On Wishing: Nietzsche, Freud, Kafka

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Wishing and knowing are in a tense relationship with each other. Knowledge about wishing can be found in various registers and disciplines, especially in rhetoric, language theory, philosophy, and psychology. But wishing is also a major literary topic and, even more so, a genuine mode of literature, thus also of literary knowledge in the perspective of the present issue. This view indicates that wishing does not only have the status of an object of knowledge, but can also function as its source and driving force. Knowing can even descend from wishing in a direct line, according to a well-known Shakespearean proverb: "Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought," a genealogical formula which, in the second part of *Henry IV*, Prince Harry hears from his royal father, of all people (195, act IV, scene 3). This saying also points to a fundamental problem about situating the wish within the realm of knowledge and thought, since wishfulness often indicates impurity or imprecision.

In what follows, I would first like to offer some preliminary considerations for an investigation into wishing. I will then further explore this with regard to Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, two authors who played an important role in modernizing the relationship between literature and knowledge around 1900 and provided insightful reflections on wishing. Finally, I will examine an outstanding example of a literary wish in a poetically condensed short text by Franz Kafka.

Towards a Poetics of Wishing

As the title of this paper already suggests, I am interested in wishing as a process and peculiar activity. More conceptual coinages, particularly the psychological terminology of "desire," are also involved, but the main focus of my argument is on the processuality of wishing and its mental, medial, and, above all, linguistic representations. However, the focus on language contrasts with the view that a wish is something essentially unspoken. This view not only concerns the relation of wishing to the unconscious – which I will discuss below with regard to Freud – but it can just as well be found in the common conviction that your heart's desires should not be expressed verbally. Upon seeing a shooting star, you have quickly to wish for something, but keep it to yourself. However, even in such cases, it is required to formulate the respective wish precisely and specifically, albeit silently. It is this tacit but distinct utterance that is actually intended to ensure that the wish comes true.

Of course, the belief in the power of precise wishing may be considered superstitious, a remainder of magical thought which should be banned from modern consciousness and modern life.[1] But there are undoubtedly very practical, pragmatic ways of wishing. Think of a wish list, or verbal information about what you want for your birthday. Here you should formulate as clearly and unambiguously as possible in order to get what you want. If the wish list is supposed to be the epitome of reality-based, pragmatic wishing, then the question arises as to whether wishing ultimately means more than wanting to have. In any case, wishing seems to be based on the absence of what is being wished for. Thus, what is desired is its presence, and it is precisely this presence that is to be brought about by wishing. Wishes are therefore directed in a special way towards the future. They represent it, or even, they conjure it up from a given present, as this present's future. However, wishes are so clearly aimed

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at the future that they have their reference area not only in present futures, but also in future presents. Wishes can be used to create the future (Willer 2016).

One might think that the pragmatic wish for a certain object, state or situation comes to an end once that desired 'something' has become part of reality. But the aforementioned emphatic futurity of wishing is a major objection to the view that wishes can be fulfilled at all. Quite on the contrary: it is one of the characteristics of wishing that it sets in motion a never-ending process. The most pertinent example of this is the Grimm Brothers's fairy tale (in fact, written by Philipp Otto Runge) "The Fisherman and His Wife". In the tale a poor fisherman is forced by his wife to make more and more wishes for her sake from a magical flounder. This fish is an enchanted prince who can make wishes come true immediately. Thus, the fisherman's wife first gets a little cottage, then a big stone palace, but she still is far from being content and successively manages to become king, emperor, and pope. Finally, she urges her husband to go to the seashore once more to wish that she "be like God" – just to find herself transported to their original pigsty again (70-76). Stories like this seem to suggest a moralizing interpretation that the inconclusiveness of wishing simply expresses the insatiable greed for the consumption of worldly goods. But, one can also argue otherwise. If wishing is an activity in its own right, why should one ever stop wishing? Conversely, why should one imagine wantlessness as soul-satisfying contentment? After all, citing Peter Handke's formula *Wunschloses Unglück* [*A Sorrow beyond Dreams*], the state of being desireless – being without the want to make wishes – can be seen as the epitome of unhappiness.[2] This makes the preoccupation with (actual or desired) wishlessness all the more important as an integral part of a theory and poetology of wishing.

If, according to the Grimm fairy tale, every fulfilled wish engenders another one, then it makes sense to link wish fulfilment closely to the processuality of wishing. To formulate it the other way round, the process of wishing itself already involves a peculiar kind of fulfilment. "The representation of a wish is, eo ipso, the representation of its fulfilment" (*my trans.*, 32). This remark can be found in Ludwig Wittgenstein's comments on the studies of the British ethnologist James Frazer on the connection between religion and magic. It should be noted that this does not refer to a critique of religion in the sense of Ludwig Feuerbach, for example, who traced religious thinking in general back to wishing: "Wishing is the origin, is the essence itself of religion. The essence of the gods is nothing other than the essence of wishing" (*my trans.,* 37). Rather, in Frazer's ethnological view – interpreted by Wittgenstein – the wish becomes recognizable as a *representational* and *expressive* force of religious magical thinking: "But magic brings a wish to representation; it expresses a wish" (32).

