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## Waiting

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To a large extent a border can be considered a waiting act. A border causes a standstill, a distance and difference in time and space. As any border is a Janus face (Van Houtum 2010) consisting of two mutually reinforcing faces of inclusion and exclusion and of openness and closure, so too the waiting consists of two categories which are mutually reinforcing. Waiting is both an inclusion and an exclusion at the same time. On the one hand, there is the waiting in terms of waiting for the 'final border', which involves degrees of subjectification and internalization of the state by those who are based in a given territorial order, and through which citizens are included and being made ('citizenizing'). And on the other hand, there are the exclusionary waiting practices as authorized by a border guard (the b/ordering and 'state-ization' of territory and people in the name of the 'law'), which goes hand in hand with the Othering for others who wish to enter (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002).

To aesthetically illustrate and exemplify the first kind of waiting, inclusionary self-bordering, we will use the powerful parable 'Before the Law' (1914–1915) by Franz Kafka. In this short piece, using his typical Kafkaesque both intriguing as well as estranging style, he portrays an individual who waits to come before a state system of authority, and the limitless postponements and adjustments society makes through its officials to subjectify and control the expectations and rights of such individuals. For this latter exclusionary category of waiting, we will consider the allegorical presentation of waiting at the border in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). In this novel, a border community identifies their citizenship with a settlement in a border zone, while they await a perceived transgression of their borders by an invading 'barbarian force'. The borders they construct and those protected by the Empire's army embody societal and personal insecurities on the periphery of 'the Empire'. In Coetzee's text, the border security force must discipline the citizenship and must 'spy' on both its citizens and the 'barbarian' Other. The imaginary geography is a borderscape that contains, both outside it and



within it, the 'barbarian' Other who figures a desire for and the fear of political authority. It is a practice of b/ordering and Othering in which, as is often the case when it comes to anti-migration, security and anti-terrorism, border policies make an appeal to an 'exceptional state of emergency' as a necessity (Arendt 2007). And in turn this potentially further provokes the first waiting practice, the inclusionary self-encaging of ourselves. What we are waiting for then crucially is dependent on our own fears and desires, as we will make clear. But let us first begin with Kafka's parable on waiting, in which he portrays a man from the country who is waiting his entire life.

### Kafka's Waiting

#### *Before the Law*

Before the law sits a gatekeeper. To this gatekeeper comes a man from the country who asks to gain entry into the law. But the gatekeeper says that he cannot grant him entry at the moment. The man thinks about it and then asks if he will be allowed to come in later on. 'It is possible', says the gatekeeper, 'but not now'. At the moment the gate to the law stands open, as always, and the gatekeeper walks to the side, so the man bends over in order to see through the gate into the inside. When the gatekeeper notices that, he laughs and says: 'If it tempts you so much, try it in spite of my prohibition. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the most lowly gatekeeper. But from room to room stand gatekeepers, each more powerful than the other. I can't endure even one glimpse of the third'. The man from the country has not expected such difficulties: the law should always be accessible for everyone, he thinks, but as he now looks more closely at the gatekeeper in his fur coat, at his large pointed nose and his long, thin, black Tartar's beard, he decides that it would be better to wait until he gets permission to go inside. The gatekeeper gives him a stool and allows him to sit down at the side in front of the gate. There he sits for days and years. He makes many attempts to be let in, and he wears the gatekeeper out with his requests. The gatekeeper often interrogates him briefly, questioning him about his homeland and many other things, but they are indifferent questions, the kind great men put, and at the end he always tells him once more that he cannot let him inside yet. The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, spends everything, no matter how valuable, to win over the gatekeeper. The latter takes it all but, as he does so, says, 'I am taking this only so that you do not think you have failed to do anything'. During the many years the man observes the gatekeeper almost continuously. He forgets the other gatekeepers, and this one seems to him the only obstacle for entry into the law. He curses the unlucky circumstance, in the first years thoughtlessly and out loud, later, as he grows old, he still mumbles to himself. He becomes childish and, since in the long years studying the gatekeeper he has come to know the fleas in his fur collar, he even asks the fleas to help him persuade the gatekeeper. Finally his eyesight grows weak, and he does not know whether things are really darker

around him or whether his eyes are merely deceiving him. But he recognizes now in the darkness an illumination which breaks inextinguishably out of the gateway to the law. Now he no longer has much time to live. Before his death he gathers in his head all his experiences of the entire time up into one question which he has not yet put to the gatekeeper. He waves to him, since he can no longer lift up his stiffening body. The gatekeeper has to bend way down to him, for the great difference has changed things to the disadvantage of the man. 'What do you still want to know, then?' asks the gatekeeper. 'You are insatiable'. 'Everyone strives after the law', says the man, 'so how is that in these many years no one except me has requested entry?' The gatekeeper sees that the man is already dying and, in order to reach his diminishing sense of hearing, he shouts at him, 'Here no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I'm going now to close it'.

