders of the liberal German community, particularly Schmeykal and his colleagues, still openly rejected anti-Semitism and Pan-Germanism, in the decades before World War I it became increasingly difficult to refuse concessions to völkisch nationalists.

Throughout the 1870s and 80s, völkisch ideals gradually took root in German student societies, appeared among adult members of the German National Club, and came to dominate the German Gymnastics Society. Indeed, the latter counts as the first enduring völkisch group within the German minority. The Gymnastics Society also serves as a superb example of the exchange between the ‘liberal’ community and the nationalist movement. The Society not only

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mimicked the organizational forms developed by German liberal groups, but also included an anti-Semitic leadership that had strong ties to the elite of the Casino’s organizational hierarchy. That should come as no surprise, considering that the intellectuals and students at the forefront of German nationalism in Bohemia belonged to middle-class society and had previous connections to liberal groups. And although liberal leaders did not agree with the hardline exclusionary response nationalists gave to the Jewish question, they adhered to arguments claiming that centuries of ghetto life had produced unpleasant traits among Europe’s Jews to assuage their nationalist constituents. While their feelings towards German nationalists were likely still uneasy, liberal leaders increasingly tolerated them nonetheless. In the last several years before WWI, völkisch groups finally were allowed to meet in the Casino, something unthinkable almost three decades prior.

Although “Der Bau” represents a decisive movement regarding the identity of Cisleithanian Germans towards the nationalist pole, its setting features a spatiality similar to Kafka’s imagined imperial space. The blueprint of völkisch nationalism thus features an imperial orientation. Centrally located is the “Burg-Platz,” where the narrating creature keeps its stores and from which repetitive forms, simply rooms and passageways (“Plätze und Gänge”), spread out into a labyrinthine composition, although the passageways vary in the minute details of their design. A uniform repeating, or stamping, of form is clear in addition to the presence of a center and remote peripheries; the creature has spread out within the soil of the earth to re-create a type of imperial spatiality, yet what sets this burrow apart from the imperial residence is that

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merely one figure inhabits it. The only Menge in the text refers to the creature’s food-stuffs. Imperial space, intended for a linguistically and ethnically diverse population, has become the residence of only one type of dweller, reflecting the nationalist orientation around a singular Volk. That this dweller is also responsible for the Bau’s construction suggests how national spaces refer to some primordial inhabitant.

At the opening of the narrative, the creature ruminates upon the entrance(s) to its burrow, the passage doubly serving as the literal entrance to the remaining text. I understand it additionally as something of a parable regarding the exclusive or self-separating group life of the Prague German community. Indeed, the motif of entrances is of immense thematic significance as it introduces questions of protection and vulnerability as well as of belonging to an inherently exclusive space. The passage is simultaneously a description and explanation of the creature’s construction of the entrance:

Von außen ist eigentlich nur ein großes Loch sichtbar, dieses führt aber in Wirklichkeit nirgends hin, schon nach paar Schritten stößt man auf natürliches festes Gestein … Wohl tausende Schritte von diesem Loch entfernt liegt von einer abhebbaren Moosschichte verdeckt der eigentliche Zugang zum Bau, er ist so gesichert, wie eben überhaupt auf der Welt etwas gesichert werden kann, gewiß, es kann jemand auf das Moos treten oder hineinstoßen, dann liegt mein Bau frei da und wer Lust hat … kann eindringen und für immer alles zerstören.198

All that can be seen from outside is a big hole; that, however, really leads nowhere; if you take a few steps you strike against natural firm rock … At a distance of some thousand paces from this hole lies, covered by a movable layer of mass, the real entrance to the burrow; it is secured as safely as anything in this world can be secured; yet someone can step on the moss or break through it, and then my burrow would lie open, and anybody who liked … could make his way in and destroy everything for good.199

Although from outside the burrow one can see a large opening, in actuality it leads only to a natural firm rock. The real opening is approximately a thousand paces away from the dupe entrance, secured as anything in the world can be secured (“er ist so gesichert, wie eben überhaupt auf der Welt etwas gesichert werden kann”). The opening, that which ideally leads one into the burrow, is a tool of deception, emphasizing the burrow’s exclusivity. The entrance asserts the difficulty of belonging to its confines, not just any animal can waltz in. Offering the creature a sense of protection from intrusion, it nevertheless raises doubts for the burrow’s security. The ruse, in fact, draws attention to the fact that something worthy of inquiry may lay in the vicinity, undermining the supposed efficacy of the protective measure (“es ist gewiß auch kühn, durch dieses Loch überhaupt auf die Möglichkeit aufmerksam zu machen, daß hier etwas Nachforschungswertes vorhanden ist”).200 Moreover, anyone could penetrate the layer of moss to the real entrance, leaving the burrow totally susceptible to destruction; if it is secured as anything in this world can be, then not much apparently can be secured. The burrow’s first level of defense, albeit restricted, can only offer a false sense of protection. These imperial-national spaces which seem to be impenetrable or exclusive are rather quite open, but that may be only apparent to the creature, who is responsible for these flaws in the first place. The sense that it is not protected, the substance of its doubt, emanates from within the mind of the creature.

Mental or personal vulnerability complements the spatial vulnerability of the burrow’s entrance. Noting that the ruse was unintentional, the creature claims it was the result of abortive building attempts (“es war vielmehr der Rest eines der vielen vergeblichen Bauversuche”).201 Explaining itself, thus opening itself up to criticism, in this case advances its self-understanding as a reasoned builder who relies on the principle of trial-and-error to perfect its creation.

However, it also allows us to perceive its paranoia as well. The first mention of an enemy accompanies the discussion of entrances: “in meinen Träumen schnuppert dort oft eine lüsterne Schnauze unaufhörlich herum” (“in my dreams a predatory nose often sniffs incessantly around there”). The invader, the element foreign to the Bau, is immediately present only in the psyche of the Bau’s inhabitant.

Traces of the imperial orientation of German identity likewise manifest in other ways. To start, the creature emulates the German self-image as a community of builders guided by reason. The first line of the text is a statement of the creature’s successful construction: “Ich habe den Bau eingerichtet und er scheint wohlgelungen” (“I have established the burrow and it seems to be a success”). The entire effort to construct der Bau is based on the creature’s desire to bend the soil to its wishes. When recounting the construction of the Burg-Platz, the creature notes:

die Erde [war] recht locker und sandig, die Erde mußte dort geradezu festgehämmert werden, um den großen schön gewölbten und gerundeten Platz zu bilden.

the soil was very loose and sandy and had literally to be hammered and pounded into a firm state to serve as a wall for the beautifully vaulted chamber.

Through hammering the earth, the creature transformed the raw soil into a large, beautifully vaulted and rounded space (“um den großen schön gewölbten und gerundeten Platz zu bilden”), thus confronting a raw, natural form, physically civilizing it to domesticate the wild, initially unyielding space into something both practical and aesthetic. The creature admits that the labor on the Burg-Platz was physically demanding, although the rest of the Bau was “vielleicht mehr

204 Kafka, “Der Bau,” 469.
Eine Arbeit angestrengtesten Verstandes” (“perhaps more a work of exerted Reason.”).\textsuperscript{206} As an enlightened builder, the creature impresses its Germanized self-image onto the unshapen earth itself; the spatial form of the \textit{Bau} is both a result and affirmation of the creature’s intellect.

Kafka positions the creature at the top of a hierarchy, moreover, using its intellectual powers to direct the tasks and duties of subordinate beings. For the passages, the creature employed the labor of “Waldmäusen” of whom the creature has made proper use (“ich habe es verstanden sie in meinen Bau richtig einzubeziehn”) and who offer it “die Möglichkeit weitreichender Witterung und geben mir so Schutz” (“the opportunity of far-reaching scent and [they] give me thus protection”).\textsuperscript{207} Here, Kafka perceives a new relation between center and subject in the nationalist expression: whereas the imperial center, although still in a position of dominance, is required to serve its anonymous, everyday, peripheral underlings, the ill-defined creature approaches other animals as not only (ethnically) distinct “Waldmäusen,” but also understands them as instruments for its purposes. The self-segregating creature, in fact, conceives of specific roles for other types of animals in its life. Kafka problematizes the isolationist element of nationalist identity by depicting the necessary presence of difference in the world that national communities build around themselves.

Nonetheless, he does not shy away from addressing the intensified exclusivity with which nationalists identified with distinct spaces and why nationalists, on the surface, reject the appearance of difference. The blood-and-soil discourse of \textit{völkisch} nationalism primarily comes to fore. In fact, Christoph Stölzl claims that Kafka was exposed to the proto-fascist \textit{Blut und Boden} myth from his familiarity with \textit{völkisch}-derived Zionist ideology promoted by the Bar Kochba organization. Physical labor on the land was a romantic ideal for groups intoxicated by

\textsuperscript{206} Kafka, “Der Bau,” 468.
\textsuperscript{207} Kafka, “Der Bau,” 467.
the nationalist conception between homeland and Volk.\textsuperscript{208} In order to shape the Burg-Platz, the creature “had to run [its] forehead thousands and thousands of times, for whole days and nights, against the ground,” adding, “[it] was glad when the blood came, for that was proof that the walls were beginning to harden; and in that way … [it] richly paid for the Castle Keep.”\textsuperscript{209} The fusion between the blood of the creature and the soil of the burrow is mentioned still more:

… here is my castle, which I have wrested from the refractory soil with tooth and claw, with pounding and hammering blows, my castle which can never belong to anyone else, and is so essentially mine that I can calmly accept in it even my enemy’s mortal stroke at the final hour, for my blood will ebb away here in my own soil and not be lost.\textsuperscript{210}

Kafka is playing with the liberal self-image of Germans as a nation of builders and the nationalist rhetoric introduced in the excerpt. The manual labor on the land, so idealized by the völkisch movement, is connected back to the imperial mission to raise and spread civilization, represented by the imagery of domesticating the soil, of Nature bent to the will of man. This civilizing, done with such an intense effort that it brought blood, is the foundation for the creature’s unshakeable bond with the burrow – it “can never belong to anyone else, and is so essentially [the creature’s].” Precisely because the creature in this way staked itself in its creation, even at the imagined coup de grace of its enemy, it rests assured that the soil is its “own.” The creature seems certain of the eternality with which its belonging to and possession of the burrow will remain.

