

Seminar

14

Sydney Seminar for the  
**Arts and Philosophy**

Kafka's Cages



It seems that in Kafka's world there is no escape. His protagonists are trapped: in the *Metamorphosis* Gregor Samsa is confined to his room; in the *Castle*, K. is unable to leave the village; and in *The Trial*, the whole city functions like a giant prison for Josef K. In contrast to these 'cages' that permeate Kafka's writings, there is – in the final chapter of *Amerika* – a description of the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma. When Karl Rossmann arrives there, he discovers that its members are absolutely free. Everybody is welcome to join the Nature Theatre, and the actors are not even constrained by a script, since all they have to do is play themselves.

The Sydney Seminar "Kafka's Cages" will explore these fascinating interplays between ideas of imprisonment and freedom in Kafka's work.

Indeed, such contrasts between freedom and imprisonment touches the core of Kafka's work. His modernist writing is characterised by lack of reference to particular locales. Do these nameless places operate as figurations of 'hell,' where people are imprisoned? Or are they images of a possible 'heaven,' where there is absolute freedom? This lack of reference to specific places may appear as being connected to the political

turmoil engulfing Europe during Kafka's lifetime – turmoil that ultimately led to perhaps the most horrifying prison that mankind constructed for itself, Auschwitz. The contrast between freedom and imprisonment highlighted by Kafka's 'cages,' affords us the possibility of re-examining Kafka's position in the modernist canon of the twentieth century, his political and social ideas – and perhaps even key issues of our own time.

**Coordinator:** Anthony Uhlmann  
**Web Design:** Andrea Curr  
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This event, sponsored by the Consulate General of Germany, the State Library of NSW, the Goethe Institute and the Sydney Seminar for the Arts and Philosophy, will bring together a number of experts who will discuss aspects of Kafka's life and work. Speakers will include the distinguished Professor Kiarina Kordela from the US, and the Australians Chris Fleming, John O'Connor, and Dimitris Vardoulakis, as well as the editor of *Heat and Giramondo* Press Ivor Indyk as a panellist.

For further information on this event please see our website: [www.sydneyseminar.org](http://www.sydneyseminar.org)  
If you would like to receive information about future events, please email us at [sydneyseminar@bigpond.com](mailto:sydneyseminar@bigpond.com) and provide email details.

## **Seminar 14:**

**Friday, 3 July 2009**

**5.30–8:30pm**

Metcalfe Auditorium

State Library of NSW

Macquarie Street, Sydney

**Cost:** \$15/\$10 (concessions)

**Bookings Essential:** Tel. (02) 9273 1770 or [bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au)

The School of Humanities and Languages and the Writing and Society Group at the University of Western Sydney, the State Library of NSW in conjunction with the Consulate General of the German and the Goethe Institute present:

### **Kafka's Cages**

#### **Programme**

5:30 pm

5:50 pm **Welcome: Christiane Gruber**

(Cultural Attachée, German Consulate General)

5:55 pm **Introduction: Professor Nancy Wright**

(University of Western Sydney)

6:00pm **A. Kiarina Kordela** (Macalester College, St Paul, USA)

*Kafkaesque Arrogance, or, The Kabbalah of Secular Capitalism*

6:30 pm **Chris Fleming and John O'Carroll** (University of Western

Sydney and Charles Sturt University)

*Delusion of Agency: Kafka, Imprisonment, and Modern Victimhood*

7:00 pm **Dimitris Vardoulakis** (University of Western Sydney)

*"The Fall is the proof of our freedom": Kafka's Hope*

7:30 pm **Break** – Refreshments

7:45 pm **Ivor Indyk** (University of Western Sydney)

Panel discussion with the speakers, and Questions from the Audience