

# Reading Kafka Enactively

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**Abstract:**

I argue that understanding cognition as enactive—that is, as constituted of physical interaction between embodied minds and the environment—can illuminate the opening of Kafka's novel *Der Proceß* (*The Trial*), revealing it as cognitively realistic in this respect. I show how enactivism is relevant to this passage in several ways: in terms of enactive vision and imagination (based on the sensorimotor account of vision), enactive language (with a focus on basic-level categorization and readers' motor responses), and enactive emotion (drawing on appraisal theory). I also suggest that these cognitively realistic features might result in ambivalent reactions on the reader's part.

**Keywords:** categorization, cognitive realism, emotion, enactive cognition, imagination, Kafka, reader responses, vision

Someone must have slandered Josef K., because without his having done anything wrong, one morning he was arrested. His landlady Frau Grubach's cook, who brought him his breakfast at about eight o'clock every morning, didn't come this time. That had never happened before. He waited a little while longer, saw from his pillow the old woman who lived opposite and who was watching him with a quite uncharacteristic curiosity, but then, at once disconcerted and hungry, he rang the bell. Instantly there was a knock at the door, and a man whom he had never seen in the apartment before came in. He was slim and yet solidly built, he wore close-fitting black clothing, like a travelling suit, furnished with various folds, pockets, buckles, buttons and a belt, all of which gave the impression of being very practical but without making clear what it was actually for. 'Who are you?' K. asked, and immediately half sat up in bed. But the man ignored the question, as though one simply had to accept his appearance, and for his part merely said: 'You rang?' 'Anna is to bring me my breakfast', K. said, and tried, silently at first, to establish through attentiveness and reflection who the man actually was.<sup>1</sup>

*Reading (Kafka) Cognitively*

This kind of opening to a novel could be approached from innumerable analytical angles. Over the years since its publication in 1925, it has been subjected to too many to count, from the metaphysical to the syntactical, from the socio-legal and biographical to the more psychoanalytically speculative—but, happily, survived them all. The present contribution will read this passage cognitively, and while this is in one sense just another way of reading to add to all the others, in another sense it differs from them. As Terence Cave points out in the introduction to this issue, the tautologous character of the phrase ‘to read cognitively’ invites the question: how else is one meant to read? And asking this in turn suggests that to read a text explicitly in this manner is to engage with something fundamental to the reading process, to which the focal points of other critical reading strategies may be seen as supplementary.<sup>2</sup>

Reading cognitively has several consequences, which I hope this essay might manage to present as advantages. Firstly, cognitive reading—at least as I’ll be practising it—compels us to take seriously the literal level of the text’s meaning: it asks what the cognitive *effects* of a given textual feature might be,<sup>3</sup> rather than what this feature might really *mean* despite literal appearances (see also Smith, this issue). Secondly, it foregrounds a crucial overlap between text and reader: cognitive processes as evoked in the text’s ‘fictional minds’<sup>4</sup> are inherently comparable to those that operate in the reader’s own mind, and how the two correspond or differ may provide useful clues to the likely effects of the text. Thirdly, cognitive readings are readings informed by cognitive science, and in this case in particular by what is known as ‘second-generation’ cognitive science,<sup>5</sup> which I’ll suggest yields certain important insights about the nature of cognitive responses to literary texts (see also Chesters, this issue). The most important for this discussion will be the extent of the interconnexions between interpretative, emotional, perceptual and physiological components. Understanding how these connexions function allows us, I think, to consider literary features and effects in a more inclusive, joined-up way than is often the case.

Cognitive readings also often have the minor but not insignificant effect of validating first impressions as starting-points for literary analysis. Although it’s a very long time since I read this passage by Kafka for the first time, my (teenage) reaction to it was along the lines of: it’s pretty strange, but in a good way. My cognitive reading will try

to explore that first impression, which seems to me reasonable as far as it goes. Being arrested in bed in the morning for an unknown crime is an unusual occurrence, for readers of Kafka in the 1920s as today. The unknown man's outfit is strange, and K.'s reactions are strange. How little we're told about almost everything (the outfit and certain of K.'s reactions aside) is strange. Nonetheless, it all works.