What is all the more important in this respect is the concrete and correct execution of wishes in the form of successful speech acts. Indeed, even if John Austin does not explicitly mention wishes in his standard work *How to Do Things with Words*, they can be broken down in terms of speech act theory: for example, as "exercitives" (insofar as wishes can have the character of commands), as "commissives" (since wishes that are related to the wisher(s) and in themselves can also have a binding effect) or as "behabitives" (in the case of explicitly social-interactionist wishes)(148-164). After all, speech act theory is the place where linguistic magic (nothing else is the doing of things with words) is explored with the means of rational linguistics. This radically pragmatic understanding of speech acts underlies the poetics of wishing and can be seen in the history of poetry of formed and performed wishes.

To know how to wish, it is imperative to take a closer look at those forms and performances. They include, above all, small forms of poetry and sayings: the prayer,

the blessing, the spell (certainly also for the purpose of cursing), the congratulation, i.e. occasional poems that are very often easily overlooked. However, wishes are also articulated in larger forms that cannot be readily attributed to pragmatic functions, such as idyllic poetry with its programmatic distance between wishful thinking and reality. In addition, the question of forms is always directed at the formulae with which the grammar and rhetoric of wishing is marked. This includes, for example, the formula "I wish I were…," which could be related back to the imaginative formulae in children's make-believe plays: "Let's pretend…". In German, children very often employ both the subjunctive and a marker of presence in these game situations, using formulae such as: "Ich wäre jetzt…" ["I would be … now"], in which the grammatic mode of the unreal paradoxically seems to have a special magical and mimetic power: saying "I would be a car now," or "I would be you now" turns the child into the car or the other person.

In contrast to this immediacy of linguistic magic, the formula "I wish I were" is a gesture of distance and difference in which wishful speech explicitly thematizes itself, such as this example from German Baroque poetry:

> Wolte sie nur / wie sie solte;
> und solt' ich nur / wie ich wolte /
> So wer' ich und sie vergnügt.
> Ach! wie wer' es wol gefügt. / [3]

I will come back to another version of this formula at the end of this paper: the "If only" that introduces Kafka's "Wish to Become an Indian". Before that, I will start an investigation of wishing in, first, Friedrich Nietzsche and subsequently Sigmund Freud. Indeed, the latter followed the former in a historically neat way as Nietzsche's work ended in 1889, more than five years before Freud wrote his *Project for a Scientific Psychology*. While Nietzsche was unable to take note of Freud, Freud on the other hand famously tried to avoid having to take note of Nietzsche. Nonetheless, reading both authors in the light (or rather twilight) of each other makes sense, especially with regard to the topic of this paper. For both thinkers the confrontation with wishing was of great importance regarding what they recognized as *knowing*, not only in the psychological, epistemological and anthropological sense, but also with regard to their own literary ways of knowledge production.

"Wishability" in Nietzsche

Seeking information from Friedrich Nietzsche about the connection between wishing and knowing implies a harsh critique of wishful thinking. Corresponding remarks can be found in the many passages in which Nietzsche judges philosophical tradition. This happens with increasing sharpness in his late writings of the years between 1886 and 1889. Thus, in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), in the first part that deals with "Prejudices of Philosophers," it is said that "all philosophers" only pretend to develop their opinions by cool deliberation and dialectic, "whereas at bottom they are defending some anticipated proposition, a notion, an 'intuition,' most often a fervent desire [Herzenswunsch] rendered abstract and sifted for reasons they seek after the fact" (viii, 8). In contrast to this, Nietzsche speaks of the "new species of philosophers" (viii, 42) who are also called "philosophers of the future," "new friends of 'truth'", "philosophers to come", or "*new* philosophers" (viii, 43-46). Their fundamental characteristic is "The Free Spirit" (which is the title of the second part of *Beyond Good and Evil*). When it comes to those "philosophers of the future," Nietzsche starts to speak in the first person

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plural: "[W]e find ourselves on the *other* end of all modern ideology and herd desire" (viii, 45). Here, desire as the basis of ideology is not only a sign of the untalented philosophers' lazy style of thought, which has to be overcome within the realm of philosophy, it is the epitome of what the herd, the mindless mass, thinks.