This powerful, fascinating parable of Franz Kafka on waiting,<sup>1</sup> which we cited here in full, was first published in 1915. Ever since it was published it has fascinated many readers. For us and for the purpose of this book, we will zoom in on how the border is portrayed in this parable. The border presents itself as a framing gate that, precisely because it is closed, initiates the question of what lies beyond. As such it offers an unknown possibility by stimulating the man's curiosity as to what is to be found on 'the inside (*das Innere*) ... – not the law itself, perhaps, but interior spaces that appear empty' (Derrida 1992: 203). The threshold figure of the gate constitutes 'a difference between an emptiness and a binding secret' (Vismann 2008: 15), resisting the doctrine of categories by suggesting immense possibilities.

The man is waiting all his life to have permission to enter this imagined world of possibilities. The principal activity of the man from the country therefore is waiting. It is this waiting that is most telling, for to wait is to discipline oneself. Waiting calls for a standstill, a fixation on a place and subjection to the passing of time. It makes you aware that you are not taking part in other activities; you cannot spend your time in other places when you have decided or are forced to wait.

What is perhaps most striking in Kafka's text is that the man from the country is allowed entrance, but *not now*. And this 'not now' is a permanent status. It is precisely the waiting 'before' the Law and this 'not now' that installs and reproduces state power and creates the internalization of control. The man from the country controls and disciplines himself in a Foucauldian sense by waiting on a stool at the gate. To a large extent, perhaps we are all a man from a country at various moments of our lives. For, what the terms waiting 'before' the Law and 'not yet' illustrate are a destiny, a future, a promise, a life beyond the present reality, which can only be reached through training, devotion, honesty, working or even suicide, depending on whatever the promise consists of. It is this promise of good behaviour, of good internalization of



the dominant order, the imagined final appreciation that is constructing the social self, the waiting self. The consequence of this waiting act is that we live our lives in a 'not now' and not yet status, in flux of constant be-coming, of indefinite postponement.

In Kafka's text the Law constitutes an imagined order, a belief. It is a belief in the presence and continuity of a spatial binding power, which becomes meaningful and becomes objectified in our everyday social practices, expressed by the waiting of the man. The spatial separation that a border creates and represents is goal and means at the same time (Houtum 2011). The border makes and is made. A border should hence be seen as a verb, not a noun. As Van Houtum and Van Naerssen (2002) have argued, we should therefore rather speak of bordering. To border is a practice, it is a process of both internalization/subjectification of an in-land, in-side and 'in-laws' and the objectification/*Verdinglichung*/exclusion of the 'out-land', out-side, and potential out-laws.

The practice of bordering is to be understood as a continual space-fixing process that gives the impression of a finite physical process as if it concerned a physically identifiable entity with objective and unchangeable borders. The constitution of a border, a shared truth, creates an immediate satisfaction for a short time, but the consequence is a long-term desire for new appropriations and control of the truth when this truth is threatened (Van Houtum 2010). The desire, the wish for the (comm)unity of tomorrow, the dream of the national utopia, the imagined world of possibilities beyond the not yet, is never-ending.

And what is seen as a utopia or truth in one domain can be a lie in the space and/or eyes of an Other (Van Houtum 2011). Borders are only the construction of a reality and truth in a certain context, in a certain spatial entity. It is the performative act of believing which makes a border real and truthful. The belief in a fantasy of a true life produces the necessary illusion that what is lacking in one's identity is filled, that one's (personal) order can be unified, causally referential and coherent. To border oneself is to discipline oneself to an order, it is to create oneself, to create a social self. It gives meaning to our selves. It fills the 'holes', it makes a whole. Believing in the truthfulness of a self-devised b/orderly scheme of reality is believed to mean that some of the vulnerability and doubts one lives with can be reduced. Believing in the constructed and imagined community helps one to gain some control over the complexities of life. Borders must therefore be seen as a strategic effort of fixation, of gaining distance and control in order to achieve ease (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002).

Although the b/order is an imagined-and-lived reality, that does not stop the desire for the true Self. The true b/order has no end, for realizations of wholeness never align with the fantasy perfectly. The perfect identity is

always there, beyond the threshold, beyond the gates of the Law. The identity is the desire of a self or order that is an unattainable Other. The emptiness of the Law produces a contingent reality and contingent rituals of truth keeping and aesthetic production for those who wish to maintain the constructed b/order.<sup>2</sup> That means that the lack of fulfilment is perpetual and the final truth of the b/ordered self is unattainable. In the words of the guard standing before the Law in Kafka's parable: 'you are insatiable'. The man from the country is waiting before the Law, and by internalizing and believing in the fantasy of the Law he has found a pseudo-home, an in-the-meantime-home at the gate, yet his desire to unmask the void, to have access, to know the truth, to truly come home, is 'insatiable'. This feeling of inexhaustibility is also constructed by the gatekeeper who warns him already in the beginning of his life, when he first sought permission to enter, that there was no end indeed in searching for the truth, for after the first gatekeeper there are only more gatekeepers, even more powerful and harder to get past than him. There is no final truth. Perhaps, extending Kafka's text, like the man from the country, we as human beings are outsiders to our own lives. We cannot enter definitely and forever into one's own Law: there is no final homecoming. And to fill in that lack, we create a fantasy-home by waiting before the Law, a simulacrum-home, illustrated by the stool the man from the country sits on. As such, we necessarily live in a condition of not yet and never will be. We are unavoidably living in the meantime. We are unavoidably waiting before the Law.