### *Enactive Vision*

I'll explore this last kind of strangeness first. The scene-setting technique employed in this passage is my favourite example of the cognitive effectiveness of Kafka's minimalist style. Kafka's minimalism isn't indiscriminate elimination of detail, but what I've called a 'maximally efficient minimalism'.<sup>6</sup> The beauty of this minimalism is precisely that we're unlikely to notice it on casual reading—so let's take another look. The first thing we learn about K.'s surroundings is what he sees from the pillow, so we infer that he's in bed (looking out of the window), and in a bedroom, and in a house. When we're told that 'he rang' and that 'there was a knock' (neither verb in the German original, *läuten* or *klopfen*, specifies its object), we infer a bell and a door, and by the time the bed, the door and the apartment are explicitly mentioned, we already know they're there. We are unlikely to experience the lack of representational accumulation of detail, because the unfolding action and its indications of K.'s perspective create all the detail we need. Why is this? What makes this minimalism effective rather than just annoying? (Of course, you may just find it annoying—and cognitive approaches that incorporate empirical testing can explore individual variations of this kind, though they won't be my focus here.) My suggestion is that Kafka's highly underdetermined descriptive mode taps in directly here to the mechanisms by which visual perception and (visual) imagination seem to operate.<sup>7</sup>

A long history of pictorialist accounts of vision—according to which, just as in folk-psychological assumptions about 'pictures in the head', a detailed and long-lasting mental representation of the environment is responsible for the experience of consciously seeing<sup>8</sup>—has, especially over the past thirty years or so, met a number of serious challenges. These have come from work on relatively well-known perceptual phenomena like change blindness and inattentional blindness (which demonstrate how much less we see and notice than we think we do; see also Lyne, this issue) and lesser-known factors

such as perception–action coupling at the level of ‘micro-affordances’.<sup>9</sup> This is still a highly contested area, but accounts of vision which propose an alternative to the mental–pictures explanation (as well as to propositionalist accounts, which also rely on mental representation<sup>10</sup>) seem to account better for a range of relevant empirical evidence, and to encounter fewer theoretical obstacles: they arguably sidestep both the homuncular fallacy and infinite regress entailed by the need for some kind of ‘mind’s eye function’ to read off the internal representation of the world posited in pictorialist accounts, as well as the ‘hard problem’ of how brain states could possibly ‘give rise to’ conscious experience.

In the sensorimotor account of vision and visual consciousness,<sup>11</sup> vision is action: seeing is not building up an internal representation, but is an exploration of the environment with active mastery of the governing laws of sensorimotor contingency — actively exercising routines for extracting information about the world, interacting with visual input and exploiting the ways this input changes as we and/or the world move. The world functions as an outside memory, as its own (re)presentation; we know we can always look if we need to, and we store not mental models of the world but the information needed to further explore it. The world emerges as we need it to, as we need to interact with it, ‘just in time’.<sup>12</sup> And this is precisely the kind of emergence that the opening of *The Trial* evokes: a ‘just-in-time’ emergence of just those aspects of the world which K. needs to interact with, and which we therefore need to know about in order to enactively imagine what he sees.

As has often been argued, ever since the commentaries on Kevin O’Regan and Alva Noë’s *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* paper (2001), this strong account almost certainly needs to be modulated by an acknowledgement that some kind of representation is needed of the environment, if only to allow us to know where to look to begin with (when things are out of sight beyond even low-resolution peripheral vision) and to prevent our having to start from scratch with each blink or eye movement. But these representations are not only probably very limited in detail, they most likely also survive only in the order of a fixation duration.<sup>13</sup> Crucially, from a theoretical standpoint, they aren’t what is seen when we see the world around us: seeing is not having an internal representation, but engaging with an environment. This engagement must clearly be mediated by ‘representations’ of information guiding perceptual routines, and perhaps also by short-lived representations of some aspects of the scene, but neither of these

causes the phenomenology of seeing.<sup>14</sup> Converging evidence from numerous areas including those I've briefly mentioned here makes it fairly clear that vision isn't mediated by richly detailed and lasting neural representation of the world. These are the key points on which my analysis of the visuo-perceptual effects of this passage will rely.