This connection between mole and burrow based on blood is the impetus for Kafka to parody the way nationalists viewed their relation to the according national spaces. For instance,

\textsuperscript{208} Christoph Stölzl, “Kafka: Jew, Anti-Semite, Zionist,” in Reading Kafka: Prague, Politics, and the Fin de Siecle, ed. Mark Anderson. (Schocken Books, 1990), 70.
\textsuperscript{209} Kafka, “The Burrow,” 328.
\textsuperscript{210} Kafka, “The Burrow,” 340.
the creature claims that even the thought of the burrow has the miraculous ability to rejuvenate the mole, replenishing its energy and giving it a renewed life.\textsuperscript{211} In this regard, Kafka raises the discourse running in nationalist circles regarding the attainment of the ideal, healthy body as a cure to the deformities triggered by the modernized, urban world.\textsuperscript{212} It seems that the creature and the burrow are so inextricably bound up together that “any wound to it hurts [the narrator] as if [the narrator itself] were hit.”\textsuperscript{213} The tie between the two is thus of an existential character, offering an explanation for the fierce nationalist defense of their own territory: an attack against the land, is an attack against its people. The creature’s need to maintain purity over its burrow and the fear of penetration therein may be understood in this context, although purity is introduced in structural terms. The creature indeed avoids a flawed entrance precisely because it does not “want to be perpetually reminded of a defect” in its construction; nonetheless, the creature senses “an atmosphere of great danger,” even if it walks near this entrance.\textsuperscript{214} It fears that the structural deformity or abnormality of the burrow’s entrance threatens the security of the entire labyrinthine structure. The defect already in the home could be responsible for further penetration. This notion is not too distant from the contemporary rhetoric of German nationalist politicians who spread fear for the nearly ubiquitous Czech-speaking servants of German households, claiming that they threatened the ethnic purity of German families.\textsuperscript{215}

These more biological means of claiming territory for oneself overcompensate for or conceal a questionable status within that territory. Doubts about the creature’s belonging to the burrow follow it, despite its insistence on the blood-bond between them. Even within the burrow,

\textsuperscript{211} Kafka, “The Burrow,” 341.
\textsuperscript{212} Stölzl, “Kafka: Jew, Anti-Semite, Zionist,” 70 – 73.
\textsuperscript{213} Kafka, “The Burrow,” 355.
\textsuperscript{214} Kafka, “The Burrow,” 332.
the creature views itself as a separate element. Two such confessions frame the narrative. Nearer to the beginning, the narrator fears:

   enemies in the bowels of the earth. I have never seen them, but legend tells of them and I firmly believe in them … It is of no avail to console yourself with the thought that you are in your own house; far rather are you in theirs.²¹⁶

The terrain of the burrow is not only surrounded by the enemies, but also belongs to these subterranean beings as well. The narrator echoes these concerns later in the text as it struggles against the noise-emitting enemy: “Perhaps I am in somebody else’s burrow … and now the owner is boring his way toward me.”²¹⁷ Here, Kafka posits the imperial, self-separating identity of Deutschböhmen as a progenitor of the racialist method of claiming space for one’s nationality. For the Deutschböhmen, Bohemia was their home, even though their Germanness made them a separate element within it. Similarly, the burrow is the creature’s home, yet it does not completely accept itself as the primordial owner over the labyrinthine space. In order to lay claim to the burrow, the creature had to assimilate the unshapen earth to its structural vision for the burrow and, only in the physical process of building, achieves a relationship with space that Kafka describes using the nationalist terminology of his day. This aspect of the story would suggest that Kafka viewed the völkisch movement as a response to the uncertainty left by the imperial self-image of Germans as a multinational people.

   This nationalist response may even be a result of a feeling of degeneration. Keeping with other instances of Kafka’s association between imperial spaces and decline, the creature and its burrow exhibit signs of decay or corruption. For instance, the creature is fully aware that its abilities are not what they once were. “[Aber] ich werde alt, es gibt viele die kräftiger sind als ich
Not only does the creature grow older and weaker, but also increasingly finds itself in a conflict with countless other enemies. With the Prague context in mind, this confession closely mimes similar self-reflections emanating from the Prague German camp. Writing in 1909, Ottokar Weber, a professor at the German university of Prague offers a representative example:

Decades ago [Prague] was a German city, where only the lowest classes of the population dared express themselves in Czech … Now [those] times are long since gone … In short, one will see in general a prodigious growth of the Czech nation, and one will realize it is not only prodigious, but also powerful.219

Whereas Weber ascribes the decline of German power in Prague to the rising Czech nation, Kafka looks inward. Signs that the creature’s capacities for reason, intellect, and civility have devolved appear in response to threats from the outside, shifting the responsibility of decline to the creature. Fearing omnipresent “crowds of little beasts,” who have invaded the burrow, the creature regrets that it no longer has the strength to execute the grandiose plans of his youth and early adulthood.220 As the story continues, the creature encounters a foreign noise which he seeks to eradicate through enlightened construction, specifically the building of a trench, yet in this plan too he does not put his trust.221 Either the creature no longer has the vitality to carry out its Verstand-guided construction, or it deems these plans not sufficiently reasonable to be carried out in the first place. Moreover, Kafka draws attention to the creature’s inner, bestial nature. In a hypothetical response to some “innocent little creature” who follows it out of curiosity, the creature fantasizes about “[leaping] on him, [mauling] him, [tearing] the flesh from his bones, [destroying] him, [drinking] his blood, and [flinging] his corpse among the rest of [its] spoil” in a

blind rage. The excessive violence towards and ill-treatment of such a trivial opponent seems unbefitting of this enlightened being; the punishment rubs off on one as far too brutal given the nature of the threat. Apparently out of a desire to protect the purity of its burrow, the creature debases itself to engage in a sort of Verwilderung.

In this regard, Kafka uses the creature as a means to display the unruliness of nationalist-style politics, aligning himself with contemporary criticisms directed against nationalist Germans. Representing the stance of liberal, imperially-loyal Germans, Alois Aehrenthal was fiercely critical of German riots over the Badeni laws: “The Germans degrade themselves, when they follow the example of Czechs and anti-Semites. The nation of Goethe is becoming more and more a nation of beer consumers with stableboy manners!” Aehrenthal may have held in his mind Georg von Schönerer as one of the culprits responsible for what Carl Schorske lightly dubbed politics “in a sharper key.” As a Pan-German and radical völkisch nationalist with a substantial following in Northern Bohemia, Schönerer embraced a more confrontational politics, which appealed to feeling over reason. The creature’s reaction to his trivial opponent functions as a parallel to the unruliness with which German nationalists were accused of handling their political and national rivals. Kafka was no stranger to these ‘sharp’ tactics. During times of increased nationalist conflict, the weekly Sunday morning promenade of German university fraternity students, known for their militant nationalism, along Am Graben/Na Prikope often turned violent as they brawled with Czech National Socialists.

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224 Glassheim, “Between Empire and Nation,” 77.
Kafka locates the most fatal aspect of the creature’s decline is its privilege, underpinned by its arrogance, excessive possession, and gluttony. Indeed, the complementary relationship between these three aspects of the creature’s persona is arguably the cause of an increasingly untenable situation. The opening passage is dedicated to the mole’s ruminations regarding the entrance of its burrow. At a certain point during the monologue, it admits:

das alles sind recht mühselige Rechnungen und die Freude des scharfsinnigen Kopfes an sich selbst ist manchmal die alleinige Ursache dessen, daß man weiterrechnet.\textsuperscript{226}

all that are rightly arduous calculations and the joy of the astute mind unto itself is sometimes the only reason for one to calculate further.\textsuperscript{227}

The creature’s reason for designing an entrance both deceptive and easy to leave, and for further revising his plans, is to enjoy to itself the joy of its own keenness (“die Freude des scharfsinnigen Kopfes”). If the whole effort of building is to affirm the creature’s cleverness to itself, then the burrow is an entirely self-reflexive work, a testament to the creature’s infatuation with its own creative powers. The chief builder is additionally convinced of its own ‘chosenness.’ To justify to itself its earlier decision to not build more rooms similar to the Burg-Platz, the creature presumes that providence intervenes on its behalf, or to use its own terms, that destiny looks upon the preservation of its head (“wahrscheinlich weil der Vorsehung an der Erhaltung meiner Stirn, des Stampfhammers, besonders gelegen ist”),\textsuperscript{228} Its belief in its own specialness is a way of re-affirming its judgment as a creator, yet achieves more for the aim of enjoying a sense of its own cleverness than for constructing a protected, nurturing burrow.

\textsuperscript{226} Kafka, “Der Bau,” 466.
\textsuperscript{227} My own translation.
\textsuperscript{228} Kafka, “Der Bau,” 471.
Likewise, the creature concerns itself with ownership just as seriously as maintenance; to put it simply, the central tension in the creature’s existence is that between comfort and survival, enjoying its creation and urgently ensuring its security. The former, nonetheless, seems to be the victor. The burrow’s “kleinen runden Plätzen” promise the creature an experience of bliss: “Dort schlafe ich den süßen Schlaf des Friedens, des beruhigten Verlangens, des erreichen Zieles, des Hausbesitzes.” Ownership of a home (“des Hausbesitzes”) is positioned at the end of a constellation connecting it to peace (“des Friedens”), pacified desire (“des beruhigten Verlangens”), and achieved aim (“des erreichen Zieles”). To the apparent Bildung of the creature, demonstrated by its ability to have created a complex spatial layout, Kafka adds Besitz, thereby ascribing the two main values of German middle-class life to the narrator. Moreover, Kafka advances the understanding of Besitz as an exclusive, yet dangerous privilege, whose fulfillment in sleep brings peace, satisfies desire, and celebrates a goal reached. Yet the creature is at least somewhat conscious that its Besitz lays the path towards gluttony. The Burg-Platz, serving as a storage for stores found both inside and outside the burrow, is

so groß, daß ihn Vorräte für ein halbes Jahr nicht füllen. Infolgedessen kann ich sie wohl ausbreiten, zwischen ihnen herumgehn, mit ihnen spielen, mich an der Menge und an den verschiedenen Gerüchen freuen und immer einen genauen Überblick über das Vorhandene haben.230

so large, that supplies for half a year do not fill it. Hence, I can arguably spread them out, go between them, play with them, rejoice in their multitude and the different smells and always have a precise overview over what is available.231

So spacious that provisions for half a year do not fill it (“so groß, daß ihn Vorräte für ein halbes Jahr nicht füllen”), the Burg-Platz is a monument to the creature’s privileged existence insofar as

231 My own translation.
the creature occupies more space than it needs. In another sense, it is so spacious that the creature transforms provisions, objects of base necessity, into objects of pleasure. It defines its relationship to its stores not in rudimentary survivalist terms, but rather as means towards enjoyment. The creature locates their value in what its provisions offer outside of nourishment, expressing its cultivated sensibility. For instance, it can spread out its supplies (“kann ich sie wohl ausbreiten”), walk about between them (“zwischen ihnen herumgehn”), play with them (“mit ihnen spielen”), and delight itself in their plenty and different smells (“mich an der Menge und an den verschiedenen Gerüchen freuen”). In this regard especially, does the creature betray a concern more with achieving a sense of taste and refinement. Inseparable from the pleasure satisfied by such engagement with its provisions is the creature’s ongoing, precise overview of what is available (“immer einen genauen Überblick über das Vorhandene haben”). Kafka is careful not to underemphasize the role that total and exact visualizations of its property plays in constructing the privilege of Besitz. This seeming omniscience and control over its stores provides the creature a foundation for receiving food as pleasure-objects.

Indeed, the creature’s most piercing self-criticism is its desire for the burrow to nurture a blissful existence. Addressing itself, it states, “You feel as if you had never really organized the burrow for defense against attack … the danger of an attack [seemed] … infinitely less important than the need to put it in a state where one could live peacefully.” Yet the peace it seeks to achieve is rather a thinly-disguised gluttony that threatens the security of its abode. It finds tranquility by flinging itself upon its provisions, seizing as much as it can until it is “completely gorged.” At another occasion, it praises its passages, in which “one can stretch oneself out in

comfort, roll about in childish delight, lie and dream, or sink into blissful sleep.”  

Exhibiting a ruthless self-clarity typical of Kafka’s animal narrators, the creature is fully aware that its predisposition towards comfort, made possible by its Besitz, is its principle weakness; “anyone who knew how to exploit [my happy hours] could destroy me with ease and without any risk.”

Despite knowing full well its problematic behavior, the creature makes no major or effective steps to change it, instead adapting its defensive measures to its greedy practices. If anything, the creature and its lack of self-discipline functions as more of an enemy to the burrow than the source of the mysterious noise, which appears later in the text as a serious disruption. Privilege in the burrow is not only a more overt source for mockery, but also an existential threat, in contrast to “Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft” when it is merely problematized or demonstrated to be a false promise. Kafka therefore deploys the text as an instrument for criticizing the privilege which middle-class Germans ascribed to themselves; it was their own sense of self-superiority that made it too late for them to respond adequately to the Czech threat.