It is well known that Nietzsche advocated a powerful remedy for this condition, an escape from this emptiness, this void that is created by the self-disciplinary waiting for a permanent not yet (Nietzsche 1987). In his eyes, nihilism's destructive effects could and should be overcome through the transcendence of man into an overman, the Dionysian *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* is characterized as someone who possesses the 'will to power', who affirms life, acts out of passion, creates spirit and love. The *Übermensch* acts above and beyond oneself. Becoming an *Übermensch* is a practice of self-overcoming. In a way, therefore, Nietzsche's project is about the self-enlightenment of the Enlightenment, about pointing at the borders of truth, the ratio and the Law (Safranski 2000).

This desire for transcendence, to transcend the borders set out by the Law, to enter the gate, is lucidly present in the parable 'Before the Law' by Kafka. But crucially in Kafka's story, the man is waiting. He does not liberate himself. He does not escape. Seen in this light, Kafka's parable is in fact a testament of the subject. The man from the country denies life by waiting his entire life before the Law.

The Greek poet C.P. Cavafy famously has written about this connection between the death of the subject and the enclosing society around him, in his poem 'Walls': 'Without consideration, without pity, without shame, / they



built around me great and towering walls' (2007: 13). And this figure too is waiting: 'And now I am sitting here and despairing here. / I think of nothing else: this fate is gnawing at my mind; / for I had many things to do out there' (ibid.). Implicitly following Nietzsche's Dionysian desire, Michel Foucault aimed in his later works to find ways to free oneself from the internalization of the silencing and suffocating emptiness. To this end, he tried to theorize about what he labelled the 'aesthetics of existence', that is, on the practices and strategies of rethinking oneself, of liberation and de-subjectification, of the ethical self.

Equally provocative and disobedient as Foucault, but with a different tone and style, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari made it their theoretical goal to theorize on this Nietzschean aspiration for the nomadic, the escape from desiring our own repressive order (Deleuze and Guattari 2004a, 2004b). For Deleuze and Guattari there is an internal struggle between order and flight, what Nietzsche termed the Apollonian versus the Dionysian will to power. Each human moves then between these two poles of monadism and nomadism, or what they label as the paranoid desire and the schizoid desire (Van Houtum 2010). And crucially these desires do not stem from a natural lack, as Freud and Lacan had argued, but are principally socially produced. Society in their eyes is a desire-machine.

The paranoid desire is to be interpreted as being homesick, a desire for order, easiness, nihilism, control, security, comfort, hence the desperate desire for the truth here, the desire for self-repression and disciplining. This desire represents the politically inspired and socially constructed human desire to internalize the b/order, to be subjected, to be-long to this side of the gate, to be a subject made to wait for the promise that is implicit in the bordering of any space: to wait for tomorrow, the near future, the fulfilment of the dream that is the order. In a sense, this waiting is liberating, it gives one a task, a meaning, a social function and a potential identity. But at the same time this desire is a fear: a fear of being overwhelmed by emptiness, by a barbaric madness of total freedom, the fear of being without a b/order, of becoming a stranger (to) oneself, and of being non-existent, of becoming, as Giorgio Agamben puts it, profanely, like the Law itself, pure but empty, a man without content (Agamben 1999). In other words, it is the fear of the Dionysian Overman, the NoMad, the NoMan, the NoWhere, the NoNow, the spatio-temporal emptiness.

On the other hand, there is the schizoid desire of endless becoming and transcendence, of being 'far-sick'. The practice of waiting at the border as a subject is potentially not felt only as a practice of liberation but also of containment, a self-imprisonment of one's multiplicity in a spatially ordered box set out by others. The sentence of imprisonment is therefore precisely this: waiting for the Law to be merciful, waiting for the gates to be opened, the endless waiting at the stool. The fear here is of being suffocated by a repressive

total love, of the lie of the border, of being caged by a communal order, the fear of becoming a monadic Subject, of alienating oneself from the transcendent self, of denying life. The desire then is not to wait in a pseudo-home, to desperately long to be somewhere else. This is the desire to de-border oneself, to turn to the Other, to long for the Other in oneself, to become a stranger oneself, to free oneself from the surrounding, silencing walls, to be outside the Law, to be without the repressive social mask, to be a naked man.