Perceptual experience consists in the rapid, automatic exploratory actions by which we engage with our environments — not just with our eyes and brains, but with our whole bodies — the endpoint of which is not a comprehensive replication of the world in the brain. The fact that the presumably very attractive floral bedspread on K.'s bed goes unmentioned is therefore a perceptually pertinent aesthetic characteristic. Its features are irrelevant to K. as he deals with the morning's events, and they are therefore treated as irrelevant to the reader. Of course, K. is well acquainted with his bedroom, and the reader isn't, but because most of the details of the apartment never matter at all, minimal prompting of an imaginative experience of a generic apartment, as well as of the familiar constituents of the morning routine of waking after a night's sleep, is likely to be sufficient to prevent bewilderment on the perceptual level. This claim is supported by empirical evidence that people tend to evaluate long descriptions negatively, or simply skip them.<sup>15</sup> Anežka Kuzmičová suggests that 'reference to visual complexity (...) is overrepresented in literary visual descriptions', but that this doesn't end up inducing rich imaginative experiences, because it means that visual descriptions tend not to bear much structural relation to perceptual experience and therefore 'end up appearing (...) surprisingly non-imageable'.<sup>16</sup> Preliminary empirical evidence also suggests that within the category of 'imageability' itself there may be significant dissociations between the kind induced by instructions to imagine in a pictorial mode and the naturally non-pictorial imaginative experiences induced by (Kafka's) fiction: people may report minimal vividness in the former case and great vividness in the latter.<sup>17</sup> And furthermore, as Kuzmičová also points out, 'imageability' isn't the same as experientiality,<sup>18</sup> so these kinds of descriptions might make us put lots of effort into doing something (imagining in great detail) that isn't even conducive to a rich experience of the fictional world. I suggest that Kafka may here be exploiting the gap between what we imagine and what we experience in a more positive direction: reducing imaginable detail in a way that intensifies experiential richness. The broader effects of this may be twofold: on the one hand, the reader may find the 'cognitive realism' of the evocation of perception as non-pictorial compelling, and on the

other hand he or she may find its unfamiliarity, as a way of thinking about vision and being presented with fictional worlds, unsettling.<sup>19</sup>

### *Enactive Imagination and Categorization*

It's well known that the imagination (by which I here mean imagining in the visual modality, arguably the most experientially common and salient form of imagining) is subserved by brain areas closely related to those active in vision,<sup>20</sup> and visuo-imaginative experiences have a phenomenology which closely resembles that of seeing. Although it has been much less fully researched than vision in this context, there are good grounds for suggesting that the imagination operates on the same exploratory principles as vision, but with somatosensory feedback provided from memory rather than from the immediate environment, and the experience remaining to a greater extent characterized by potentiality. Imagining, then, can be conceived of as partially enacting the environmental exploration that occurs when we see, in the absence of the relevant external stimulus.<sup>21</sup> Evidence for this 'perceptual-activity' account of imagination comes from research on eye movements when imagining, as well as from work on unilateral neglect.<sup>22</sup> There's also a good deal of evidence that motor imagery (simulating an action without overt execution) is functionally equivalent to action execution, in that they share common neural substrates.<sup>23</sup> There are differences, of course—specifically, the primary motor cortex seems not to be involved in imagined actions, which makes sense, suggesting that the overlap is primarily in action planning (premotor and supplementary motor areas) rather than action execution—but the motor control hierarchy seems to be activated in very similar ways in the two modes. Both seeing and imagining can thus be understood as exploratory perceptual behaviours to which motor functions are inherent. This gives us a basis for establishing a close parallel between characters' visual experiences and readers' imaginative experiences as enactive processes that don't rely on the building-up of detailed representations.

This non-pictorial parallel yields considerations relevant specifically to the type of description we find in this passage of Kafka's. In particular, potentiality is important here. On the enactivist account, vision is substantially defined by potentiality—seeing is knowing how the input would change if I or the object moved in a certain way, and knowing that I *could* look if I needed to—and the imagination is even more so, because the potentiality isn't narrowed down as

it is when I actually look. Vision and especially imagination have the capacity to be *inexplicitly* noncommittal,<sup>24</sup> and this is a quality which language also has,<sup>25</sup> but which pictures don't. Language that isn't employed according to the pictorialist assumptions that have historically characterized much of the theory of linguistic and literary representation<sup>26</sup> can exploit this shared characteristic to powerful imaginative effect. In phenomenological terms, the potentiality which characterizes the imagination means that there isn't necessarily an answer to the question whether the bed which I imagine has a headboard or not, until and unless it becomes relevant to my needs in imagining to make it explicit (with a headboard it often never does). Kafka's minimal style in evoking the visual world exploits the continuum between vision and imagination by tapping into the qualities of potentiality and indeterminacy that define them both, and the imagination in particular, as well as language. In what follows I'll go into more detail on the linguistic front.