Through the precise exchange between the creature and its enemy, which escalates as the text approaches its end, Kafka even places in doubt whether the ‘enemy’ can be something other than the self. The ‘enemy’, however, is merely what the creature imagines to be the cause of a mysterious noise which is both diffuse, yet concentrated. It states, “It is this very uniformity of the noise everywhere that disturbs me most … it must have issued with greatest force from some given place, which it would be my task to discover.”

The creature’s desire to restore silence to its passageways establishes that the enemy is a threat to the purity of the burrow since the noise of an unknown source constitutes a foreign invasion. Indeed, the creature understands audial

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amplification as a spatial conquest: “the noise seems to have become louder … and this growing-louder is like a coming-nearer.” The ‘enemy’, furthermore, only grows more terrifying in the mind of the creature the longer it continues to hear the noise. What starts as “the burrowing of the small fry” becomes the sounds of “a whole swarm of little creatures” until the creature settles that “a single big [beast] … dangerous beyond all one’s powers of conception” is responsible for the continuing disturbance. This paranoia forces the creature to take actions which do more actual damage to the burrow than the damage done by the beast, which remain mere matters of speculation and fantasy. For instance, it decides to “dig a wide and carefully constructed trench in the direction of the noise and not cease from digging until … [it finds] the real cause of the noise.” Yet this effort devolves into something far less systematic: “one could observe [the noise] for a while … instead of, as I had done, keeping one’s ear fixed to the wall and at every hint of noise tearing out a lump of earth … simply so as to do something to give expression to one’s inward agitation.” Conscious of its failure, it resolves to “repair the damage that [it has] done to the burrow with [its] wild digging” before re-attempting to eradicate the noise. The creature, who never actually makes contact with the beast, at least seems to be aware that the noise cannot be objectively verified as it is “audible only to the ear of the householder.” The interruption of the burrow’s peace, the presence of a foreign element disrupting the purity of the home, is only apparent to the possessor of the space unsettled. Not only is its appearance, and thus that of an enemy, thrust into doubt, but a larger claim about nationalized spaces is advanced as well. Only the fact that the creature is a householder – that it has civilized the burrow and transformed it into a space to preserve its insularity and separation from the outside – causes the

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want and need to eliminate difference. Therefore, the only enemy that can be known to exist is the product of the creature within its nationalized environment. Phrased differently, the most acute threat to the preservation of the burrow is the creature’s relationship to it. The impulse to obsessively preserve the Bau becomes a source of self-torment as the creature is tortured by the sense that it is not doing enough to ensure its own as well as the structure’s survival. As a result, the space becomes so unmanageable that the creature goes to tremendous lengths to actually disturb the peace it so worships about the burrow.

In “der Bau,” Kafka targets the relationship nationalists constructed with certain spaces to identify its contradictions. Especially in Prague, the völkisch nationalistic insistence on identifying and denigrating an Other, be it a Jewish or a Czech Other, belied the very real danger posed by nationalism in the first place. In a rather prophetic manner, Kafka was communicating that it would not be the enemies of a self-declared nation who would be its undoing, but rather the framework of nationalism itself, in which a paranoid and dangerous psychology emerges from a mythologized tie between blood-and-soil. The traces of imperial self-image and spatiality have a role to play as well; such nationalist sentiments would be impossible without a groundwork laid by imperial efforts to domesticate and civilize space. Indeed, the text treats nationalism as something that emerges from the decline for which imperial attitudes are necessarily responsible. The eerie reflection between the creature’s struggle with the beast and the process by which nationalism conjures an outside enemy demonstrates that the identification of a national enemy offers nationalists cover to deflect attention or divert responsibility from the terror they inflict. In this case, that terror is inflicted upon the self as the creature damages its own creation. If Kafka is advancing a claim about the Prague context through “der Bau,” it is
that the liberal community of imperially-loyal Germans, attracted to and tolerant of nationalism in its decay, have become an enemy onto themselves.
III. Mass Politics, Secular Ritual, and the Maus-Volk: Performing the Nation in Public Space

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, a ‘hero’ of the Austrian Empire long-dead returned to many of Bohemia’s towns, whose bourgeoisie was still largely German-speaking. As Bohemian Germans reconfigured Josef II’s legacy from that of the *Volkskaiser* (people’s emperor) to the *Kaiser des deutschen Volkes* (emperor of the German people), a statue cult in his honor cult ferociously grew in popularity, connecting Germans throughout Bohemia, while inflaming their national enemy, the Czechs. What Nancy Wingfield has called the ‘Joseph II Movement’ should be understood in part as a phenomenon of modern industry and urbanization. On the whole, the production of Josef II statues was standardized, allowing them to become a popular commodity for the budding commercial monument industry. While viewership did occur in the public spaces where the statues were installed, due to modernized methods of communication it was not at all limited by their immediate location. Photographs of Josef II statues were reproduced on postcards, along with images of rural “German” Bohemian churches, town halls, and schools, which had become increasingly accessible by the expanding railroad network. Far from a mere temptation for local tourists, images of Josef II reflected the desires of towns and villages to join in “a shared and standardized program of memory.”

Ceremonies surrounding statue unveilings were often coated in religious terms. Josef himself was understood as a second messiah, a national saint for the Germans, who had preached the ‘Gospel of Enlightenment.’ The day of unveiling assumed the weight of a temporal holy day

\[\text{241} \text{ Nancy M. Wingfield, "Statues of Emperor Joseph II as Sites of German Identity," in } \text{Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present, ed. Maria Bucur et al. (Purdue University Press, 2000), 178 – 179.}\]
\[\text{242} \text{ Nancy M. Wingfield, } \text{Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech} \text{ (Harvard University Press, 2007), 28.}\]
and rituals used as part of programmed festivities drew upon the folk traditions of Roman Catholicism. Nonetheless, commemorations of Josef II statues were definitively modern, secular affairs serving to unite urban and rural Germans. For instance, the Lese- und Redehalle der deutschen Studenten in Prague sent a telegram to local unveiling in 1881, pleading with their “Holy Emperor” to pray for them, “[his] downtrodden German Volk.” Guests of the commemorations often hailed from nearby towns and well beyond as part of an attempt to expand and integrate the fledgling German community across Bohemia. Committees responsible for the statues and their commemorations encouraged Germans of all social classes to decorate their homes and participate in the ceremonies. Indeed, Josef II unveilings were interpreted by followers as days of joy, national spirit, and fraternity for all Germans in the Bohemian lands, attended by persons of all classes and ages. Much like how the Czechs raised funds for the construction of the National Theater, efforts to fundraise Josef II statues united city and country Germans in a common aim for their nation. Not only did urban dwellers make donations to rural committees, but they participated, and occasionally orchestrated, the unveiling ceremonies as well. The events were additionally covered by the Czech and German nationalist presses, further circulating either national collectivity or national hatred and suspicion around Bohemia.

The ceremonies themselves should be read as an instance of performing the German nation in Bohemia. Monuments were most often located in key public spaces, largely market squares (figures 29), although in Brünn a Josef II statue was fittingly installed outside of the

243 Wingfield, Flag Wars and Stone Saints, 34 – 5.
244 Wingfield, Flag Wars and Stone Saints, 36.
245 Wingfield, Flag Wars and Stone Saints, 36.
247 Wingfield, Flag Wars and Stone Saints, 36.
248 Wingfield, Flag Wars and Stone Saints, 38 – 39.
local *Deutsches Haus* (figure 30). Having become a mnemonic symbol for the Germans’ collective mourning over their lessened status in Bohemia, the daylong celebrations, similar throughout Bohemia, occupied the public sphere in the name of the German nation (figure 31). The festivities likewise manifested hope for the renewal of German national self-assertion and confidence. These meticulously orchestrated events typically started at dawn with reveille, sometimes followed by a celebratory Mass. Marchers paraded through a town’s most significant public spaces while singing national songs and waving flags of national or Austrian colors. A wide array of nationally-based civic and occupational groups were also featured, such as bands, choirs, fireman, labor unions, and fraternal and gymnastics organizations.249 Participants, donning black-red-gold sashes as well as folk dress (*Tracht*), sang songs dedicated specifically to Emperor Josef as well as more general German folk and national songs under banners hung alongside the Austrian black-yellow. Poetry by local writers and composers addressing Josef II’s German identity and his relationship to the Empire’s German constituents was also frequently recited or performed.250 These celebrations, moreover, often incorporated other types of social gatherings for the German public, mainly concerts and theater productions whose program revolved around venerating the former *Kaiser*.251

Such public exaltations of Bohemian Germans’ national saint inevitably enraged the sworn enemy of their nation, marking Josef II monuments as sites of nationalist conflict. Those who identified as Czech, often not invited to the celebrations, also chose not to participate likely because of the way Czech nationalists viewed the processions. In her research, Nancy Wingfield has found that Czech nationalists characterized them as having an explicitly German and anti-

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Czech character. For many Czechs, the Josef II statues represented the “combative posture” of the Germans, or put differently, another aggression against the Czechs on what they considered to be Slavic soil. Unsurprisingly, these monuments had their role to play in the increasingly ritualized confrontations between Czechs and Germans, becoming either rallying locations before Germans set off to do battle with Czechs or sites of victory upon returning.\textsuperscript{252} Czechs too had a use for the statues, as legionnaires and civilians subjected Josef II statues to damage, defacement, and destruction, especially after the First World War. Conflict, however, was not restricted to the locales since news of battles around the statues was naturally covered in Bohemia’s cities. After a particularly severe back-and-forth in the town of Eger in November 1920, the National Union of Northern Bohemia (\textit{Národní Jednota Severočeská}) called a protest in Prague, which drew about 600 people demanding the removal of everything that “injured the feelings of the Czech audience,” including of course monuments and inscriptions.\textsuperscript{253} The capital thereafter faced several days of anti-German and anti-Semitic demonstrations. Following an example set in Prague, angry Czechs in towns throughout Bohemia attacked Germans and Jews as well as buildings representing their presence and culture.\textsuperscript{254} Not only sites of national veneration, Josef II statues became a venue at which the mutually reinforcing behavior of nationalist Czechs and Germans provided each with a “dangerous and convincing ‘other.’”\textsuperscript{255}

The uses of public spaces embodied by the Joseph II statue cult greatly informed the subject matter for Kafka’s final story, “Josephine the Singer, or the Maus-People” (“Josefine die Sängerin, oder das Volk der Mäuse”). I would even go so far as to argue that Kafka may have named the titular character, who is openly identified as a hero of the Maus-Volk, after Josef II

\textsuperscript{252} Wingfield, “Statues of Joseph II,” 190 – 1.
\textsuperscript{253} Wingfield, “Statues of Joseph II,” 196
\textsuperscript{254} Wingfield, “Statues of Joseph II,” 196.
\textsuperscript{255} Wingfield, “Statues of Joseph II,” 191.
precisely due to the ways he was re-figured in the Bohemian German national imagination as a “German” hero. The text by no means involves a description of the statue cult, although Kafka may have had it in mind when considering an example of the new type of nationalist mass politics in Bohemia. Among the many conditions out of which the Josef II statue cult arose, including the long-standing nationalist tensions and the increasing minority-status of Germans, one is of particularly prime importance. Since the 1867 Compromise establishing a dual monarchy of Austria and Hungary, new ways of organizing in public space were made possible by the growing democratization of the political sphere. As the twin processes of industrialization and modernization gained even more momentum in fin-de-siècle Bohemia, politics assumed an ever more mass quality. Popular political manifestations, such as mass demonstrations, protests, and national festivals, appeared in response to the changing nature of political expression within the Empire. I read “Josefine” as Kafka’s attempt to critically interrogate these nationalist mass politics – through which imagined heroes of a nation were rallying points to forge national unity and identity – at such a late stage in his life. The narrative closely concentrates on the dynamics of performing nation, for which the relationship between Volk and hero is critical. Not only is Kafka particularly attuned to how a “hero” can in fact be an enemy to their own people, but also how such a hero weds the aesthetic and political, and to what ends. As a German and a Jew in Bohemia, Kafka had spent his entire life identified as a dangerous and detested Other, yet by re-reading the text through this contextual lens, one finds that Kafka may have been far more suspicious of the threats posed by a Volk’s self-chosen hero, rather than those of an accused national enemy.