The law of the territorial border then is the constantly moving navigational route that is the result of sailing between the Scylla of the free but Law-breaking anti-social and the Charybdis of the social but self-repressed. In other words, the border is in principle a Janus-faced continuum (Van Houtum 2010). Janus was the Roman God of the end and the beginning, the guard between the world above and the nether-land, and between the centripetal, inward oriented and the centrifugal, the outward oriented face.

We would argue that the totalitarian, monadic order, as well as the totally nomadic schizoid, cannot be reached, as this would lead in both cases to the destruction of the self. Radical paranoia, the home of the omnipresent ever-watching, and inescapable order, would result in the neurotic destruction of the individual self; and radical psychosis, the endless unbounded escape, would lead to a maniacal destruction of the social self. Hence, necessarily, if one does not wish to lose or destroy oneself, there must be a balance between the two poles of desires/fears. So the question Nietzsche puts – how much truth do we need or can we bear – must, as Safranski (2003) later did, be contrasted with the question: how much liberation, how much openness can we bear? The desire for the self-defining subjective order and liberating disorder are generally operating at the same time at once. Desiring therefore has no end, no final fulfilment, as there will always be that other contrasting desire which lurks and pulls us back. Therefore, as there is no end in desiring, equally there is no end in fearing. On this waiting continuum, the delineation of the border is, then, ongoing and dynamic, crucially contingent on our own co-production of our fears and desires.

### Coetzee's Waiting

Let us now turn to Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* and see how border fears and desires, and how a state of waiting before and at borders, is used there. Published in 1980, Coetzee's third novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* was the work that brought him international acclaim. Set in an unspecified time and place, the novel has more often than not been read as an allegory with a strong focus on the South African security police, as the language of the novel reflects the language of the apartheid regime. More recently it has



become a useful text for examining the ways in which a state borders through exclusion, justifies torture, the creating of camps as 'states of exception' to let people wait before the Law, and the ways in which ordinary laws became the object of exception post-9/11 (Crocker 2007). Several critics, as well as Coetzee himself in his article 'Into the Dark Chamber' (1992), encouraged such a reading. In fact, Coetzee speaks about the dark scenes of torture in the novel and their erotic appeal for the reader. They are the origin of 'novelist fantasy per se; in creating an obscenity, in enveloping it in mystery, the state creates the preconditions for the novel to set about its work of representation' (1992: 364). Coetzee is aware of the aesthetic dilemma for the novelist: 'The true challenge is: how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one's own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one's own terms' (Ibid.).

Both Kafka's and Coetzee's texts begin with a prohibition: an act of forbidding action or of forbidding a person to act by command or decree. They also begin with a 'primitivescene' (Cixous 2011b: 86) of the annunciation of a secret, something hidden away due to a prohibition which is announced as an initiation (a period of probation): no one is 'supposed either to know or to ignore the Law' (Cixous 2011a: 76). In both fictional texts, the only hope seems to be for the central character to know how long to wait to pass through the door, which controls the threshold space, the liminal site marking the interspace of being inscribed into the law. All accede to a demand not to try to gain access, at least, 'not yet'. Unable to cross the threshold, they wait: their gatekeepers are both interrupters as well as go-betweens. They are before the law but already in it: paused subjects awaiting orders.

Let us see now how this is developed precisely in Coetzee's novel. To begin with, we will zoom in on the Magistrate. In the novel the Magistrate is a border guard both implicated in and self-consciously critical of the 'the Law'; 'one thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era' (Coetzee 1980: 133). He is 'no less infected with it than the faithful Colonel Joll' (ibid.), who later arrives with his assistant Mandel and an army to help maintain order. Both men have parts to play in 'the first line of defense' (Coetzee 1980: 52) of the Empire and both are isolated from other people. While the Magistrate considers himself a foreigner in the land through his work for the Empire, he is at home on the frontier since he was born there and is in the process of writing its history. He feels that the acts committed within his jurisdiction, in the name of Empire and necessity, are acts that over time increasingly rob him of his individual authority and from which he seeks to distance himself. But he cannot distance himself from torture, rape, or 'the dark chamber' of interrogation that the army is using and of which he is part.

At the beginning of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate despairs when Colonel Joll's captives are not the barbarians he set out to find: 'Did

no one tell him the difference between fishermen with nets and wild nomad horsemen with bows? Did no one tell him they don't even speak the same language?' (Coetzee 1980: 19). Clearly, in making this point, Coetzee has been inspired by Cavafy's poem, 'Waiting for the Barbarians' which carries the same title as Coetzee's novel. The poem ends with the lines: 'And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians? / They were, those people, a kind of solution' (Cavafy 2007: 17). In other words, the creation of Others is constitutive for the construction of an b/ordered 'we'. In a similar vein, Ania Loomba argues that the creation of the Other depends on binary oppositions, and 'are crucial not only for creating images of the outsider but equally essential for constructing the insider, the (usually White European male) "self"' (1998: 104). It is the Magistrate who is on the border between the barbarian and the We. He is the literal and metaphorical borderlander, one introspectively seeking a balance between his fears and desires. It is Joll who acts as the hard-ball believer in the above-mentioned Apollonian b/order. The army of the Empire and men like Joll, who act in its service, are in many ways 'foreign' to the land and the community, but 'necessity' has made Joll and his army essential in countering what he believes are existential threats from the enemy at the gate.