### *Enactive Language*

In the mid-1970s, the cognitive linguist Eleanor Rosch and her colleagues<sup>27</sup> found that the categories into which we divide the world's stimuli are not only organized hierarchically from the most general to the most specific, but also incorporate cognitively basic levels that claim a privileged place within this general-to-specific hierarchy: the most cognitively basic level is in the *middle* of the hierarchy, that is, 'bed', not 'furniture' or 'futon'. There are also basic-level actions like swimming, walking and grasping, and basic-level social actions like arguing, as well as basic-level emotions such as happiness, anger and sadness. The basic level is a cognitively privileged level beyond which, if prompted to list category attributes, people in general show virtually no increase in knowledge<sup>28</sup>—that is, in most cases no more associations are stimulated by more specific words. Language thus seems to work most efficiently not when it's being maximally specific, but when it doesn't give all possible detail. This principle also forms the central plank of Sperber and Wilson's 'relevance theory' of linguistic communication (see Sellevold, this issue), which suggests that inferencing in the search for relevance 'fills in the gaps' in linguistic utterances, which are always essentially underdetermined. The authors have themselves suggested that these considerations can usefully be extended to perception.<sup>29</sup>

Categorization is not only a cognitive-linguistic phenomenon, but also a perceptual and therefore action-related phenomenon. We have

general motor actions for seeing beds and lying on them (that is, all beds have relatively similar sensorimotor affordances), but we have no motor actions for furniture in general that aren't motor actions for some basic-level object like a bed, and motor actions for double beds are different from the 'bed' actions in only minor ways. Here too, these findings about the importance of action can be extended from vision to imagination: we are likely to respond more readily if prompted to imagine a bed than either a four-poster bed or a piece of furniture, because the imagination, like language, operates in constant interplay with sensorimotor functions. The imagination is less likely to posit details such as the specific type of bed, given the tendency of the imagination to leave more inexplicit than a picture would be able to, which in turn derives from the fact that most common ways of interacting with beds don't depend on additional subordinate-level features. As George Lakoff puts it: basic-level distinctions 'are "the generally most useful distinctions to make in the world," since they are characterized by overall shape and motor interaction and are at the most general level at which one can form a mental image'.<sup>30</sup>

Supporting evidence for the embodied and enactive view of language espoused by Rosch, Lakoff and Johnson and others has more recently been provided by neuroimaging research on 'mirror neurons', which has found that neural activation patterns when reading action verbs, for example, closely resemble those which subserve action execution and observation,<sup>31</sup> and that this motor activation is important to comprehension rather than just epiphenomenal (see also Chesters and Müller, this issue).<sup>32</sup> When reading fiction, engaging with fictional characters 'in the mode of an anticipatory kinaesthetics'<sup>33</sup> constituted by the motor responses inherent to linguistic processing might be expected to increase the empathic connexion between the acting character and the imaginatively acting reader. In the context of categorization, this motor response seems (dependent on the verb context) to involve the formation of a 'motor prototype' of the object being read about, which includes information about temporary versus canonical action affordances of the object in question (with canonical orientations, for example, yielding shorter reaction times):<sup>34</sup> motor information attributable to sensorimotor categorization seems automatically to be recruited as part of the act of reading. Although these behavioural and neuroimaging studies work with very basic textual examples, we might hypothesize that extended visual descriptions emphasizing the static qualities of a scene (the type associated with nineteenth-century Realism and with popular

fiction in the Realist mode) are less likely to stimulate motor responses than descriptions based on interactions between minds, bodies and environments—that is, descriptions of the kind we find in Kafka, where the bedroom isn't described in pictorial detail but is evoked as the site of actions.<sup>35</sup>

Observations of this kind, then, add detail to the claim that we can't separate thought and language from other aspects of our experience of the world, which is essentially embodied. In textual terms, these considerations might lead us to conclude again, from a rather different angle, that less is more: that the basic level of textual 'stimulus' often stimulates as much as something more highly specified—and is therefore also a more efficient stimulus. The apparent verbal simplicity of Kafka's writing is something that comes up again and again in the critical discourse,<sup>36</sup> and by drawing on principles of cognitive categorization we can attribute to this simplicity a specific kind of cognitive power. In as straightforward a sense as the striking prevalence of beds in Kafka (on which, as opposed to four-posters or furniture, there has been a surprising amount of research<sup>37</sup>), the neutrality of many of Kafka's descriptions can be connected with their cognitive power by way of categorization. Rather than showing a consistent preference for greater detail, for subordinate-level terms, he employs a high proportion of basic-level terms: houses, cars, streets, faces, chairs, tables, etc. are often left not specified any further.