For the latter expression, however, the translation desire appears very much abbreviated and misses the point. The original does not simply speak of the herd's Wunsch, but of "Heerden-Wünschbarkeit." This word, "Wünschbarkeit," is at the core of what might be called Nietzsche's theory of wishing (Glatzeder 2000). That something is desirable or wishable means first of all, only that one can wish for it, i.e. that it is possible to wish. But it also means that something is worth a wish, thus associating a value judgment. To form a noun again from this already somewhat wavering, floating adjective – from wünschbar to Wünschbarkeit [wishability] – means elevating the connection between potentiality and value judgment to an abstract notion. Nietzsche uses the term Wünschbarkeit with preference when epistemological prejudices are involved. While there is the mentioned chapter about the "Prejudices of Philosophers" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, one of the aphorisms in book five of the *Gay Science* (1882) already bears the title "'Science' as Prejudice" ("'Wissenschaft' als Vorurteil"). Prejudice means a misguided way of scientific and scholarly foreknowledge here.[4] This consists of somewhat hasty "inner expectations and [the] wish that things might be *such and such*" (Nietzsche 2001, 238). One might think that such wishfulness could contribute to a certain sense of joy and gaiety of scientific knowledge. However, this is precisely not part of Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, but rather typical of the "intellectual middle class" instead. Their mediocracy lies in the fact that "their inner expectations and wish [...]find rest and satisfaction too soon" (2001, 238). Practicing "'Wissenschaft' als Vorurteil," one draws "a line of hope, a horizon which defines what is desirable." (2001, 238) Wishing and desiring thus mark a horizon that is too narrow, while scientific and scholarly knowledge should actually reach much further. In the German original, again, there is an abstract noun, which is obviously not easy to translate into English: "eine Horizont-Linie der Wünschbarkeit" (1999, 625).

Nietzsche probably borrowed the term Wünschbarkeit from his former Basel colleague Jacob Burckhardt. This historian, whom Nietzsche held in high esteem, had spoken programmatically of Wünschbarkeit in his world-historical lectures held around 1870, which were only printed decades later under the title *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*. In Burckhardt's *Betrachtungen* the term denotes the historian's position in relation to the history he interprets. For example, Burckhardt considers a "mysterious law of compensation," according to which gains and losses balance each other in the "overall life of mankind" (both in terms of demographic and cultural development) (*my trans.*, 269). While he was formulating this law, Burckhardt was already rather skeptical about it: "The doctrine of compensation is mostly just a disguised doctrine of wishability [Wünschbarkeit], and it remains advisable to be sparing with the consolation to be gained from it" (270). However, it is important to emphasize that the doctrine of compensation in general is not a mere sense of wishful thinking here, but it is itself understood as a "*doctrine* of wishability". This means that Burckhardt does not simply declare wishing as such to be misleading, but recognizes, marks and problematizes it as the driving force of world-historical thought itself. This applies above all to Burckhardt's central pattern of interpretation of historical continuity: "This continuity, however, is an essential interest of our human existence and a metaphysical proof of the significance of its duration." Precisely because we cannot know with certainty whether "the connection of the spiritual would also exist without our

knowledge of it," we must "urgently wish that the awareness of that connection lives in us" (272).

Against this backdrop Nietzsche's concept of "Wünschbarkeit" does not simply serve to disqualify philosophical opponents. It is true even for superficially unambiguous statements such as the one from the last book Nietzsche published at his own responsibility, *Twilight of the Idols* (1889): "But the philosopher despises the desiring human, as well as the 'desirable' human – and all the desirable things, to boot, all the human's *ideals*" (ix, 104) (The German original, again, has "den wünschenden Menschen," "den wünschbaren Menschen," and "alle Wünschbarkeiten.") (*Sämtliche Werke*, 6, 131). It also says there, "How does it come about that the human, so venerable as a reality, deserves no respect insofar as he desires [insofern er wünscht]?" (104) This, too, seems to amount to a very clear opposition: reality versus wish, thus also realism versus wishful activity, wishing as escape from reality, as escapism. Yet, it is not all that clear and simple. The passage has to be read, as so often in Nietzsche, as a kind of role play. The title of the aphorism states: "The Immoralist speaks," who is the person or character who designates human wishes as despicable. Moreover, the emphasis on immorality should also be placed in relation to Nietzsche's differentiated view when it comes to questions of morality in general, according to which all moral values have historically evolved – and could have evolved differently. In this respect, it is not about the sheer rejection of wishing, but about their pre-history. Still, the quoted passage in *Twilight of the Idols* continues: "Up till now, the story of his desirable things [Geschichte seiner Wünschbarkeiten] was the human's *partie honteuse*: we should be wary of reading too much into this" (ix, 104).[5] This formulation contains a precarious historical will to knowledge: the awareness that what is to be found out about the history of wishes can be embarrassing, even shameful.

What I have sketched so far does not exhaust what Nietzsche has to say about wishing. Elsewhere in *Twilight of the Idols*, for example, there is a clearly affirmative use of the term "Wünschbarkeit," namely as "*Wünschbarkeit von Leben*" ("a *desideratum of life*")(ix, 102).[6] At this point, it is not the task of philosophy or science that is being characterized, but the "meaning of art." According to Nietzsche, such a meaning definitely exists: it is about being "the great stimulant to life," i.e. not just being committed to itself as art. Towards the end of that same aphorism, Nietzsche repeats that the emphasis of *life* in art is "greatly to be desired": "eine hohe Wünschbarkeit" (ix, 102). Seen in this light, despite all the criticism of wishfulness, there remains a lot to be wished for in Nietzsche. This is precisely where the counterpart of wishing, namely *knowing*, becomes precarious.