The novel is full of city gates and the building of barriers that create an ambivalent topography of Empire oscillating between torture room and incarceration, legal gatekeepers and prison guards, doorkeepers and executioners/torturers. Like in Kafka's parable, there is also in Coetzee's book a hierarchy of gatekeepers of the Law. The Magistrate claims he is the lowest of the legal intermediaries in a pyramid of gatekeepers whose apex is Joll and the Empire, even sovereignty itself. It appears that the first gatekeeper, the Magistrate, is sacrificed to enforcement of the b/order of state control. He will become the collateral damage: what begins in the torture of alien Others (Barbarians) gradually turns, as he begins to doubt the alienness of the barbarians and to dwell in the in-between space between ruler and ruled, into the torture of the Magistrate himself. He thinks he is only an 'interpreter of the law', but he is also its emissary.

### Barbarian Girl Awaiting Torture

The other main character in the text, a barbarian girl, is central to any reading of the text and the representation of waiting at the border. Her presence in town is a disturbing factor for the Magistrate. Her father dies during interrogation and her people have abandoned her; like the Magistrate, she is solitary and isolated. The Magistrate, after discovering her, quickly takes up a peculiar relationship with her. Her body bears the marks of Joll's intensive torture



in a quest to search for an imagined hidden truth: her eyesight is damaged, leaving her only with peripheral vision, and her feet have been broken. From living outside on the streets, the Magistrate invites her into his chambers, and 'draw[s] the curtains, light[s] the lamp' (Coetzee 1980: 27), and asks to see her feet. The lamp, with its unforgiving light, makes it easier to scrutinize and see her, yet he can only see what is on the surface of her body. Then the Magistrate commences his cleansing ritual of washing the girl's feet. The Magistrate's search for truth, aligned with Joll's search for truth, is similar as they both take advantage of and attempt to invade the Other's body. In fact, twice in the text the parallelism is emphasized: first, when the Magistrate cares for the tortured girl by taking her into his arms: 'I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her – but I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate' (43); second, when he considers that 'other cold man with the mask over his eyes who gave the orders and pondered the sounds of her intimate pain?' (148). This brings us to the imagery of seeing, a striking element in both Kafka's parable and especially Coetzee's novel. Not only is the barbarian girl blind, but it is also significant that Joll for most of the time wears dark glasses. These prevent the Magistrate from seeing Joll's eyes. They represent a way of avoiding recognition and scrutiny. Both Joll and the Magistrate assume they can see without being seen. Although he does not cast his eyes down *per se*, Joll is protected from the scrutinizing gaze of others, protected from the kind of gaze he exposes others to. Wolfgang Müller-Funk connects the act of casting one's eyes down to a feeling of shame: 'Shame is quite clearly a phenomenon of borders and limits. As Simmel points out, casting down one's eyes is not a manifestation of us not wanting to look at somebody, but a way of saying we do not want to have that somebody looking at us' (2007: 83).<sup>3</sup>

The Magistrate reads the girl's body as an articulation of imagined speech, a metonymy of torture. He tries to speak the marks on her body, to really see her and make them tell her story: 'she cannot but feel my gaze pressing in upon her with the weight of a body' (Coetzee 1980: 60). Or 'I am like an incompetent school-master, fishing about with my maieutic forceps when I ought to be filling her with the truth' (44). His relationship with her leaves him free to speak for the Other, she has a binding secret only he can reveal. While recognizing that his interrogations of her body might not withstand the light of day, he pulls the curtains creating concealment and allowing himself a body upon which to trace his desire. Yet the barbarian girl's body is a closed room to him since he can find no way of 'penetrating the surface' (43, 49).

Her body contains traces of torture, signifying a disturbance, an alterity. Homi K. Bhabha's reading of such situations is helpful here, the 'silent Other of gesture and failed speech ... the Stranger, whose language-less presence evokes an archaic anxiety and aggressivity impedes the search for narcissistic love-objects in which the subject can rediscover himself' (Bhabha 1994: 166).

The Magistrate must force her to speak so that he can become an object of her imaginary desire. Thus the girl becomes the possibility for him to recreate himself yet his act of forcing her to speech is an act of torture. He has sought to bear witness to her suffering but he has no ethical capacity to admit equivalent communication, mirroring Joll's attempts to make the tortured speak 'truth' discussed below.