The slow, yet continual expansion of suffrage after 1867 democratized the sphere of politics in Austro-Hungary, encouraging political movements to become even more popular to
absorb new classes of voters. Nationalism, which had come to dominate public discourse in the mass media, to control the organization of nonreligious civic life, and to influence political activity during elections, was the tool for organizing the newly enfranchised into cohesive political agents. Based on the notion that voters identified more easily with widely shared cultural elements such as language, broad cultural-nationalist arguments unified voters from separate social classes. The ensuing mass mobilizations made possible by a more democratized political system allowed nationalist political leaders to claim they spoke for existing nations. At the same time, the success of nationalist campaigns was inseparable from the willingness of many nationalist politicians to identify and attack a distinct national Other. Anti-Semitic accusations against political opponents, for instance, easily swayed Austria’s new voters, many of whom viewed Jewish Emancipation and integration as a socio-cultural, not to mention racial, threat. Political liberalization, nonetheless, had its own specific reception in Prague. In her study on the Finis Ghetto plan, Catherine Giustino has found that, although politics had shed some of its authoritarian tendencies, it was still a largely exclusionary realm. Dominated by upper middle-class Czech males, officialdom in Prague was primarily patriarchal and oligarchic, leading the majority of Prague’s residents to employ extra-parliamentary means of negotiating group interests, including voluntary associations, manifestoes, petitions, rallies, and celebrations.

I would like to introduce two noteworthy instances of nationalist mass political mobilization in Prague to demonstrate that the form of these political activities was similar.

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across ethnic divides. Dominating both key public spaces as well as public discourse, the 1903 Foundation Ceremony for the Jan Hus Memorial and the 1912 Sokol Slet brought to Prague, much in the same way Josef II commemorations did to Bohemian towns, an orchestrated performance of the nation. Moreover, both of these events were inseparable from monuments to two crucial Czech national heroes, Jan Hus in the Old Town Square and František Palacky in Palacky Square. I have also selected these national festival programs for scrutiny since Kafka may have paid special attention to them through a fiercely critical lens. From Kafka’s perspective, commemorations to national heroes were a visible marker of the corruption of Prague’s public spaces. In a letter to Max Brod, he wrote:

Wenn es möglich wäre diese Schande und mutwillig-sinnlose Verarmung Prags und Böhmens zu beseitigen, dass mittelmässige Arbeiten wie der Hus von Šaloun oder miserable wie der Palacky von Sucharda ehrenvoll aufgestellt werden […]

If it were possible to remove this degradation and willfully-senseless impoverishment of Prague and Bohemia, that mediocre works like the Hus by Šaloun or the abysmal [ones] like the Palacky by Sucharda are honorably erected […]

Kafka no doubt uses honorably (ehrenvoll) with an ironic twist. While the aestheticization of national heroes in large, open public spaces was supposed to initiate people into the nationalist cult, Kafka advances another interpretation. He describes it as “[eine] Schande” and “mutwillig-sinnlose Verarmung” that the Hus and Palacky statues are “honorably erected.” The memorials, which indeed tower over the viewer, strike him as nothing more than “mediocre” or “miserable.” The nationalist content of the works seems to deprive them of any real aesthetic value, rendering Prague’s spaces degraded and impoverished. Instead of glorifying the city, as nationalist leaders hoped these pieces would, the memorials actually manage to do the opposite.

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262 Translation is my own.
Nonetheless, to the city’s many Czechs, the monuments were sites around which their national or Slavic identity would be publicly staged. Jan Hus’ resistance to medieval Catholic authority and efforts to standardize the Czech language made him into an idol for Czech nationalists during the nineteenth-century.\textsuperscript{263} Although Jan Podlipony, then president of the Czech Sokol Union, in his petition to Prague City Council stressed that the Hus Foundation Ceremony would demonstrate the inclusiveness of the Czech nation, the festival was among the largest gatherings of nationalist Czechs to have occurred.\textsuperscript{264} The vast range of interests which participated in the festival, including Sokol and other voluntary organizations, political parties, religious groups, trade and student unions, town and village councils, and women’s clubs, lends credit to the idea that the ceremonial program united Czechs across social divides. Participants in the massive parade from Wenceslas Square to Old Town Square assembled behind red and white Hussite banners and Czech national flags; pamphlets, songbooks, and decorations were available as well. Before the large crowd listened to speeches by Podlipony and the famed Young Czech orator Edvard Grégr, representatives of Czech and Slavic society symbolically knocked on the foundation stone with their fists. If we follow George Mosse’s analysis that national festivals of this time “were all infused with a feeling of historical continuity, a sense of being part of an organic whole,” then it is clear that the parade sought to present Czechs as a unified and historical national unit within Austro-Hungary.\textsuperscript{265} In addition, occupying public space for their nation reinforced the nationalist claim of an originary and primordial Slavic heritage in Bohemia. Much like Josef II commemorations, theatrical productions celebrating the Hussite legacy as

\textsuperscript{265} Paces, \textit{Prague Panoramas}, 31 – 32.
well as publicly-read poems dedicated to his honor supplemented the Hus festival in other public spaces, such as the National Theater.  

František Palacky, whose monumental history of Bohemia was critical for popularizing the Hussite era as a Czech national golden age, was also eventually received as a Czech national hero, earning the moniker “father of the nation.”  

Stanislav Sucharda’s monument to his legacy was unveiled in 1912 as part of the enormous Sokol Slet (figures 32-3). Founded in 1862, the Sokol gymnastics organization had close ties to the nationalist Young Czech Party, viewing itself as the inheritor of Hussite General Jan Žižka’s militaristic legacy. The fitness of its typically young and male members furthermore claimed to represent for the Czech nation not only a model for “authentic” life, but also a perfected, healthy physical body well in line with traditional ideals of masculinity (figure 34). Participants from other political and voluntary organizations in Prague were naturally present as well, such as the National Council, the Association of Czech Women, and the Mánes Association. The stylized gymnastic performances and Czech national costumes and music during the unveiling ceremony rendered the event into a display of Czech national strength.

Be it staged by Germans or Czechs, public, choreographed expressions of nationality in fin-de-siècle Bohemia assumed a readily identifiable form. Symbols of the nation – flags bearing national colors, dress referring to an authentic völkisch existence, and music in the national language – consistently made an appearance in these celebrations. The Volk, moreover, assembled around the personification of a chosen national hero. By the late-nineteenth century,

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266 Paces, *Prague Panoramas*, 34.  
Germans in Bohemia looked towards Josef II as a mnemonic repository for a past age of German glory and the continuance of German superiority despite the advances of Czechs. Whereas, Czechs stressed the legendary figures of their own medieval past, and the writers of this largely distorted history, as a key point in the development of their national identity worthy of commemoration. Nonetheless, large public gatherings offered a physical manifestation of the national body and invigorated a sense of national strength. For Kafka, the matter of language was critical for these performances of nationality in public space, as well as for understanding the relationship between Volk and hero. Of all the ways to depict the symbols with which nationalist mass politics draped itself, he chose to concentrate on the music of the Maus-Volk and the producer, or emitter, of this music, Josefine.

**Celebrating the Volkssprache**

An anonymous member of the Maus-Volk, who clearly has been to a number of Josefine’s performances, leads the narration, attempting to discern the precise relationship between Josefine and his people. The text begins with an act of claiming: “Unsere Sängerin heißt Josefine.” (“Our singer is called Josefine.”)

271 The opening lines establish a communal possession over Josefine and her art. That the Volk does hold some possession over her art makes sense once the narrator fully explains precisely what her singing is. It is nothing less but a celebration of the Maus-Volk’s daily speech, which the narrator refers to as “Pfeifen,” or piping:


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hier doch schon zunächst die Sonderbarkeit, daß jemand sich feierlich hinstellt, um nichts anderes als das Übliche zu tun.\textsuperscript{272}

Is it not perhaps just a piping? And piping is something we all know about, it is … the characteristic expression of our life … by trying to identify [Josefine’s] voice [among others], you will undoubtedly distinguish nothing but a quite ordinary piping tone … Yet if you sit down before her, it is not merely a piping … here is someone making a ceremonial performance out of the usual thing.\textsuperscript{273}

“Piping” is a banal, communal, and everyday aspect of the life of the Maus-Volk, which the narrator indeed identifies as the medium of daily communication between mice.\textsuperscript{274} More than just a linguistic medium, however, piping seems to contain a “characteristic expression of [mice] life”; it embodies something essential to the existence of the Maus-Volk itself. Her piping, although nothing too exceptional from the piping of the everyday mouse, transforms this ordinary aspect of mouse-life because Josefine distinguishes it only in the act of her making piping a ceremonial performance. The ordinariness of her voice would seem to render her the perfect single representative of the entire \textit{Volk}. Her music, which thus performs the \textit{Volkssprache} of her people, comes to embody what could be considered a national tradition for the Maus-Volk, and Kafka positions the national hero as its source.

If we want to immerse our reading in the nationalist context which informed Kafka’s composition, it is critical to identify how he encodes nationalist discourse within the narrative. In his second semester at the Prague University, Anton Marty critically exposed him to the organic-physiological explanations of the origins of language which had circulated since Herder’s

\textsuperscript{272} Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 519 – 520.
\textsuperscript{274} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 370.
influential contribution about a century prior.\textsuperscript{275} Of particular significance for the linguistic-national ideologies of Kafka’s time and his everyday life were the nativist-organic conception of language forwarded by Chajim Steinthal (1823 – 1899) and Moritz Lazarus (1824 – 1903). In short, their texts theorized the language of a people (\textit{Volkssprache}) as essentially connected through the spirit of a people (\textit{Volksgeist}) with the national body, which served as the latter’s organ. For instance, a member of the Czech nation would theoretically have a connection between their \textit{Volkssprache} and \textit{Volksgeist}, basically guaranteeing their belonging to the national body. Steinthal and Lazarus’ explanation lended a scientific credibility to more romantic notions proposed by both German and Czech nationalists. Under the direction of Karl Hermann Wolf, a racist member of parliament, the \textit{Ostdeutsche Post} served as the ideological mouthpiece for pan-German nationalism in Bohemia. In addition to decrying literature produced by German-Jews, one exemplary editorial argued that, “the most sacred treasure of a people or race is its language. What sort of nation can it be if it does not find … its true essence in its language.”\textsuperscript{276} As we were able to discern in chapter 1, since the early-nineteenth century Czech nationalists, such as Josef Jungmann, asserted in a Herderian fashion that it was impossible to conceive of a nation without its own language or, put differently, to detach language from a distinct national spirit.\textsuperscript{277} In Kafka’s day, language was primarily understood as a code for nationality, or national essence – something that captured the ‘unique’ characters and customs of a nation.

Since Josefine’s music is purely the language of the Maus-Volk – as opposed to music in the orthodox sense, that is a composition of melody, rhythm, and pitch – Kafka defines it first


and foremost as a celebration of the essence of the fictional mouse race. Kafka further establishes this quality of her music in the text by relating it to the collectivity of the Maus-Volk’s existence.