A relevant reflection appears in the first aphorism of the first treatise of Nietzsche's polemic *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), where knowing and wishing are played off against each other as binary opposites with the formula: "if one is allowed to wish where one cannot know, then I wish from my heart that it were otherwise" (viii, 218). However, what is – or should be – unknown according to this initial aphorism, is the very intuition of historicizing morals: the suspicion that the human "partie honteuse" (Nietzsche here anticipates the expression from *Twilight of the Idols*), e.g. the "*vis inertia* of habit" or "some purely passive, automatic, reflexive, molecular and thoroughly stupid thing" (viii, 217), might be what actually drives the supposedly higher achievements of mankind. Interestingly, the declared impetus of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* lies in the denial of this knowledge, i.e. in wishful thinking: "I hear this with defiance, even more I do not believe it," and here follows the already quoted phrase about "wish[ing] where one cannot know." Nonetheless, this very wish again leads to its opposite, namely, to the "sacrifice [of] all desirability [Wünschbarkeit]" in the name

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of the non-negotiable conviction that the search for truth – particularly the unwanted and dangerous truth – must be at the core of every scientific, philosophical, and literary attempt. What is required here, to quote *Gay Science* again, is research that goes beyond the "Horizont-Linie der Wünschbarkeit," which Nietzsche then sets out to do in the argumentation of his *Genealogy of Morality*. To quote the complex and self-contradictory consideration in context:

> I hear this with defiance, even more, I do not believe it; and if one is allowed to wish where one cannot know, then I wish from my heart that it were otherwise with them – that these explorers and microscopists of the soul were at the bottom courageous, magnanimous and proud animals, who know how to keep their passions and their pain reined in and have trained themselves to sacrifice all desirability [Wünschbarkeit] to truth, to *every* truth, even the plain, harsh, ugly, repulsive, unchristian, immoral truth… For such truths do exist. (viii, 218)

One final aspect remains to be mentioned in this short overview: Nietzsche's work also contains emphatic declarations of wishlessness, for example in one of his very last texts, the hyperbolic self-apology *Ecce homo*. The following passage can be found there in the section "Why I Am So Clever":

> To 'want' something, 'strive' after something, have an 'aim,' a 'wish' in view – I don't know any of that from experience. At this very moment I can spy out my future – a *broad* future! – as though it were a calm sea: no craving makes a ripple over it. I have not the slightest desire for anything to be different that it is; I myself do not want to be any different. But I have always lived like that. I never had a wish. (ix, 244)

As already stated above, wishlessness must be part of an investigation into wishing. This is even more true for Nietzsche's emphatically professed wishlessness, which is conceived here precisely with a view to the future: a future imagined not as temporally but as spatially ahead, like a sea, to be immediately envisioned and almost accessible. Nevertheless, one would almost like to argue with a Freudian hypothesis of negation: anyone who says so clearly that he is wishless, wishes for that wishlessness with particular urgency; his wishes are therefore of particular interest (ixx, 233-240). However, for the sake of my own argument, it would be misleading to simply cross-reference Nietzsche with Freud in order to prove that Nietzsche actually meant the opposite of what he wrote. It is rather the other way round, as already indicated: Freud was well aware of his own Nietzscheanism and followed Nietzsche, but always in an effort not to read too closely what his predecessor had already formulated.

Wish Fulfilment in Freud
First and foremost, Freud follows Nietzsche in the sense that he too was interested in a genealogy of morality. Like Nietzsche, he takes a developmental perspective and asks how cultural values have become those perceived and struggled over today. Here lies the cultural-historical and theoretical scope of Freudian psychoanalysis in studies such as *Totem and Taboo* or *Civilization and Its Discontents*. But even before that, wish and wish fulfilment are central themes of Freudian psychoanalysis. They stand for the structure of the human drives and for the functioning of the unconscious. Especially wish fulfilment can be regarded as a psychoanalytic core concept, almost as

synonymous with the dream, i.e. with that psychic activity which is at the heart of psychoanalysis like hardly any other.

"A dream is the fulfilment of a wish"; this is the central thesis of Freud's seminal *Interpretation of Dreams* from 1900 and also the heading of its third chapter, with which, after a 100-pages literature review and a first dream analysis, the theoretical work of the book actually gets going (147). A dream is the fulfilment of a wish, and the interpretation of dreams is, according to the famous remark almost at the end of the book, "*the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind*" (604). Accordingly, the correct interpretation of those psychic processes in and with which wishes are fulfilled is decisive for the knowledge of the workings of the unconscious. In this regard, the theory of dreams seems to emphasize, above all, the immediate and complete fulfilment of wishes. At the end of his analysis of one of his own dreams ("Irma's injection") in the second chapter, Freud states: "The dream represented a particular state of affairs as I should have wished it to be. *Thus its content was the fulfilment of a wish and its motive was a wish*" (143). This quote clearly stresses the complex mediality of the dream: It represents something that is being wished for; the wish is the dream's motive, to be distinguished from wish fulfilment as its content. This complexity is then quite radically reduced towards the heading of the chapter that immediately follows, "The dream is the fulfilment of a wish."