As one might expect, however, things are often more complex than this. The opening of *The Trial* uses a variety of levels of categorization to create a variety of more or less subtle effects. Much of the scene is evoked through the single basic-level term 'apartment', and K.'s location and orientation within this are implied by the basic-level 'pillow'. As mentioned above in passing, actions which in English usually have a basic-level object as their natural referent (knock at the door, ring the bell) are in German more common in their solely verbal forms, with the basic-level objects not even needing to be stated. This is one small feature of the text's linguistic efficiency, exploiting a simple, everyday connective point between language, perception and action to contribute to the overall evocation of K.'s enactive cognitive-perceptual engagement with his environment. The neutral setting (basic-level concepts tend to be those used in neutral contexts<sup>38</sup>) is offset against the strangeness of the events, and K.'s responses to these are non-basic-level emotional responses: identifying curiosity and feeling disconcerted. And when it comes to the intruder's clothing, this unsettled state is heightened by the combination of the

introductory superordinate-level description — ‘clothing’ — and the subsequent enumeration of basic-level terms (‘folds, pockets, buckles, buttons and a belt’) that ends up creating a subordinate-level effect of a highly specified non-generalizable item. The result of this, I think, is that the outfit is perceptually and conceptually both too general and too specific to make sense of. This linguistic construction of K.’s cognitive failure to grasp what the clothing is also has a humorous effect, of course: it looks really useful, but I’ll be damned if I know what for. His action, too — partly in response to the baffling clothing — is of sitting up (basic level) but then complicated (half sitting up). (I’ll talk more about the significance of the half sitting up in the next section.) Thus Kafka uses categorization in evoking perception to create a compelling basic-level convergence with real-life situation-dependent, gappy perception, and also to convey a state of being unsettled in those perceptions through interesting combinations of non-basic-level categories. Thanks to the cognitive parallelism of vision and imagination, as enhanced here by the enactive mode of evocation, an imaginative parallel is likely to be established between the reader’s and K.’s mental and physical states.

I’m aware that dwelling on the specifics of whether the bell is mentioned and how far K. sits up in bed may seem a slightly perverse response to a Modernist masterpiece. But, as noted, I think it’s important to do the textual details the courtesy of taking them seriously on their own terms — and that a cognitive approach is the best way of doing this. It also seems to me that Kafka’s style in particular encourages and rewards a focus on seemingly simple linguistic details, and I hope that paying attention to these details, as I’ve done in the parallel spheres of perception and categorization, and as I’ll proceed to do with reference to emotion, might be starting cumulatively to justify itself. In the last section, then, I’ll discuss emotion in the text and in the reader.

### *Enactive Emotion*

I’ll start with K.’s reactions to the events of the morning, which, as I noted earlier, are strange. So what more can we say about them? K.’s mental state is first characterized through the subjunctive ‘without his having done anything wrong’; then, within the narrative of the arrest, he assesses the attitude of the woman in the window opposite as ‘a quite uncharacteristic curiosity’, and rings the bell ‘at once disconcerted and hungry’. He evaluates the clothing of the man who

comes in as giving ‘the impression of being very practical but without making clear what it was actually for’. He interprets the man’s ignoring of his question as an attempt to force him ‘simply (...) to accept his appearance’, and tries to establish the man’s identity through an ‘initially silent’ combination of ‘attentiveness and reflection’.

None of these reactions is what one might call straightforwardly ‘emotional’. There’s no indication of any ‘basic emotion’ like anger or fear dominating K.’s response: he doesn’t ask the intruder ‘What the hell are you doing in my apartment?’, nor does he cower in bed expecting the man to attack him with his belt. K.’s obliquely emotional responses are manifested through thought and action rather than through what we might recognize as emotion proper. In this section, with Kafka’s prose as illustration and object of analysis, I’ll briefly present a framework for understanding emotions (including ‘aesthetic emotions’) as a key part of ‘cognition’ more broadly, and show how this inclusive definition of cognition also needs to include action.