The narrator writes:

\[\text{Josefine] dringt doch … etwas von ihrem Pfeifen unweigerlich auch zu uns. Dieses Pfeifen, das sich erhebt, … kommt fast wie eine Botschaft des Volkes zu dem Einzelnen; das dünne Pfeifen Josefinens mitten in den schweren Entscheidungen ist fast wie die armselige Existenz unseres Volkes mitten im Tumult der feindlichen Welt.}\textsuperscript{278}

there is yet something … that irresistibly makes its way into us from Josephine’s singing. This piping … comes almost like a message from the whole people to each individual; Josephine’s thin piping amidst grave decisions is almost like our people’s precarious existence amidst the tumult of a hostile world.\textsuperscript{279}

Her piping can serve as the way the entire Volk communicates to its individual members, representing the existence of the Volk back to itself. It informs each mouse of the nature of their collective existence as a Volk and their collective place in their surrounding environment. The collective memory and struggles of the Maus-Volk are additionally wrapped up in her music. The narrator, for instance, can identify in it something of both “[their] poor brief childhood” as well as their daily life.\textsuperscript{280} Kafka here is clearly drawing from the discourse of nationalism since her music, which is the language of the mice, communicates experiences to which only the Maus-Volk could have access.

It is precisely the point that Josefine’s music, which reinforces collectivity among the Maus-Volk, is a means of raising their national consciousness. Her ‘art,’ so to speak, reminds the Volk of the uniqueness of their language. Although piping is a characteristic of the Maus-Volk, the narrator clarifies that it is actually an aspect of their existence so mundane that many pipe

\textsuperscript{278} Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 527.
\textsuperscript{279} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 367.
\textsuperscript{280} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 370.
without noticing, some even unaware that piping belongs to one of their “Eigentümlichkeiten” – a unique quality possessed only by the *Volk*.

What makes Josefine a national hero to her people is exactly this role fulfilled by her performances: to transform an aspect of their collective life so quotidian it has become invisible into a matter of national identity and community-definition. She elevates their language to an art-form, asserting to the *Volk* that it is an undeniably central part of their life, which may in fact be why the narrator refers to piping as “die eigentliche Kunstfertigkeit unseres Volkes” (“the unique art-ability of our people”).

The narrator employs the analogy of making nut-cracking a popular attraction to explain Josefine’s role in the transformation of language from the mundane to a level of national significance:

> Eine Nuß aufknacken ist wahrhaftig keine Kunst … Tut [man] es dennoch und gelingt seine Absicht, dann kann es sich eben doch nicht nur um bloßes Nüsseknachen handeln. Oder es handelt sich um Nüsseknachen, aber es stellt sich heraus, daß wir über diese Kunst hinweggesehen haben, weil wir sie glatt beherschten und daß uns dieser neue Nußknacker erst ihr eigentliches Wesen zeigt …

To crack a nut is truly no [art] … But if … one does do that and succeeds [in their intention] … then it cannot be a matter of simple nut-cracking. Or it is a matter of nut-cracking, but it turns out that we have overlooked the art of cracking nuts because we were to skilled in it and that this newcomer to it first shows us its real nature …

Just as the newcomer reveals to a public, already skilled in nutcracking, the true nature of this art, so too does Josefine demonstrate to the *Volk* the true worth of their language. Far from a neglectable item of mouse-life, she saves piping from obscurity by showing the Maus-Volk that it is a beauty and art that only they can possess. Again, it is only due to her act of distinction,
which is merely Josefine placing herself ceremoniously to pipe, that piping gains aesthetic dimensions. Only by thrusting it out of the context of daily life and usage does piping assume this aesthetic value. As we shall come to see in Josefine’s performances, stillness is the expected response to her piping. By expressing that piping is worthy of aesthetic appreciation, Josefine allows the Maus-Volk to see the language so basic to their existence as truly special. The aestheticization of piping serves as an act of self-definition for the Maus-Volk: the whole Volk is made distinguishable through this possession of something so “unique” as piping. The purpose of her art thus emphasizes that piping is nothing less than a matter of national pride.

At this point, we can come to perceive why Kafka, when naming the Maus-Volk hero, feminized the Bohemian German national saint, Josef II. Across Europe, nationalists envisioned a similar role for women in the process of nation-building. The many chores of motherhood, among them breast-feeding, were the means by which the nation’s youth would inherit national characters, customs, and language; while men had to exert themselves in the outside world of business and transaction, it was the mother’s duty to bring up children, understood as the future of the nation, so that they could fulfill their patriotic obligations to the nation later as adults. Playing the role of national hero and mother, Josefine likewise teaches the Maus-Volk the importance of their language, thus fulfilling that role which most male chauvinist nationalists envisioned for their female counterparts.

As Josefine’s performances assert a significance for the entire nation of mice, they assume a mass quality, that is, they are the vehicle through which the Maus-Volk can realize themselves as a Volk. Kafka impresses upon the reader that the dynamics of nationalist mass politics have a role to play in Josefine’s performances. When she sings, for instance, the Maus-

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Volk enjoy a communal experience among each other: “Schon tauchen auch wir in das Gefühl der Menge, die warm, Leib an Leib, scheu atmend horcht.”286 (“Already are we also immersed in the feeling of the mass, which, body on body, listens reservedly”). The auditory experience of Josefine’s piping therefore allows a physical closeness to emerge between the community of mice. Accordingly, it counts as well among one of Josefine’s ability to assemble the mass of mice virtually at will:

Und um diese Menge unseres fast immer in Bewegung befindlichen, wegen oft nicht sehr klarer Zwecke hin- und herschießenden Volks um sich zu versammeln, muß Josefine meist nichts anderes tun, als mit zurückgelegtem Köpfcchen, halbopenem Mund, der Höhe zugewandten Augen jene Stellung einnehmen, die darauf hindeutet, daß sie zu singen beabsichtigt. Sie kann dies tun, wo sie will … Die Nachricht, daß sie singen will, verbreitet sich gleich, und bald zieht es in Prozessionen hin.287

And to [rally] around her this mass of our people who are almost always on the run and scurrying hither and thither for reasons that are often not very clear, Josephine mostly needs to nothing else than [with a thrown-back head], mouth half-open, eyes turned upwards, in the position that indicates her intention to sing. She can do this where she likes … The news that she is going to sing flies around at once and soon whole processions are on the way there.288

Even before a single note of Josefine’s piping has emanated from her mouth, she can physically unite and order a largely frantic and disordered Volk around herself; impressively, her music can unite the Maus-Volk from anywhere, summoning processions to her once her mere intention becomes clear. This passage additionally forces one to consider the conspicuous absence of public space in the text. At no point does Kafka describe in depth the spaces and places in which Josefine’s music is heard, despite the fact that in Bohemia public spaces were critical to the

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286 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 523.
287 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 523.
performances of nation which were inseparable from the practice of nationalist mass politics in the region. Instead, the narrator states that the site of her music need not be a place visible from a distance, that any concealed corner selected at a moment’s notice will do. By making space a neglectable aspect of Josefine’s performances, he is, on the one hand, noting a parallel between the transformation of language in the text and the transformation of everyday spaces in Prague, which too was transfigured from the mundane to an arena loaded with nationalist symbolism. On the other hand, he identifies space as a mere ornament to the performances of the nation; what is really at stake in public spaces is how the national hero or figurehead forges a national community. During her concerts, the narrator clarifies that only the young are interested in her music as such, while the real mass of people has ‘pulled back’ into themselves (“auf sich selbst zurückgezogen”):

Hier … träumt das Volk, es ist, als lösten sich dem Einzelnen die Glieder, als dürfte sich der Ruhelose einmal nach seiner Lust im großen warmen Bett des Volkes dehnen und strecken.

Here … our people dream, it is as if the limbs of each were loosened, as if the harried individual once in a while could relax and stretch himself at ease in the great, warm bed of the [people].

Her piping triggers a loss of self for an individual mouse, so that each can feel themselves connected to the entire Maus-Volk. The atmosphere which Kafka composes, moreover, is strongly reminiscent of the romanticized, blissful home of the mole in “Der Bau,” which also parodied nationalist ideas around the Volk. Given that Josefine’s performances are sites of völkisch peace and unity as well as mass mobilization, it is welcomed when the narrator acknowledges that “it is not so much a [musical concert] as an assembly of the people, and an

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289 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 523.
290 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 530.
assembly where except for the small piping voice in front there is complete stillness …"292 ("Es ist nicht so sehr eine Gesangsvorführung als vielmehr eine Volksversammlung, und zwar eine Versammlung, bei der es bis auf das kleine Pfeifen vor völlig still ist …").293 Even though they are Josefine’s performances, it is the great, silent unity of the Maus-Volk which Kafka positions at their center, Josefine’s voice a mere “[kleines] Pfeifen” in their presence. In contemporary political practice and the narrative, mass mobilization represented allegedly the nation and, since Kafka weds the “Volksversammlung” with a performance of songs, he understands mass politics as primarily a spectacle of national symbols.

**A Stony Front to One of Their Own: Struggle between Hero and Volk**

Now that we have a handle on what Josefine’s music is and what effect it has on the Maus-Volk, we are better equipped to inquire about the dynamics between the national hero and the Volk at play in the text. The title (“Josefine die Sängerin, oder das Volk der Mäuse”) already suggests something significant about this relationship; one involves or necessitates the presence of the other, indicating that a Volk has a naturally close connection with one of their heroes. Yet the tension between Josefine’s individual power and the collective will of the Volk drives the narrative.

Although Josefine’s performances fulfill an important role for the nation of mice, they also serve to display her own individual achievement. For instance, the narrator ascribes to Josefine’s piping a theatrical element insofar as she undergoes a near-physical transcendence during her song:

> Schon steht sie da, das zarte Wesen, besonders unterhalb der Brust beängstigend vibrierend, es ist, als hätte sie alle ihre Kraft im Gesang versammelt, als sei allem an ihr, was nicht dem Gesange unmittelbar diene, jede Kraft, fast jede Lebensmöglichkeit

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293 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 526.
entzogen, als sei sie entblößt, preisgegeben, nur dem Schutze guter Geister überantwortet, als könne sie … ein kalter Hauch im Vorüberwehn toten.294

So there she stands, the delicate creature, shaken by vibrations especially below the breastbone, … it is as if she has concentrated all her strength on her song, as if from everything in her that does not directly subserve her singing all strength has been withdrawn, almost all power of life, as if she were laid bare, abandoned, committed merely to the care of good angels, as if … a cold breath blowing upon her might kill her.295

However similar her piping may be to the piping of an ordinary mouse, her production thereof is anything but. The narrator emphasizes the frailty and delicacy of her condition which singing induces; to achieve the beauty of her song, Josefine must perform a self-sacrifice, concentrating all her life powers on making this sonic material. At another place, the narrator describes her notes as “triumphal” and her effort to exert her throat to the fullest of its capabilities.296 Indeed, her physical display at these times is critical to making a ceremony “out of the usual thing.” Her own bodily transcendence likewise reflects the transformation of language which occurs during her performances.