The Magistrate tells the cook that the torturers 'thrive on stubborn silence: it confirms to them that every soul is a lock they must patiently pick' (Coetzee 1980: 124), inadvertently referring to his relationship with the barbarian girl. The imagery here suggests that the picker of the lock does not have the key that fits the opening, but that he must find something suitable. This is an allusion to the body of the tortured boy at the beginning of the text when his torturer 'makes a curt thrust into the sleeping boy's body and turns the knife delicately, like a key, first left, then right' (10). After attempting to return the Barbarian girl to her native people, the Magistrate is accused of 'treasonably consorting with the enemy'; he soon finds himself subject to the same methods of torture used against the girl. The Magistrate seeks to be the 'one man who in his heart was not a barbarian' (102).<sup>4</sup> Earlier he has called Mandel, the man who has tortured him, 'one of the new barbarians usurping my desk and pawing my papers' (78) and sees himself as a 'go-between, a jackal of Empire in sheep's clothing' (72). Coetzee suggests such sentimental cynical discourse is a dead end. The issue here is that the Magistrate is always guilty of having participated in the acts of the tormentor first by his passive acceptance of the actions of Colonel Joll and later in his objectification of the barbarian girl's body as a site of torture.

The Magistrate has become increasingly connected with the barbarian girl as both her rescuer and her torturer. Several critics have argued that the Magistrate sets out to mend her body during torture, but in our opinion the masturbatory quality of his actions suggests a more selfish goal. The girl's body is always sexual to him but it also 'symbolize[s] the conquered land' (Loomba 1998: 152), which only he can redeem. The girl's body is also a landscape the Magistrate cannot penetrate as he hunts 'back and forth seeking entry' (Coetzee 1980: 43). The Magistrate's attempt to read and identify with the Other leads him to return to the rooms of torture.

### Waiting to Torture

Like the stool in Kafka's parable, the torture room in Coetzee's novel becomes a constitutive border: inside, the victim is held in isolation, waiting. And the torture room itself will not bear witness: 'I stare all day at the empty walls, unable to believe that the imprint of all the pain and degradation they have



enclosed will not materialize under an intent enough gaze' (Coetzee 1980: 87). His exclusion is what spurs the Magistrate's search for 'the truth' of what has gone on at the border and in the garrison. His own waiting leads not to seeing but instead he hears rumours of 'the screaming which people afterwards claim to have heard from the granary' (4–5), so he questions his guards and the boy who was interrogated.

In another sense, these two rooms of torture, that of Joll and that of the Magistrate, parallel each other. For both the Magistrate and Joll cannot enter the room of torture other than as a torturer or a victim. Both are locked rooms, windowless, closed from sight but open to expressions of desire for the expression of 'truth' or the promise of forgiveness. His own room and the prisoners' cells cannot be fully scrutinized and will not allow him to bear 'witness'. Like Kafka's text, the novel is allegorical and tautological, revealing a desire for access to what cannot be known about the border itself (Vismann 2008: 20).

Coetzee has stated that the novel is about 'the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience': the Magistrate (Coetzee 1992: 363). Furthermore, in his article 'Into the Dark Chamber' Coetzee suggests the torture room is a metaphor for the novelist's imagination: 'the novelist is a person who, camped before a closed door, facing an insufferable ban, creates, in place of the scene he is forbidden to see, a representation of that scene, and a story of the actors in it and how they come to be there' (1992: 364). This sentence is a reimagining of Kafka's *Before the Law*: the fear and the desire for access to a closed-off space on the other side of a border. The border that denies insight into the processes of institutionalization of the law is both self-created and structural. Both alienness and power are imagined and are therefore powerful structures that hold no key to unlock their secrets. While Coetzee seems to be suggesting that the novelist has the ability to cross the boundaries of a closed-off space through the use of their imagination, it is, however, a crossing only 'on one's own terms'. This leaves the author himself 'waiting': to recognize the Other's call, and thus to bear witness. This is a deeply problematic act: 'The witness speaks for someone who cannot speak for him- or herself; the witness's freedom of expression is subjected to the responsibility for Others' (Pinchevski 2001: 72).

Torture will cause a person to tell their story, 'pressuring' them into a narrative act that demands the torturer to interpret the prisoner's fear and desire to speak. When Joll is asked how he can know whether a prisoner is telling the truth or not, he explains:

I am speaking of a situation in which I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see – this is what happens – first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth. Pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt. (Coetzee 1980: 4)

But the truth Joll finds is the story he has already set his mind on hearing. Recognizing this, the Magistrate advises the boy under interrogation at the beginning of the novel: 'Listen, you must tell the officer the truth. *That is all he wants to hear from you – the truth*' (Coetzee 1980: 7; emphasis added). Patrick Lenta's article 'Legal Illegality: *Waiting for the Barbarians* after September 11' argues that '[p]rolonged torture forces victims to try to comprehend the torturer's interests and present themselves in a way that is most likely to satisfy their torturers. After a time, the victim will say what he/she thinks the torturer wants to hear' (Lenta 2006: 75). The Magistrate in this instance functions as a gate-keeper/messenger encouraging the boy to 'confess'. However, when the boy has confessed, and told the 'truth', admitting that there is a 'barbarian' uprising, the Magistrate denies his own hand in it and confronts the boy about it: 'Do you understand what this confession of yours will mean? ... It means that the soldiers are going to ride out against your people. There is going to be killing. Kinsmen of yours are going to die, perhaps even your parents, your brothers and sisters. Do you really want that?' (Coetzee 1980: 11).