In this third chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud first emphasizes that "dreams often reveal themselves without any disguise as fulfilments of wishes." Taking another dream of his own as an example, he notes "how conveniently everything was arranged in this dream. Since its only purpose was to fulfil a wish, it could be completely egoistical" (149). Freud's explanations at this point are of an almost provocative simplicity: one is thirsty at night and then dreams of drinking water. It is no accident that he argues a lot with the "dream of young children" here, which he explicitly calls "pure wish fulfilments." This makes them "uninteresting compared with the dreams of adults" but methodically important, "proving that, in their essential nature, dreams represent the fulfilment of wishes" (152). The objections are obvious, of course: What if you dream something downright undesirable? What about punishment dreams, anxiety dreams, and nightmares? It is part of the dramaturgy in Freud's writings that he first draws these objections himself only to refute them. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, it is exactly with the dreams that seem to contradict the theory of wish fulfilment that the psychoanalytic work of interpretation starts, developing the differentiated terminological apparatus of "Distortion" (ch 4), "Material and Sources of Dreams" (ch 5), and "Dream-Work" (ch 6). Essential for the problem of wishing and wish fulfilment is the distinction of the manifest "dream content" from the "dream thoughts" standing "behind" it (160). To put it briefly: The wish and its fulfilment belong to the dream thoughts; in the dream content they can be emphatically distorted, by appearing, for instance, as sad or frightening. As straightforward as this distinction seems, it is exactly the place where the methodical complications start. How can dream thoughts be accessed if we only have the dream as such, which, moreover, is always blurred after awakening and already evaporates in the narration? It is fundamental – but not trivial – that the dream thoughts, which are supposed to precede the dream content, are only uncovered afterwards, in the psychoanalytic process of interpretation.

Exactly here, in the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams, which is always done retrospectively and belatedly, the difference between the two diverging formulations of the general thesis, "A dream is the fulfilment of a wish" (147) and "Dreams represent the fulfilment of wishes" (152) takes effect. Again, I am referring to Wittgenstein's sentence: "The representation of a wish is, eo ipso, the representation

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of its fulfilment." In the context of wishing, representation is a necessary means to distance immediacy. Just like Nietzsche abstracted wishing to Wünschbarkeit, Freud does not only ask for representation, but for Darstellbarkeit. In his subchapter on "Considerations of Representability," included in the chapter on "Dream-Work," Freud explains representability as "displacement along a chain of associations" (354). This displacement, the association in general, is also a time relation. However, this does not only concern the analytical interpretation of dreams, but also their origin in the psyche. In the course of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams,* it becomes increasingly clear which factors enter into dreams so that they can become wish fulfilments. This continues to the far-reaching remarks in the concluding chapter, "The Psychology of the Dream-Processes," that "dreaming is on the whole an example of regression to the dreamer's earliest condition, a revival of his childhood" (550). And even more: "Behind this childhood of the individual we are promised a picture of a phylogenetic childhood – a picture of the development of the human race," to which Freud adds the assessment "that the analysis of dreams will lead us to a knowledge of man's archaic heritage" (550) (Willer 2014, 132-152).

The specific temporality of the dream thus refers to the deep time of man. One might think that the point here is to demonstrate anthropological constants: Humans are humans because they wish and dream, because they fulfill their wishes in dreams. But it is the depth-time perspective which brings some further irritations into the assertion of a simple identity of dream and wish fulfilment. Freud dealt with this some time later, after the First World War, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). One of the decisive challenges that lead Freud to the "far fetched speculations" (24) in this important essay is the necessity to accept an "exception to the proposition that dreams are fulfilments of wishes" (32). He connects these considerations with another kind of psychic temporality: the repetition function, or even the repetition compulsion in dreams. According to Freud, this applies to the dreams of patients suffering from war or accident neuroses; but it also applies to "dreams during psychoanalyses which bring to memory the psychical traumas of childhood" (32). Against this background, Freud considers that wish-fulfilment as function of the dream could not arise "until the whole of mental life had accepted the dominance of the pleasure principle"; hence it is "only consistent to grant that there was also a time before the purpose of dreams was the fulfilment of wishes" (33). The beyond of the pleasure principle is therefore temporally antecedent, even though it has revealed itself anew in the destructive historical present: in the sign of the World War. In the beyond, another, opposite principle reigns: the death drive, which cannot be traced back to individual wishes – however disguised they may be – but is the wish of life itself to end its "circuitous paths" and to come to rest in death (39).[7]

Freud's ongoing work with his own thoughts, which can only be briefly mentioned here, is already present within *The Interpretation of Dreams* itself, which quite often deals with the justification of the interpretative work as such. This is why it repeatedly takes on the character of a defensive treatise, in which Freud can become quite unpleasant, as in this footnote added in the 1909 edition: "It is hard to credit the obstinacy with which readers and critics of this book shut their eyes to this consideration and overlook the fundamental distinction between the manifest and latent content of dreams" (160, footnote 2). It is indicative of the dynamics of his argument – particularly of its procedural continuation with amendments from one edition to the next – that he reports so-called "counter-wish dreams" from many of his patients: especially nightmares, which they recount in his practice, triumphantly so to speak, in order to test the global validity of wish fulfilment. The solution to the problem is not