The Maus-Volk’s hero thus literally offers up her body for the sake of the nation, yet Kafka’s narrator questions the role that a national hero sees itself as serving for the Volk. Whereas the narrator sees a father-child dynamic at play between Josefine and the Maus-Volk, she ascribes to herself a messianic power. Her transcendent piping will save the people from political and economic misery, if not by expelling evil, then at least by providing the Volk with the collective strength to overcome it; to Josefine, the Maus-Volk is the flock and she their shepherd, conceiving herself as not only a hero of the people, but also in times of strife a leader 294 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 522. 295 Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 363. 296 Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 363.
or figurehead.\textsuperscript{297} The narrator, nonetheless, expressly denies this false belief of Josefine’s, writing that the Maus-Volk have always saved themselves, although they are susceptible to external saviors.\textsuperscript{298} The messianism with which national heroes were imbued, Kafka exposes, is mired in illusion. And his criticism of such heroes does not stop there. The narrator for instance admits that she is afflicted with vanity and vulgarity. For those who compare Josefine’s “artful” piping to ordinary piping, she has only hatred; she seeks admiration only in exactly “the way she prescribes”; and, when her audience does not congregate before her quickly enough, she rages, swears, and even bites.\textsuperscript{299} Her messianic attitude thus can be understood as a consequence of her vanity, urging the reader to distrust the claims made about national heroes by scrutinizing their personality.

Besides exhibiting vanity because of self-conceived notions of her art’s “greatness,” Josefine holds a suspicious and worrying influence over the Maus-Volk. On the one hand, Josefine’s music creates a \textit{völkisch} unity of mice, allowing them to realize themselves as a distinct national unit; on the other, such a unity is only forged by inducing mice into a trance-like state. I would urge my readers to recall that the narrator states that it is merely the young who interest themselves for Josefine’s piping as such, for the masses of mice dream during her performances, at least are they able to relax from the struggles of daily life.\textsuperscript{300} Her music gives them tranquility, which is actually the music they love most.\textsuperscript{301} In fact, the narrator feels that Josefine’s piping sets them free (\textit{befreien}), if but temporarily, from their everyday collective suffering.\textsuperscript{302} Kafka, therefore, in two separate texts has stressed a connection between the

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\textsuperscript{297} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 366.
\textsuperscript{298} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 366.
\textsuperscript{299} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 362 – 364.
\textsuperscript{300} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 370.
\textsuperscript{301} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 360 – 362.
\textsuperscript{302} Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 531.
\end{flushright}
nationalist ideal of a unified Volk and the passivity to which the Volk is allured. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, the mole in its burrow similarly found bliss in the soil which contained its blood. Although the texts utilize two separate discourses of nationalism – in “Josefine,” language creates the national community, whereas in “Der Bau,” Blut und Boden plays a more decisive role – both trace how each involve essentially the same dynamics.

In the case of the Maus-Volk, Kafka views the realization of the national body as a product of passivity, docility, and manipulation as well. The narrator notices how on certain occasions her music becomes a mechanism for controlling the Volk by ensuring that they preserve her power. A child, who once piped up in Josefine’s audience, was hissed and whistled down, even though its piping was indistinguishable from Josefine’s. Without a directive from Josefine, her music was so enchanting that the Maus-Volk preserved her authority of their own whim. In response to her vulgarity, the Maus-Volk strive to meet her excessive demands, rather than revolt against them. To gather an audience that would satisfy Josefine, messengers are sent to summon new hearers, while sentries are posted on the roads, greeting newcomers and urging them to hurry. These followers of Josefine, who expand outward into space to attract a still larger following, fulfill the same role as monuments to historic figures, which were positioned in public spaces to enlist everyday people into the nationalist cause. The Volk’s collective threats additionally secure Josefine’s position: “Die Drohungen, die über uns stehen, machen uns stiller, bescheidener, für Josefine’s Befehlshaberei gefügiger…” The Maus-Volk is made more still (stiller), tamer (bescheidener), and more obedient to Josefine’s commandments (für Josefine’s

305 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 526.
Befehlshaber zweifellos) as a result of crises. Indeed, Kafka here notes how the supposed
menaces to a Volk can be used to enhance the figurehead’s power over them.

Whereas Josefine’s performances ostensibly invigorates the collective spirit of the Maus-
Volk, it is far more the means by which she seeks to protect her interests. Josefine argues that her
singing should relieve her from her daily work; her responsibility for earning the daily bread as
well as doing everything that is related to the “Existenzkampf” of the Maus-Volk should be
transferred to the whole people. According to Josefine, working strains her delicate voice and
prevents a sufficient enough recuperation needed to sing again. In her self-centered arguments,
the narrator finds that she trivializes the Maus-Volk’s daily efforts of labor in comparison to the
strain of her singing. Her juvenile campaign to avoid work in response to the Volk’s refusal
illustrates national heroes as figures worthy of skepticism and mockery. Her supporters
apparently spread the rumor that Josefine will cut short her grace notes unless her petition to be
freed of daily labor is granted; here, Josefine seeks to leverage her only gift to the Volk as a way
of achieving her aim to distance herself from their daily toils. The national importance of her art
is therefore merely a cover to manipulate the Maus-Volk into affirming her separate,
‘unvölkisch’ interests. When this attempt also fails, she resorts to petty, physical drama: on one
occasion, she claims to have injured her foot during work, forcing her to cut short her songs
since she must stand to perform. Despite limping and leaning on her supporters, no one believes
her. Josefine eventually changes excuses, stating that she is too tired, not in the mood, or feeling
faint and for that the narrator sardonically admonishes her, writing that the Maus-Volk is graced
with a play as well as a concert. Furthermore, he observes insightfully that, while Josefine may

306 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 532.
308 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 537.
express that she is too exhausted to sing, she never lacks the strength to continue her struggle against the Volk.\textsuperscript{309} Kafka’s national hero is indeed a figure to find pathetic, not only one whose real interests do not rest with the nation, but one who should be dismissed as a mere child, lamenting that they cannot have it their way.

In this sense too does the patriarchal relationship that the Maus-Volk has with Josefine pose another way by which she defines the collective community of mice. Whereas Josefine believes that she protects the people, the narrator insists that “the people look after Josephine much as a father takes into his care a child whose little hand … is stretched out to him.”\textsuperscript{310} No individual mouse, furthermore, would be capable of discharging these paternal duties as the people as a whole do.\textsuperscript{311} Only the entire Volk has the strength to assume care for Josefine, suggesting not only that a Volk carries the burden to care for their national hero, but also that a community is further defined by fulfilling this duty of protection. There is of course a parallel between the Maus-Volk and ordinary Germans and Czechs who felt the need to protect their own “mythic” heroes, either by erecting monuments to them or physically defending such representations with their lives. From this patriarchal relationship, Kafka advances a veiled criticism of nationalist mass politics: the Maus-Volk protects their hero even though she is tyrannical, vein, and, as I will demonstrate, endangers them. Yet since the Maus-Volk do look upon her a child, they are not entirely under her thumb and are certainly capable of resisting her. To her “announcements, decisions, and counterdecisions,” the Volk merely ignore them “like a grown-up person deep in thought turning a deaf ear to a child’s babble.”\textsuperscript{312} It is entirely due to this infantilizing of Josefine that the Volk is able to resist her will. What the narrator finds

\textsuperscript{309} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 372.
\textsuperscript{310} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 365.
\textsuperscript{311} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 365.
\textsuperscript{312} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 374.
significant about Josefine’s petition and the Volk’s refusal is the fact that “the people are capable of presenting a stony, impenetrable front to one of their own”; he goes on that it is all the more impenetrable as a result of this “anxious paternal care” of theirs. Thus it is not just their protection of Josefine that can define the Maus-Volk’s collective nature, but also the exertion of their collective strength against her individual authority. “As a whole,” the narrator writes, “[the Maus-Volk surrenders] unconditionally to no one, and not to her either.”

The weightiest criticism levied against national heroes in the text is expressed by the physical dangers posed by Josefine’s piping. It seems that on more than a few occasions the large audiences before Josefine have been suddenly slaughtered by the enemy. The narrator ascribes full responsibility to Josefine, who likely attracted the enemy with the sound of her piping. Yet whereas many of her audience members are slain, Josefine is always the first to quietly escape under cover of her escort. The Volk’s chosen hero invites violence by doing precisely that which made it a hero in the first place, that is, serving as a conduit for celebrating national identity. Kafka’s narrative is therefore clearly attuned to the many outbursts of violence instigated by either Germans or Czechs performing their nation in public spaces. Yet Kafka also directs scrutiny towards the relationship between national hero and Volk at this place in the text. The people, although fully aware that attending Josefine’s concerts is a risk to their lives, always run to whatever place she decides on next; likewise, she goes unpunished, despite endangering her people. The cult surrounding Josefine’s singing – her power over the Volk in addition to their own carelessness and submissiveness – brings the Volk to bloody ruin. Kafka may have seen nationalist violence not as stemming from some mythic, eternal conflict between Volk and a

national enemy, but rather as a result of internal dynamics: the dangers prompted by the nationalist worship of heroes and public celebrations of national identity were self-inflicted.

At the narrative’s conclusion, the narrator fittingly contends with the legacy left by national heroes as well. In the end, Josefine deserts the Maus-Volk, going missing just at a time when she was expected to sing. Her final act is proof that she was never their savior, ultimately betraying the Maus-Volk as they will not cede to her selfish demands. What was her worth to the Maus-Volk in the final analysis? She is measured up as a “brief episode in the eternal history (“ewige Geschichte”) of the Volk,” whose loss the Volk will eventually overcome. It is also revealed that she is neither the first nor the last of the Volk’s heroes, but indeed merely a single addition to a pantheon of heroes:

Josefine aber … wird fröhlich sich verlieren in der zahllosen Menge der Helden unseres Volkes, und bald, da wir keine Geschichte treiben, in gesteigerter Erlösung vergessen sein wie alle ihre Brüder.

Josefine however … will gladly lose herself in the countless mass of the heroes of our people, and soon, as we engage in no history, will be forgotten in heightened redemption like all of her brothers.

Since Josefine is only a piece of the Volk’s mythology, her chapter will be forgotten like all their other national heroes. On the one hand, one could say that Kafka is asserting that the production of mythic heroes renders them insignificant and interchangeable, yet that fails to calculate the issue of collective memory into the equation. The ultimate fate of national heroes is that they are forgotten in the collective memory of the Volk since they do not engage in (treiben) history. But interestingly the narrator lays a string of questions which suggest that it was the Volk’s collective

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316 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 537.
317 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 538.
318 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 538.
319 My own translation
memory in the first place which gave such heroes their power: “Was her actual piping considerably louder and more vivid than the memory of it? Was it still during her life more than a mere memory?” 320 The piping itself lacked sufficient materiality to inspire the worship of the Maus-Volk, whereas the memory of her piping was the real source of their attraction to it. And because their love of her song was based in their collective memory they will come to forget her as well. This forgetfulness of the Volk, of course, benefits Josefine greatly for she was no hero; only her introduction to the pantheon of heroes, by which her complete disappearance from the life of the Volk is cemented, could redeem her.

But that still leaves us with too simple of a reading. Kafka’s ways are subtle, and when we consider the matter of the Volk’s history a different image emerges. The text should lead one to heavily doubt the narrator’s claim that the Maus-Volk does not busy themselves with history. It stands out if only for the fact that during the nineteenth-century nationalism(s) explicitly grounded itself in the discipline of history to render its claims legitimate: as we recall from Chapter One, nations needed to exert a historical right on a territory to be authoritatively considered as such. No fervent patriot of a self-declared Volk would disregard such a task as history; yet, that is exactly what the narrator wants to the reader to accept about the nature of the Maus-Volk. Among other generalizations with which he describes his people, he writes, “… generally speaking we ignore historical research entirely …” 321 The text itself, however, is proof of the opposite: Kafka’s story records at the least a singular chapter of the history of the Maus-Volk, if not an attempt to characterize the nature of their race. For instance, the narrator marks the Volk with certain collective qualities that make them distinct – their “practical cunning,” their disinclination towards music, their habit of suffering, their swiftness of decision, their

320 Kafka, “Josefine die Sängerin,” 538.
acquaintance with death, and, in one particularly memorable passage, the brevity of their youth, which leads the Volk to becoming both childish and “prematurely old.”\textsuperscript{322} For all his talk that the Maus-Volk will forget Josefine, it is exactly the point that he does not want them to forget, neither the true nature of Josefine nor their own. Indeed, the narrative strives to make the flimsy collective memory of the Maus-Volk concrete.