The Magistrate attempts to rid himself of guilt and moral responsibility. The boy is as powerless to stop an attack on the 'barbarians' as he is to withstand torture. And the Magistrate, who is equally unable to stop this attack, does nothing but transfer his guilt onto the boy. Later, when the Magistrate is tortured himself, he tells us: 'I discover with surprise that after a little rest, after the application of a little pain, I can be made to move, to jump or to skip or crawl or run a little further' (Coetzee 1980: 128). The Magistrate knows how far he can be pushed: 'I want to live. As every man wants to live. To live and live and live. No matter what' (130).

The Magistrate wants to save himself from the barbarity of the 'civilized': 'what has become important ... is that I should neither be contaminated by the atrocity that is about to be committed nor poison myself with impotent hatred of its perpetrators. I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself' (Coetzee 1980: 114). Watching his fellow townsmen, women and children all participate in the beating of the 'barbarian' prisoners, the Magistrate is determined to be the 'one man who in his heart was not a barbarian'. He wishes not to be infected by the dis/ease that has overtaken the town. While waiting for the 'barbarians' each new person captured will have the word 'ENEMY' written on their backs, and then will be 'washed clean' by being beaten. The ironic parallelisms with the Magistrate's washing of the 'barbarian girl's' feet and Mandel's washing of his hands are obvious. The Magistrate recognizes that 'A bestial life is turning me into a beast' (87), yet when tortured himself he traces the effects on his own body: 'They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it means to live in a body' (125).



## Waiting at the Border: Toward an Ending

In the above we have illustrated how the border concept of waiting could be understood and illustrated in an aesthetical sense. Kafka's story, as Jacques Derrida has argued, is focused on both what is literature and what is the law, on who decides, who judges, and with what entitlement we say this is 'literature' (1992: 188).

What we see in both texts is an internalization of the desire to cross a border hoping that something is on the other side. Both the Magistrate and the man from the country are outside and thereby inside, and waiting before the Law. Each of these two texts is an aesthetic depiction of border performativity: each protagonist is carried to the threshold of his or her own story, before the door that opens them up to the law. At the beginning they are waiting on the edge of language that will constitute them as subjects within the Law. To be inscribed into the Law is to be made to appear 'before' the law, but does one then have access to the law? (Vismann 2008: 15). There is an intersection of form and context presented in each story's performances before the gate and by 'the gate keepers'. In each text the practice of allegorical representation and interpretation is dependent upon sight and what can be framed in outside/inside spatial analogies. Both texts move from these limited analogies, to complex presentations of multiple perspectives within the borderscapes of the nation state and the complexities of gaining access to what lies beyond the border.

The man from the country belongs to the Law while he waits for the doorkeeper's permission to even allow him entry for consideration of his case. The rite of passage and its attendant feelings of anxiety and tension are internalized, as the man becomes his own doorkeeper: he prevents himself, as he is both disciplined and policed by his own b/ordering. The man from the country imagines that behind the door the Law is present, yet the Law has no interior, there is no there There: 'the presence of the law is its concealment' (Foucault 1990: 33–35). In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, 'even if the law remains unrecognizable, this is not because it is hidden by its transcendence, but simply because it is always denuded of any interiority: it is always in the office next door, or behind the door, on to infinity' (1986: 45). In the words of Kafka in the parable: '... and I am only the most lowly gatekeeper. But from room to room stand gatekeepers, each more powerful than the other. I can't endure even one glimpse of the third'.

The point in Kafka's text is that precisely because there is no access to a central and unconcealed Law, the waiting at the border is a form of self-policing, a subjectification<sup>5</sup> of and by the citizen, and a state-ization of and by border

guards and the legal representatives of the State. The waiting act, which is enacted by a border guard and border-crosser, is part of what Deleuze and Guattari have termed the same 'machine' and that machine of justice is a machine with a 'necessary' metaphorical form and function with its files, symbols, personnel and precedents controlling what can be said and what can be desired (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 81–83).

In Coetzee's novel, citizen and border guard both wait for the barbarian Other within the machine of Empire and the Law. When events cause the imperial authorities to perceive threats to the colonial boundaries of the outpost community and the Empire, the outpost Magistrate, who administers everyday law for the people, has to give way to the imperial officers Joll and Mandel, only to become the object of that same authority. What had been outside, at the limits of the law, using torture to gain information, has moved within the Law itself. It is the Magistrate who figures as a person who both desires to escape the waiting as well as being a border guard himself. For his b/order-crossing behaviour he faces torture himself, he must answer to 'the rule of Law'. At the end of the text he seems to be a man without content (Agamben 1999).