‘I was too angry to concentrate properly.’ ‘It made me so happy I couldn’t think straight.’ Countless turns of phrase of this kind express and reinforce the opposition entrenched in folk psychology between thinking and feeling. This can be traced at least back to Plato’s tripartite model of the soul as consisting of reason, will/spirit and the lower instincts/appetites/emotions,<sup>39</sup> and is a subsection of the philosophical dualism most commonly associated with Descartes. Dualism has also been implicit in much twentieth-century cognitive science, often when the contribution of ‘matter’ to ‘mind’ and by extension emotion to thought is marginalized, as it is in computational/information-processing approaches to cognition. When it comes to emotion, however, it isn’t difficult to think of cases where this division stops being useful: are surprise, bewilderment, excitement, anxiety, etc. ‘emotional’ or ‘cognitive’ states/responses? When a classificatory system breaks down at the most informal scrutiny, it’s usually worth thinking about how it might be improved or replaced. Here, a better system clearly needs to acknowledge that most of these cognitive-emotional experiences are just that: combinations of the two. Indeed, elsewhere in this discussion I’ve been using ‘cognition’ not in the colloquial sense (opposed to emotion), but in the sense I think it should have: embracing emotion and everything else the embodied mind does.

The ‘appraisal’ account of emotion improves on the oppositional account by suggesting that emotion is the result of a rapid, automatic,

non-conscious process of appraisal: judgement of an object or situation with regard to what it means to you, in particular what its meaning is for future personal concerns or actions.<sup>40</sup> This initial appraisal induces an emotional experience with numerous components, including experience of the event/object/situation/person as appraised, positive or negative affect (that is, pleasant or unpleasant feeling), bodily arousal and a state of action readiness. A further process of cognitive elaboration may then follow, in which the causes of one's emotion are experienced and accounted for in a certain way, and at this point discrepancies between the antecedent appraisal and the post-hoc, experienced appraisal can creep in.<sup>41</sup>

On this account, then, emotion is inseparable from thought and action. Both antecedent and elaborative appraisals are closely bound up with the emotion experience itself, in complex and varying ways. And both appraisals and experienced emotion are, as hinted at in the mention of bodily arousal and action readiness, also inherently enactive. Emotions are, in evolutionary terms, the primary mechanism by which flexible 'action readiness' is initiated, favouring some courses of action over others without constituting a rigid action schema.<sup>42</sup> Given that most of us spend less time evading predators than our distant forebears used to, this 'control precedence' for action usually doesn't develop into full action, but stops at the racing heart, the stiffening of limbs or other kinds of action readiness. The principle and the mechanisms remain the same, though: emotions are still (amongst other things) states of action readiness that flexibly motivate flexible actions.

In the perceptual context, I briefly suggested that the principles which apply to visual perception can be extended to visual imagination: both operate through potentiality, the imagination even more so than vision. A similar observation can be made about real-life and aesthetic emotions. In aesthetic emotion, the emotion is induced not directly by sensory stimuli—by seeing a strange man come into your apartment, say—but indirectly by seeing and processing words on a page or screen which communicate the strange man's entrance and activate imaginative, interpretative and emotional aspects of response. Action is crucial in both cases, however: 'it is false that there are no action tendencies in aesthetic emotions'.<sup>43</sup> But aesthetic emotions are defined primarily by 'virtual action readiness',<sup>44</sup> and so are less likely to develop into full action. In this sense, emotionally responding to a stranger's appearance in the text we read is less a full activation of the relevant control precedence (greater potential for

control) than a preparedness to activate that control precedence—a precedence for, perhaps, the action tendencies to hide or run or freeze in slightly frightened fascination. The relationship between the real-life and the aesthetic is not only an emotional continuum, but one with a great deal of overlap between the two regions.