There are two fundamental points that Kafka advances in “Josefine.” First, national heroes merit intense scrutiny, rather than uncritical mythologization. There is no doubt that Josefine asserts to the Maus-Volk its own uniqueness by transforming their everyday language into an icon of national pride and identity. Yet she reveals this uniqueness as a means of advancing her own self-centered interests, which actually seek to distance her from the burden of the Volk’s collective suffering and toil. It also becomes clear that the relationship between the Volk and their hero, by which they come to worship her in open spaces, poses a grave danger to the existence of the Volk. Cleverly, Kafka uses nationalist discourse around the healthy physical body to in fact denigrate the national hero-figure and expose her ability to do harm. Christoph Stölzl has noted that, before and during the time of publication, “the ideology of physical fitness was closely linked with the concept of nation.”\textsuperscript{323} National Others, notably the Jews, could be construed as enemies to the nation because their bodies allegedly featured physical abnormalities and inferiorities, e.g. bowed legs, weak chests, and “twisted and distorted” Oriental physiognomies.\textsuperscript{324} Those who rightly belonged to a völkisch “unity”, however, sported immaculate physiques and respected the values of hard labor.\textsuperscript{325} The narrator then interestingly describes Josefine as frail, feeble, and sensitive, one who evens pretends to be physically weaker

\textsuperscript{322} Kafka, “Josephine the Singer,” 360, 366, 369.
\textsuperscript{323} Stölzl, “Kafka: Jew, Anti-Semite, Zionist,” 74.
\textsuperscript{324} Stölzl, “Kafka: Jew, Anti-Semite, Zionist,” 73.
than she actually is to avoid joining the Volk in their daily labor. By describing Josefine in the precisely those ways reserved for identifying a national Other, Kafka uses the racialist discourse of nationalism to degrade mythic national heroes.

Secondly, Kafka’s narrative is an attempt to problematize the wedding of the aesthetic and the political, to which he bore witness as a resident of Prague. Josefine’s piping makes a ceremony of ordinary piping and certainly rises to the level of an art among the Maus-Volk. This art, nonetheless, is not for art’s sake, but rather is imbued with political aims. Despite the selfish motivations she has, Josefine’s piping is an invaluable tool for the Maus-Volk to realize themselves as a distinct Volk. Without the elevation of something so characteristic of mice as their piping to an aesthetic practice, the Maus-Volk would not experience that moment of völkisch unity and definition which her concerts promise. Both German and Czech nationalists similarly sought to mobilize aesthetics for the strictly political goal of nation-building. The Statue Cult to Josef II., the Jan Hus Memorial, and the Palacky Monument responded to accepted aesthetic standards in order to mythologize chosen national heroes and orientate a performance of their nation around them. Furthermore, aestheticizing national heroes in sculpture gave them a physical presence in everyday life. Even once the festivals concluded, memorials continued to forge a connection between passers-by and the imagined nation. As a result, the deployment of aesthetics was invaluable for the success of nationalist discourse and ideology in winning over the public: statues made the worries, struggles, prides, hopes, and memories of the nation real and interactable.326 Emotional, or emotion-producing, imagery of national heroes also had key role to play in turning the public into agents of the nation. According to anthropologist Myron J. Arnoff, “… an important means of mobilizing collective action is through the use of [political]

326 For a fuller analysis of how these were expressed in the Jan Hus memorial, see Paces, Prague Panoramas, 41 – 55; and, in the Palacky monument, see Paces, Prague Panoramas, 61 – 69.
Myths surrounding German and Czech heroes were central to mobilizing their respective publics in the struggle for national dominance in Bohemia. More than that, these myths distinguished the nation by shrouding its history in a sense of uniqueness. Josef II, Jan Hus, and František Palacky all represented key points in the histories and collective memories of the German and Czech nations and came to be wells from which the Volk could draw a sense of national glory.

Yet Kafka places forth a counter to these tactics in “Josefine die Sängerin” by diminishing the myth of the hero and revealing her actual goal in aestheticizing piping. The doubt he casts on Josefine’s true interests and character suggests a concern for how politicians deployed nationalism, that is by promoting their memorialization in public spaces, as a tool for increasing their own power and that of their class. The myth of Josefine is precisely that she should be treated as worthy of reverence, and most importantly, that her piping is an art. It is only an art because her ceremonious performances distinguish it as such. At bottom, her and her piping are completely dispensable to the Maus-Volk; after all, she will be forgotten in time and the Maus-Volk will no doubt survive the loss of her music. But that is Kafka’s point: nations and their histories only seem special because nationalists frame them so. Processions, celebrations, festivals performing the nation on their surface are designed to invigorate a bona fide feeling of national unity and strength by claiming public spaces with national symbols. In the text, these feelings become translated as a trance or a lulling, through which the Maus-Volk are released briefly from their daily struggles and grow to desire Josefine’s singing. Kafka’s text nevertheless identifies the true intentions of these aesthetic performances, namely that they are all merely

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gestures to bring the public under the authority of nationalist political leaders. However, Kafka does not write about a Volk who is utterly helpless to the effect of Josefine’s singing; the narrator is fully aware of its trance-inducing power and writes this dynamic between the figurehead and the masses into his history of the Volk. The public, Kafka seems to argue, should recognize the disposability of national mythologies as well as their ability to survive without a shepherd.
Conclusion

Franz Kafka lived in Prague during a critical moment in the history of the city. What for centuries had been a nationally undifferentiated urban space became increasingly defined by national identity. This process was set in motion long before Kafka was born in Prague’s Jewish Quarter in 1883. Since the dawn of the nineteenth century, educated, middle-class and bourgeois intellectuals of Czech heritage initiated a scholarly interest in the history and language of the Czech people, their efforts culminating in the Czech National Revival of the mid-nineteenth century. In the years before Kafka’s birth, the hopes of this first generation of Czech nationalists swiftly gained momentum; German officials in the municipal government witnessed their substitution with Czechs, Prague experienced a large migration of Czech-speakers as industrialization took root, and, most importantly, the spaces of the city itself became more and more orientated around the public expression of Czech national identity.

Czech nationalists decried the influence of German language and culture in Bohemia which they argued had strengthened since the end of the Thirty Years War. For them, the city’s spaces functioned as a canvas whose urban material projected the power of the ruling ethnic group. Before the late-nineteenth century, Baroque architecture dominated the image of the city, which became associated with the alleged Catholicization/Germanization of Bohemia after “Czech” losses at the Battle of the White Mountain. Fundamentally transforming urban space from reflecting a German, or Habsburg, identity to a Czech one was a necessary means of realizing the ascending Czech nation and demonstrating the decline of German control. By supporting the installation of structures representing a national iconography and occupying public spaces through demonstrations, processions, festivals, and riots, Czechs demonstrated their exclusionary possession of and belonging to Prague’s public spaces, often employing the
visual power of national symbols and the physical brutality of national defense. The city’s German minority, however, was hardly idle during this time. As their position in Prague declined along with the power of the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself, Germans came to question the formerly imperial orientation of their group identity and responded to the Czech incursions by adopting similar methods, although their embrace of nationalism had far less success in Bohemia. When either Czechs or Germans sought to possess Prague’s public spaces, they hoped to temporarily, or permanently, take it over, occupying it to make it express what these groups sought, namely a representation of their national identity and nation. Public space was thus the arena in which Czech and German nationalisms engaged in the primordial ethnic struggle their respective historical narratives had constructed.

Rather than continuing the typical trends of Kafka interpretation, which finds a host of fin-de-siècle and twentieth-century philosophical issues in his works, this thesis has strived to extend a relatively new approach, for which Marek Nekula’s contributions have proven invaluable. His research has laid the groundwork for situating Kafka in this Prague context, which highlights the transfiguration of its public spaces during Kafka’s lifetime. This thesis has furthered Nekula’s pioneering approach by analyzing the representation of public spaces in Kafka’s short fiction. Concentrating on Kafka’s narration of public spaces is essential for several reasons. While Kafka’s oeuvre might indeed be engaged in struggles with the existential questions posed by modernity, we can come to a more precise interpretation of his works by focusing on a far more concrete, underlying struggle that permeated every aspect of everyday life in fin-de-siècle Prague. A German-Jew born into a rapidly “Czechisizing” city, Kafka could not escape from the alienation and violence of fin-de-siècle nationalism. Narrowing in on those textual instances in which public space is represented provides insight into the ways the middle-
class-driven movement of nationalism historically achieved its ends. Kafka, moreover, offers a useful perspective: as a Jew alienated equally from both German and Czech national imaginaries, his testimonies are those of a victimized observer, whose fiction reveals the inherent dangers of nationalism. The analysis of those scholars, particularly Andreas Huyssen328, Ritchie Robertson329, and Andrew J. Webber330, who situate Kafka in the context of a purely modernized, industrialized, or urbanized Prague will inevitably fail to adequately address the reality of nationalism and its urban articulations. The discourse of nationalism set the terms of everyday life in fin-de-siècle Prague, so if we write about Kafka and “the modern city,” it would be wise to not lose sight of this fundamental dimension. If we did, then we completely miss how nationalism and European modernity were intertwined.

There is still another reason I would care to address, that is, how Kafka’s narration of public space can help us make sense of the role of such spaces in the architectural and urban histories of Central and Southeastern Europe. The way public spaces evolved in Prague was of course unique to that place and time, although nationalist movements were a common feature of nearly all regions of Austro-Hungary in its last decades. As the twentieth-century continued, furthermore, Europe as a whole would have to reckon with the atrocities justified with nationalist ideologies; even into the present, the continent cannot divorce itself from the legacy of those romantic nationalisms born during the post-Enlightenment age. Clearly, the transformation of Prague’s public spaces around the fin-de-siècle not only reflected the wider transformation of a Bohemian to a Czech society, but also was a key signifier of Europe’s transformation into a

continent of nation-states and competing nationalities. I agree with Nekula who has written that the alteration of urban public space in Prague illustrates Pierre Bourdieu’s thesis that modern society is represented in urban space.331 Such an interpretation of public space makes sense in light of Jürgen Habermas’ analysis of the post-feudal public sphere. Whereas the populace at large was a passive element in the representative public sphere of the feudal era, the bourgeois public sphere was defined by ordinary citizens who actively negotiated beliefs and values, thereby shaping the public sphere itself.332 If we use public space as a lens through which to view societal development, we see how the inner conflicts of a society are played out. Public spaces testify to (1) in what directions society is moving and (2) in what directions citizens should resist. We must therefore turn to the Prague context for an understanding into the way nationalisms shape the dynamics at play in public spaces and are shaped by them as well.