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difficult for Freud: the driving force behind such dreams "is the wish that I may be wrong" (181).[8] A characteristic feature of this self-reflexive turn in dream theory is not least the fact that in the very passage where Freud writes about "counter-wish dreams," he refers to his own theory as "my 'wishful' theory of dreams" (181, footnote 2 added 1911).[9] In this formulation, the wish theory turns from a theory on wishing into one that is itself wishful in character. This was observed very astutely by Robert Musil, who drafted an essay on the development of psychoanalysis with the proverbial and Shakespearean heading in the 1930s: "The wish is the father of thought!" (824-825) Freud himself often and readily admitted this in the many methodological, self-reflexive remarks that can be found throughout his texts. There he continually draws "horizon lines of desirability," to use Nietzsche's phrase again, though his method does not take into account Nietzsche's criticism of his own narrow horizon. Rather, it is a matter of a horizon insofar as this horizon always moves further away as one approaches it.

Critics, such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, have condemned the wishful character of psychoanalytic theory. In their 1972 *Anti-Oedipus*, they also attack Freud's concept of wish fulfilment. Above all, they are disturbed by the fact that Freud always justifies the wish with the fact that there is a lack of what is desired; i.e. that in and through wishing something that is not present in reality has to be compensated for. Deleuze and Guattari contrast this with an emphatically productive and realistic concept of desire: "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object." "The objective being of desire is the Real in and of itself" (26-27). The claimed productivity of desire is emphasized in the famous term "The Desiring-Machines," which are understood to be "really machines, in anything more than a metaphorical sense" (36).[10] This orientation towards productivity and a specific realism is quite helpful for a wish theory – like the one attempted in this chapter – that understands the fulfilment of a wish as intrinsically linked to the way in which it is being uttered, verbalized, and performed.

Pursuing this thought, one may well stay with Freud. Contrary to what Deleuze and Guattari imply in their furious reckoning, Freud by no means attributes all wishful activity to lack. Rather, it is precisely in his work that we find the consideration that wish formulation and wish fulfilment can come together in a specific activity: namely in poetry, as can be seen in his essay *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* (*Der Dichter und das Phantasieren*). Written in 1908, the argument still takes place not beyond, but on this side of the pleasure principle, within the logic of the supposedly simple wish fulfilment. This is played out here not with the dream, but with the daydream, particularly in poetic fantasizing. In this essay is the following remarkable consideration on temporality:

> We may say that it [an imaginative activity] hovers, as it were, between three times – the three moments of time which our ideation involves. Mental work is linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present which has been able to arouse one of the subject's major wishes. From there it harks back to a memory of an earlier experience (usually an infantile one) in which this wish was fulfilled; and it now creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish. What it thus creates is a day-dream or phantasy, which carries about it traces of its origin from the occasion which provoked it and from the memory. Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them. (ix, 148)

The idea of a floating between times, which Freud attributes to poetic imagination – the regression to a wish that has been fulfilled in the past and is to be fulfilled *again* in the future, the whole being perspectivized from a given present – bears in itself traces of the imaginative, fantastic, and even phantasmatic, while being, at the same time, a rational account of wish production and reproduction. Of interest here is not an author's psychology, but a decidedly formalistic kind of reception aesthetics: "the purely formal – that is, aesthetic – yield of pleasure that he [the writer] offers us in the presentation of his phantasies" (ix, 154). More specifically, this yield in pleasure is "an *incentive bonus*, or a *fore-pleasure*" (ix, 154), which means that it somehow participates in the hovering character of the poetic fantasies it derives from.

A Wish Phrase by Kafka
This brings me to one of the greatest, and at the same time, shortest wish texts in modern literature: Franz Kafka's "Wunsch, Indianer zu werden" [Wish to Become an Indian] from his prose collection *Betrachtung* (*Contemplation* or *Consideration*) from 1913 (printed already in 1912):

> *Wish to Become an Indian*
> If only one were an Indian, immediately set, and on the running horse, crooked in the air, trembled time and again briefly over the trembling ground, until one let the spurs, for there were no spurs, until one threw away the reins, for there were no reins, and hardly saw the land before oneself as smoothly mown heath, already without horse's neck and horse's head. (1, 30; *my translation*)[11]

Ever since Walter Benjamin's rather aphoristic statements in his 1934 Kafka essay (416–17, 436), this prose piece has always been open to new commentaries and readings. Among these, any approach to reduce the text to the longing of modern man for the simple "Indian" life, must appear suspicious – not so much because of today's concern about cultural appropriation, but because the text does not allow for such a reduction in the least. As can be seen in the contributions of a small volume of *Essays on a Sentence by Franz Kafka*, published some years ago, attempts to explain Kafka's "Wish" by contextualizing it, for example within imaginations of the 'Indian' in popular literature. This is especially true in the work of Karl May, or by connecting it to early cinema, to the contemporary fascination with horse racing, or even to perception experiments in phenomenology,[12] must in one way or another deal with the intricate structure of that *Sentence by Franz Kafka*. In fact, the short text does not only consist of a sentence, but also of a four-word headline. It is there that the wish is explicitly stated as such: "Wunsch, Indianer zu werden." At the beginning of the actual text, then, it immediately reappears in the subjunctive: "If only one were an Indian […]".