An emotionally expressive interplay between cognition and action through appraisal occurs in the sequence which culminates in K. half sitting up in bed. K. experiences the woman's curiosity as appraised in a certain way (as uncharacteristic); this result of his appraisal is accompanied by the feeling of being disconcerted which, in combination with hunger, causes him to ring the bell. Both the simultaneity of being hungry and disconcerted, and the smooth transition from feeling these things to ringing the bell, begin to manifest the physiological qualities of interpretative-emotional response. Hunger is not presented here as a mere interruption to (disconcerted) thought; both seem equal causes of the action of ringing the bell, and both are equally well motivated by the preceding events. The action of half sitting up is the epitome of action readiness that flexibly permits either a sinking back down into the pillows or the continuation of the action into actually sitting, or even getting, up. The clause about the sitting up is in fact a manuscript addition on Kafka's part; the text originally read simply 'sofort' (immediately), qualifying the speech act.<sup>45</sup> The alteration has the effect of connecting the dialogue more closely with the environment through action, giving the reader an impression of K.'s physical stance and of the perspective—both visual and more broadly cognitive—from which he engages in the following exchange. K.'s uncertainty is manifested in this half action, which is at once his response to the intruder and his acknowledgement that he doesn't know quite how to respond. This uncertainty motivates the cognitive activities (or at least the attempt at the activities) of attentiveness and reflection that follow.

Here we see not only how the essential interconnectedness of emotion, thought, perception and action is manifested throughout the passage, but also how this, and this alone (without handy character sketches, tellingly introspective dialogue, or extended visual descriptions), is what constructs K. as a character and his environment in our first encounter with the novel's fictional world. This is probably, again, both compelling and unsettling. Readers may or may not experience an empathic response in which the same action tendencies are potentially given control precedence as those that contribute to K.'s bodily and mental state. Whether or not we do is at least

partially contingent on adoption of K.'s perspective, and the passage contains perspectival instabilities which make frequent if subtle shifts in the reader's empathic stance very likely. These instabilities can be connected with enactivist principles too,<sup>46</sup> but I don't have space to go into that here. For now, I'll just say that the ambivalence which I suggested might well be a consequence of Kafka's cognitively realistic evocation of perception, through language and for the imagination, also holds for his evocation of emotion, in both cases thanks to their superficially counter-intuitive but more profoundly intuitive enactivism.

### *To Conclude*

I've suggested that debates and findings in the cognitive sciences can be productively integrated into a way of reading literature that illuminates both the cognitive underpinnings of textual features and readers' possible interactions with them. For me, cognitive realism has been a helpful framework for bringing insights about minds and texts into dialogue, and has repeatedly allowed me to notice things in texts that I hadn't, and couldn't have, noticed before. In this passage of Kafka's we observe a rich network of forms of enaction — motor, visual, imaginative, linguistic and emotional — and all of them seem (to me, at least) to feed into each other with a surprising degree of mutual illumination. The simplicity with which findings in these areas of scientific research map on to Kafka's text at the level of individual words and phrases, and the ease with which possible global effects resulting from these individual mappings can be identified, seem promising indicators of the future not just of cognitive approaches to the study of literature in general, but of second-generation cognitive approaches in particular. To read cognitively is to read enactively, with Kafka as I've shown here, and with all literature.

### NOTES

- 1 Franz Kafka, *Der Proceß*, edited by Malcolm Pasley (New York: Schocken, 1990), 7. All translations are mine.
- 2 Alan Palmer, *Social Minds in the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 7.
- 3 On textual features and effects, see Peter Dixon, Marisa Bortolussi, Leslie C. Twilley and Alice Leung, 'Literary Processing and Interpretation: Towards Empirical Foundations', *Poetics* 22 (1993), 5–33.

- 4 Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002) and Palmer, *Social Minds in the Novel*.
- 5 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Philosophy* (New York: Basic, 1999), esp. 75–8.
- 6 Emily T. Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 141.
- 7 See also Emily Troscianko, 'Kafkaesque Worlds in Real Time', *Language and Literature* 19 (2010), 151–71, and Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism*.
- 8 E.g. Stephen M. Kosslyn, *Image and Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) and Stephen M. Kosslyn, *Image and Brain: The Resolution of the Imagery Debate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), and, for a critical review, Nigel J. T. Thomas, 'Are Theories of Imagery Theories of Imagination? An Active Perception Approach to Conscious Mental Content', *Cognitive Science* 23 (1999), 207–45.
- 9 Mike Tucker and Bob Ellis, 'The Potentiation of Grasp Types During Visual Object Categorization', *Visual Cognition* 8 (2001), 769–800.
- 10 E.g. Zenon Pylyshyn, *Seeing and Visualizing: It's Not What You Think* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
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