To that end, I would like to return to the three pairs of issues I have identified as defining Prague’s spatial politics: belonging/unbelonging to public spaces and community, possession/purification of public spaces, and power/humiliation of ethnic groups. Czech and German nationalists projected their national iconography into public urban spaces as a means of demonstrating their “originary” claim of belonging to Bohemia, naturally locating their national enemy as a foreign element of the territory. Both national camps viewed itself as the true and legitimate inheritor of public space while attempting to alienate the Other from the territory. In addition to the iconographical and semiotic incursions into the city’s spaces, nationalists on occasion occupied public spaces with their national signifiers not merely to re-assert their belonging to it and the unbelonging of the Other, but also to purify space of these “strange” or

“impure” elements. During the numerous violent outbursts of the city’s history, purification took on a more literal connotation when the establishments operated by supposed national enemies, typically Germans or Jews, faced attack. After the collapse of Austro-Hungary, these purification processes were no longer restricted to simply adding national iconographies to public space (or assaulting national Others) but came to include physically removing the iconography of the opposing nation, i.e. the national symbols of Bohemian Germans. On the one hand, emphasizing one’s own belonging to the Bohemian territory and possessing its spaces became the way for Czechs to display the rising power of their nation and for Germans to cling onto whatever meager influence they had left. On the other, such attempts alienated a national Other from public spaces, always intending to humiliate their standing in Bohemia and making them feel powerless.

In each text I have analyzed, these dynamics at play in Prague’s urban space define the representation of public space in Kafka’s literature. In “An Old Manuscript” (“Ein Altes Blatt”) the public square becomes a site of contest between the townsfolk, who have inhabited the capital city (Hauptstadt) for some time, and the nomads, who have invaded the city’s space from a foreign, peripheral area. The townsfolk’s cultured and civilized way of life, which is part and parcel of their hegemony over the public space, is threatened by the more barbaric customs of the nomads. Yet it is precisely through their conquest and possession of the city’s spaces that the nomads begin to emerge as a nation with history, thus evoking the nationalization of Prague’s urban space by Czechs. Likewise, Prague’s spatial politics inform those of the town square: the nomads disrupt the townsfolk’s belonging to the Hauptstadt by claiming the space for themselves. They change its use so that the square becomes an assertion of nomadic identity, rather than that of the townsfolk; as a result, the native townsfolk become alienated from their
presumably primordial homeland. Whereas the nomads freely inhabit space, subjecting it to their primitive nature and expressing their power, the townsfolk encounter utter humiliation and are helpless to resist these new possessors. Since the narrator’s perspective supplies a universal form to the claims Czechs and Germans made about self and Other – simply, we the victims stand for the forces of civilization in Austria, they the colonizers represent barbarism – Kafka is actually signaling that two opposed national identities in Bohemia were not really all that distinct, but rather shared common narratives for defining group identity. By raising the responsibility that the Kaiser bears in attracting the nomads, he additionally identifies the role of imperial power in creating both the national Volk and the national enemy. The text also articulates the fundamental pillars of historical scholarship in Bohemia, which relied upon myths of national origins to construct ethnic identity and conflict, while formulating its own criticisms of Bohemian history. While the text appropriates the nationalist use of history as a means of reinforcing national consciousness, it points to several flaws of nationalist histories. “Ein Altes Blatt” challenges the representation of an age-old or primordial past during which the mythic struggle between Germans and Czechs began and expands the scope of Bohemian history, recognizing that the imperial state had a hand in creating this conflict in the first place.

Chapter 2 featured close readings of “An Imperial Message” (“Eine Kaiserliche Botschaft”) and “The Burrow” (“Der Bau”) to assert that Kafka not only scrutinizes how the locus of Bohemian German identity evolved from empire to nation, but finds contradictions in both constructions of their identity as well. Represented in the parable by the messenger who fulfills the Kaiser’s command, Germans fashioned themselves as civilizers who presided over a vast imperial space needing to be brought in line with their enlightened principles. The badge the messenger receives before setting out expresses the privilege with which Germans ascribed their
imperial position: serving the imperial state promised an unlimited belonging to the infinite totality of imperial space. The decline of imperial power, however, severely inhibits the messenger’s movement, so much so that his belonging is in fact stasis and the imperial subject assumes a position of dominance. An even greater handicap to his movement is the infinite structures of rule; occupying the vastness of imperial space, they present themselves as obstacles or barriers which cannot be overcome by the imperial administrator. It was thus their expansive bureaucratic apparatus that rendered the belonging of Germans within the Empire impotent and constricted. In “The Burrow” the vast imperial space shifts underground to the labyrinthine tunneled-out home of a solitary mole-like creature. The driving force of the narrative is the being’s struggle for the preservation of its construction, its relationship with its home becoming a source of self-torment. The creature’s fantasies of an “enemy” are merely an externalization of its inner turmoil. The narration, which I argue offers Kafka’s parody of nationalist thinking, shows that national identity was inseparable from its imperial referent: the creature inherits both the civilized, enlightened, and property-owning self-image of German liberals loyal to empire, while evoking their weaknesses of gluttony, arrogance, and excess. The “mole” believes that its construction of the burrow, or its civilizing of the raw soil, promises an unbreakable belonging to it; indeed, Kafka mobilizes the discourse of blood and soil to make the point. Yet despite such a powerful connection the creature cannot rid itself of fears of unbelonging, specifically that some monstrous primordial inhabitant lurks within the burrow. In order to survive, it then seeks purity for its burrow, hoping to keep it free of structural imperfection and foreign penetration. Despite its angst of a humiliating attack in its own home, the creature blatantly disregards taking security measures in order to receive pleasure from its use of space, namely by gorging itself on its food stuffs and lying in blissful slumber. The monoethnic utopia romanticized by nationalist
ideologies is ridiculed by Kafka as a desire to embrace gluttony and excess without disruption. Furthermore, the existence of a national enemy is illustrated as nothing more than a means to justify the damage nationalist thinking brings to its adherents and the homeland.

“Josefine die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse” probes and criticizes the new nationalist mass politics in Bohemia, which performed the nation by occupying public spaces with national symbols and codes. An anonymous mouse attempts to analyze the relationship between his people and their beloved singer Josefine. Her performances, which arouse the masses of mice to sit before her, transform the language of the Maus-Volk, piping, into an aesthetic act. This instance of distinction, from which the everyday rises to ceremony, carries immense national significance: her music demonstrates that the Volkssprache of the Maus-Volk is worthy of public celebration and reverence, which consequently enhanced a sense of völkisch collectivity among mice and offered collective strength. Indeed, national festivals in Bohemia’s public spaces often had an aesthetic dimension since both German and Czech nationalists rallied around massive public sculptures of their national heroes. Kafka thus interprets the possessions of public spaces as a way of defining the national community. However, Kafka also questions the interests behind this merging of the aesthetic and the political in public spaces by denigrating Josefine, the national hero of mice. The collective unity provided by Josefine’s music is inseparable from the trance-like state it induces in its listeners. By releasing the Maus-Volk temporarily from their collective suffering, Josefine hopes that her performances will allow her to selfishly escape the daily labor in which all mice must engage. Her concerts have also occasionally led to outbreaks of violence, leaving many of her people dead, yet she is never held responsible for the atrocities. In the end, Josefine betrays the Maus-Volk by abandoning them without warning after it becomes clear that her juvenile and immature attempts to curry
sympathy will always fail to free her from the collective responsibility. Although her music did allow the Maus-Volk to recognize piping as unique quality of their race, her actual motivation for transmuting their banal language into an aesthetic practice was merely to enhance her authority over the Maus-Volk. For Kafka, performances of the nation displayed the true dynamics between Volk and national hero, exposing on the one hand that figureheads use nationalism to achieve a complicit public and on the other that the totality of the Volk is greater than the singular authority of their chosen leaders or heroes.

Kafka’s oeuvre is vast, and his other narratives deserve re-reading in light of the Prague context. One question we should ask is: Does he always represent public space as a site of group identity formation or frustration? In some cases, the spatial politics of Prague continue to inform his texts. “Josefine,” for instance, is not the only text in which Bohemia’s nationalist mass politics clearly had a role to play. “The Building of the Chinese Wall” (“Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer”) takes the form of an essay, whose author attempts to explain why the high command of the Empire resolved itself to construct the wall piecemeal and what impact this massive infrastructure project, which is supposed to defend the nation from northern nomads, has on China.333 Nationalism not only serves as a way of maintaining the public’s desire for a wall, but is enhanced by its construction as well. The procession of workers leaving their homes to travel vast distances to the site of the unfinished wall closely mimics the sentiments evoked by nationalist mobilizations in Bohemia:

Groups of people with banners and streamers waving were on all the roads; never before had they seen how great and rich and beautiful and worthy of love their country was. Every fellow countryman was a brother for whom one was building a wall of protection, and who would return lifelong thanks for it with all he had and did. Unity! Unity! Shoulder to shoulder, a ring of brothers,

a current of blood no longer confined within the narrow circulation of one body, but sweetly rolling and yet ever returning throughout the endless leagues of China.\textsuperscript{334}

The sense of national pride and völkisch unity that we saw in the “Josefine” – all individual members of China feel themselves bonded by blood in one national body – returns as a result of the national building project. The wall itself is an act of national self-definition since it marks the physical boundaries of the nation as well as who belongs within its territory. The nomads again stand for a detestable Other, whose cruelties are “in accordance with their nature.”\textsuperscript{335} The text also offers a comparison between the segregation of urban schools between Czech- and German-based education and how Kafka represents nationalist schooling. More than that, the extended discussion of the relationship between the Volk, who inhabit the rural China, and the high command of Empire, which remain at a distance in the capital city, warrants interpretation. The passage is loaded with urgent contemporary concerns regarding how the multinational peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire felt about their connection to Vienna and the nationalist notion that the rural Volk had a more “authentic” existence than the imperial elite.

I have doubts, nonetheless, that Kafka’s representation of public space was strictly formed by the nationalist dynamics defining Prague’s public spaces. For one, there are the three novels to analyze, America (“Amerika”), The Trial (Der Prozess), The Castle (Das Schloss), two of which take place in urban environments. A number of Kafka’s shorter stories such as “The Street Window,” “Passers-by,” “On the Tram,” “At Night,” and “Give it Up!” may grapple with life in the modern urban environment without making reference to the nationalization of public space. If we want to extend the Prague context, however, it would be worthwhile to compare


\textsuperscript{335} Kafka, “The Great Wall of China,” 241.
Kafka’s representation of public space with that of his peers. Considered a member of the Prague circle, Kafka was well acquainted with a group of writers who brought literary modernism to the city, among them Max Brod, Franz Werfel, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Gustav Meyrink. Perspectives emerging out of the Prague context in addition to Kafka’s would provide further insight into the role of public space in nation-building and how fin-de-siècle Bohemian intellectuals confronted the question of nationalism. Moreover, it would be worthwhile for German and German-Jewish studies to open avenues for this type of scholarship more generally. German-speaking Europe can neither complain of a historical lack of urban centers nor of ignorance regarding the consequences of racialist, nationalist ideology. It thus becomes important for German studies to consider: how did national identity shape and become shaped by significant urban public spaces in places where German culture held sway? how did German-language authors make sense of nationalizing urbanities? Or, alternatively, how did nationalized and nationalizing cities inform the development of German literature in and around those urban localities?

My hope in writing this thesis was to articulate the nationalist urban-spatial conflicts at work in narratives which make no mention of the city itself. I believe that Kafka, although greatly informed by his city’s spatial politics, avoided making specific reference to his locality in order to grasp these dynamics on a wider scale. He was indeed an observant, well-traveled cosmopolitan; when the centuries-old imperial underpinnings of Central and Southeastern Europe collapsed into a set of young nations, I doubt he was surprised. His point was that the public spaces of the modern city bear a national dimension. His literary representations of public space manage to pierce through the discursive relationship nationalisms had with urban public space to unearth the underlying dynamics at work. Taking nothing about the Prague context at
face value, Kafka’s short fiction interrogates, criticizes, and problematizes the ways national group identity was woven into the fabric of a modernizing city.
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