The observation that this short syntagma initiates a wish phrase is more or less common knowledge in Kafka research. For what follows, however, the articles in the volume *Essays on a Sentence* offer contrasting readings, starting with the actual correctness of the sentence. "The phrase is not elliptic, it has a beginning and an end, it is formally flawless," writes Daniel Kehlmann, who should know, as he is a literary author of considerable stylistic dexterity (48). Yet, classical philologist Glenn W. Most bases his consistent interpretation on the finding that the construction is an anacoluth, i.e. a syntactically incomplete period. He concedes, though, that the initial colon could be read as a well-formed irrealis if it were followed by a conventional exclamation mark: "If only one were an Indian!" In this case the sentence would be "complete and

aware of its non-fulfilment" (27). Consequently, the incompleteness must begin where the actual wish phrase seems to end: in the comma that follows instead of the exclamation mark. This comma sets a syntactic continuation and a grammatic transition in motion. The discourse shifts into the indicative, first without being marked by a verb, only indicated by an adverbial signal of presence instead: "immediately set" ["gleich bereit"]." The next verb that follows, "trembled" ["erzitterte"] can still be read as a subjunctive ("If only one were an Indian" and "trembled"), but at the same time it already leads into the past tense and the indicative of the following subclauses ("until one […] let, for there were […], until one […] threw away , for there were […], and hardly […] saw"). Focusing on the ambivalence of trembled, Glenn Most specifies that it results from the fact that to tremble [erzittern] is the only regular (weak) verb of the text and thus has the same form in both past tense and subjunctive (28), while all the others are irregular (strong) and clearly marked as either subjunctive ("were") or past tense indicative ("gave," "let," "threw away," "saw").

　　　　The result of this morphological distribution is what Most rightly calls a "grammatic shock" (27): the sudden realization that one is no longer in the subjunctive mode, that the mode of wishing has ceased – at least as far as the grammatic form is concerned – and that the indicative has taken over. This is precisely where the anacoluthic structure becomes effective: in a sequence of obliquely connected temporal subordinate clauses ("until one…" ["bis man…"]) from which other subordinate clauses branch off, containing what appear to be reasons ("for there were…" ["denn es gab…"]). The shift to the indicative is far from leading us from the unreal (irrealis) into the real; instead, we enter a field – or rather, a "smoothly mown heath" – where real things are negated: "no spurs," "no reins", "hardly […] the land," "without horse's neck and horse's head." In these subordinate clauses, what could be understood as desired sub-objects (spurs, reins, land, parts of a horse) appear in the paradoxical form of their indicative non-existence. In Most's reading, this negativity is the exact equivalent of the structure of the anacoluth. Kafka's "effort to construct a grammatically defective sentence" (28) thus corresponds to the disclosure of everything wished for as completely fictitious and virtual. This, according to Most, is "Kafka's triumphantly imaginary anacoluth" (30).

　　　　Along these lines, Christoph König has suggested to read the text as a "cognitive critique of wishing [Erkenntniskritik des Wünschens]," which, in Nietzschean terms, would be a critique of "wishability." Like Glenn Most, König stresses both the syntactic structure of the anacoluth and the grammatic complications between temporality and mode. He understands the temporal clauses ("until one …") as the limiting factor to the wish: "One wants to be an Indian only *until* one has got rid of the things" (13). Syntactically, this discharge is a matter of the past, but nonetheless it seems to be directed to the future, i.e. into the tense into which – as has been shown several times in this paper – wishing is often directed and with which the critique of wishability is particularly concerned. König concludes that it is not about the concrete wish to become an 'Indian' – or about anything concrete – but about the form of wishing, which he identifies, in an epistemological interpretation, with the "condition of possibility to have the wish [die Bedingung der Möglichkeit, den Wunsch zu hegen]" (17).[13] The point of this reading is to make the interpretation itself the subject of the text: "To be able to wish to become an Indian, one has to retrace, by means of interpretation, the dynamics of the text" (18). Even if this may seem a little self-apologetic, it should be emphasized that König gives a particularly precise reading of the temporal structure, stating that the continual letting go of things, which is situated in the past, nevertheless "presupposes a point of time in the future, as if the wish to become an Indian […] had

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already come true. The semantic logic of this syntax is the logic of pre-future [Vorzukunft]: The wish aims at a future in which the wish has already been realized" (14–15).