So, in both these texts the border stands between fear and desire, and as a representation of both fear and desire. It is both the conferral and selectivity of belonging and the means to recognize those who need to be seen by the waiting State apparatus. And this b/ordering and production of the Other is endless. Its power cannot be understood by determining its coordinates or lines on maps or on the ground alone. In the words of W.S. Merwin's poem 'Door':

This is a place where a door might be  
here where I am standing  
In the light outside the walls  
  
there would be a shadow here  
all day long  
and a door into it  
where now there is me (Merwin 1973: 33)

The poem illustrates the above described threshold/border aesthetics: there is an outside and inside simultaneously. At a point, where we seek admittance, 'where now there is me' there is also waiting in the subjunctive: 'long after I have gone'. The poem is searching, like the man from the country in Kafka's parable, for this 'door' that might be the centre of all things, an eternity in the present tense where 'there in front of me a life / would open' (Merwin 1973: 33): the promise of inscription into a text or representation, the promise of a shared truth.

To conclude, what both Kafka's and Coetzee's text on waiting have made powerfully and poetically clear is that a border is neither a beginning nor an



end. A border is the intrinsically temporal and contextual product of a continuous confrontational introspective question: why do we wait and for whom? A question we perhaps all have to answer before our own door is finally shut.

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## NOTES

1. Some material in this section of the paper is taken from Van Houtum 2010. We wish to thank Professor Ian Johnston of Malaspina University College, Nanaimo, BC, Canada for use of his translation of 'Before the Law' which can be found on The Kafka Project website: <http://www.kafka.org/index.php?id=162,165,0,0,1,0>.
2. For example, Hannah Arendt argues that Kafka's *The Trial* implies 'a critique of the pre-War Austrian bureaucratic regime whose numerous and conflicting nationalities were governed by a homogeneous hierarchy of officials who ran the bureaucratic machine, and whose interpretation of the law became an instrument of lawlessness' (2007: 97). See also the chapter on Sovereignty.
3. Coetzee in *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007/2008) has the narrator Señor C state: 'Whereas the slave fears only pain, what the free man fears most is shame' (39). Shame is a

response to the politics of apartheid and colonialism: 'Dishonour descends upon one's shoulders, and once it has descended no amount of clever pleading will dispel it' (40), or, as the Magistrate states in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 'When some men suffer unjustly ... it is the fate of those who witness their suffering to suffer the shame of it' (1980: 152).

4. The origin of the word Barbarian and Barbarous is the Greek 'barbaros' of the Latin 'bararus' to signify groups of African peoples without language and culture. To label a group 'Barbara' in European languages suggested 'tribes' who mumbled, or tribes of Africans who resisted Roman rule, Christianity, and who had no language that could be understood. One current historian suggests that from its first use Barbary and Barbarians had not only pejorative connotations but also signified groups of people who refused to communicate or who were reluctant to cooperate with colonial or imperial 'civilizations'.
5. The article 'Reintegrating Sense into Subjectification' (Hildebrand-Nilshon, Motzkau and Papadopoulos 2001) has been useful in our formulation and use of this concept.

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## Intersections: A Conclusion in the Form of a Glossary

Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe

In this book we have let six key words – *Ecology*, *Imaginary*, *Invisibility*, *Palimpsest*, *Sovereignty* and *Waiting* – steer parallel but interconnected paths through the field of border aesthetics. The time has come to pull some of the arguments proposed in the introduction together, sum up our conclusions, and make the links between chapters more visible. Embedded in each chapter are many different terms relevant to chapter themes, and a number of these terms appear in more than one of the chapters. By treating this theoretical lexicon as a network of relations between the chapters, we hope to present a snapshot of our thinking here about border aesthetics, at this point of time in the academic debate. Any such state can only be a momentary and incomplete crystallization of a field, pointing as it does towards future and often unknown potentials for research. So while in the following we provide some hopefully useful definitions of the terms which make up the nodal points, definitions which may seem to claim to be definitive, we are very aware that we do this in order to provide a practical basis for debate and criticism, and that given the historical nature of borders and the other phenomena we are examining here, our definitions must be taken as contingent.

We have chosen to take the idea of nodes in a network and of definitions very literally by drawing up a network of terms cited or suggested in the chapters, and then providing lexical explanations for these terms in the style of a glossary. To make this conclusion more readable, however, our nodes are not simply arranged alphabetically, but are grouped into several 'rhizomes' which speak to each other through series of glossary terms. First we deal with the themes of the book and our six chapters, and then provide a section for our 'protagonists', the border-crossers who are important actors in any bordering process. After this follow rhizomes of terms addressing the kaleidoscope of various fields in which borderings take place. As it happened, initial groupings quickly appeared to suggest the five border levels or planes developed in border poetics analysis (Border Poetics Working Group 2008, Schimanski 2006, Schimanski and Wolfe 2007): the *topographical*, the *epistemological*, the



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