With regard to temporality and modality, Kafka's *Wish to Become an Indian* leads back to Freud's formal characterization of poetic fantasizing and day-dreaming as a hovering "between three times – the three moments of time which our ideation involves" (ix, 148). With this statement, Freud in 1908 seems to have provided an almost startlingly accurate formula for Kafka's text, even though the latter was not published until four years later. Kafka's peculiar return of the wish to the past seems to echo Freud's idea that the present poetic activity goes "back to a memory of an earlier experience […] in which the wish was fulfilled." Similarly, the running and trembling character of Kafka's sentence in its emphatic processuality seems to create what Freud calls "a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfilment of the wish" – with all the reservations that have just been made on the subject of "fulfilment." Seen from the perspective of its present formulation, the wish cannot simply be fulfilled by conjuring up the desired objects and by putting oneself in the position of the 'Indian.' This would lead to a concretion far too comfortable, while in fact the very subject of the sentence is by essence unspecific: one of Kafka's man figurations who appear in several pieces of *Betrachtung*, e.g. in "Der plötzliche Spaziergang" ("The Sudden Walk") that starts with the same two words as *Wish to Become an Indian*: "If one seems to have decided once and for all in the evening […]" [Wenn man sich am Abend endgültig entschlossen zu haben scheint […]."][14]

In *Wish to Become an Indian*, the man figure remains in limbo, "crooked in the air," between the abstractness of a personal pronoun and the almost dramatic concreteness of his or her (or most likely: its) wishing process. The wish is directed towards not being, but becoming an 'Indian': processual and always on the way to the future. However, this becoming is not conceivable through the gain, but only through the successive loss of what is being wished for, through the letting and throwing away: a loss that is already located in the past. And it is precisely this process of continuous non-fulfilment that turns the reader (not only the interpreting literary scholar, as Christoph König seems to assume) into someone who – in Freud's words – will follow the "thread of the wish" again and again. With Kafka's *Wish to Become an Indian*, we will always remain in the Freudian status of fore-pleasure. This wish, continuously being reproduced, is a desiring-machine that runs on its own fuel, producing its own reality, and more than that: an energy that can intervene into our reality.

Notes

1. "The very word 'superstition,' in what is perhaps its original sense of 'standing over' from old times, itself expresses the notion of survival." (Tylor 1871, 1, 64)

2. Ralph Mannheim's English translation of Handke's 1972 book stresses the Freudian link between wish and dream that will be discussed below.

3. "If only she would as she should; / And if only I should as I would / I and she would be content. / Alas, how well this would fit". (Paul Fleming, *my trans.*, 83).

4. Under the heading of *Gay Science* and "'Science' as prejudice," Nietzsche nonetheless speaks of scholars ("Gelehrte"). This is due to the broad sense of the German term "Wissenschaft," which comprises both science and scholarship. In addition, the Romance subtitle *"la gaya scienza"* used by Nietzsche for the second edition, hints to the tradition of medieval troubadour poetry and thus stresses the lyrical aspect of the book.

5. Idem. In the German original, the warning is not about reading too much into, but in this history ("zu lange in ihr zu lesen", *Sämtliche Werke*, vi, 131).

6. ("Forays of an Untimely One," No. 24) (*Sämtliche Werke*, vi, 127).

7. It would be worthwhile to pursue the role of wishes in the relationship between libido and death drive even further into Freud's later writings, e.g. *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) with its far-reaching theory of sublimation.

8. Freud also mentions masochism as another motive for such (putative) counter-wish dreams. (182).

9. See also "wish-theory" or "wish theory" (256, 557, 558 [footnote 1]). In all cases the German original has "Wunschtheorie."

10. The English translation of the term comes quite close to the French original of "machine désirante," whereas the common German translation has "Wunschmaschine." (Deleuze, Guattari 1995).

11. "Wunsch, Indianer zu werden. Wenn man doch ein Indianer wäre, gleich bereit, und auf dem rennenden Pferde, schief in der Luft, immer wieder kurz erzitterte über dem zitternden Boden, bis man die Sporen ließ, denn es gab keine Sporen, bis man die Zügel wegwarf, denn es gab keine Zügel, und kaum das Land vor sich als glatt gemähte Heide sah, schon ohne Pferdehals und Pferdekopf." (1, 30) See also the version by Willa and Edwin Muir (which I will not comment on): "*The Wish to Be a Red Indian.* "If one were only an Indian, instantly alert, and on a racing horse, leaning against the wind, kept on quivering jerkily over the quivering ground, until one shed one's spurs, for there needed no spurs, threw away the reins, for there needed no reins, and hardly saw that the land before was smoothly shorn heath when horse's neck and head would be already gone." (39)

12. See the chapters by Schlaffer, Alt, and Benne in König and Most 2009. All further quotes from this volume are my translations.

13. Similarly, Ludger Hoffmann claims that Kafka's prose piece is a form of "Utopian Narration," since it opens a "world of knowledge of the possible [Wissenswelt des Möglichen]," but stresses that this about a "pure utopia" that

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lies in the very "dynamics of wishing," whereas any wish fulfilment would be "trivial" (209).

14. See: Willer 2003.

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