I begin with a precis of my argument about Theodor Adorno's essay "Notes on Kafka" ("Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka") that should suggest why I must address it. (endnote: 2) Adorno's Kafka espouses, theologically speaking, a Gnosticism *without relief*; in fact, Kafka saw remnants of light come "slanting through the words." Adorno ignores Kafka's intermittent yet felt, redemptive immersion in the act of writing (DF 261), claiming, instead, to uncover in Kafka's work a prime "inverse-theological" fable--a Marxian-Freudian story that tells of the collaboration of bourgeois commodity culture in its own extinction under fascism. Although Adorno pleads for a nonallegorical, a literal reading of Kafka's stories, he in fact proceeds allusively, by fits and starts, to "mortify" the text to fit his fable. The outcome is that Kafka's texts are seen as offering a form of socially redemptive resistance. But if they amount to an index of the falsity of Kafka's time and place (in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, to a moment of truth), it remains hard to see how this moment of insight could be recovered, since, for Adorno, the benighted bourgeois reader has been "unable to find a successor"--and we are all bourgeois (260). In general, the question of how Kafka's texts, embedded as they are in the falsity of their historical moment, may be said to convey insight remains notably obscure. My sense is that this shortcoming is founded on Adorno's own devotion to a hieratic, exclusionary style, poised to warn the reader: "Understand me at your own risk!" One is then dismayed to discover one's failure, even as a bourgeois, to have qualified as an exception.

Adorno's essay is foremost an event of style; hence, the style of any critique that resisting entry. Hence, we may not write epigrammatically, imitating him. But if we then write systematically--"rationally"--about Adorno, eschewing all half-in-love-with-easeful-death profundity (the difficult epigram being the least sociable of forms), we will have top
A comparable quest arises: how to write on Adorno on Kafka? His essay by no means "shatters individuation," but it is in many places as hermetic as Kafka, the effect of marmoreal fragments fused together under rhetorical pressure to something solid and death profundity (the difficult epigram being the least sociable of forms), we will have to put on the silk gown and begin to pronounce him, here, "Right!" here, "Wrong!" But this may amount to exactly that sort of instrumentalized reason that he comminates, as merely adding to "the soothing façade to which a repressive reason (rationale Kontrolle ) increasingly conforms" (252, G 312).

The constraints under which one writes on Adorno in America also call for reflection. Contemporary scholarly publishing requires that this essay be cited in English and treated in English. What the reader reads is Adorno in translation--ergo, Adorno in exile--the condition that such an essay as "Aufzeichnungen" (Notes) is supposed to get past. That is not the same thing as to "escape from": Adorno's only proper home, we know, is homelessness; and yet the change of address in 1945 from Los Angeles to Frankfurt portends a lesser degree of displacement. "Notes on Kafka" breathes in German; its ductus is freer; the exquisiteness of its word choice--the Parnassian face of a negative Reason--gives it a lustrous obscurity that for Adorno, I believe, marks precisely its origin in Europe--in Germany. But here a negative dialectic is also at work, for the traditionless Germany of the 1950s can no longer read such a diction, one that produces the resonances of meaning only as it alludes to the conventions that this same Germany has annihilated--in short: a style--or, precisely what, with the best will in the world, is lost in translation. Reading this essay in American is to enter a spectral space inhabited by two absences: the absence in the American idiom of room for so odd a monument of epigrammatic compression, and the historical absence of tradition to which it is offered in the spirit of defiant retribution. These aspects of Adorno's thought, except as they are conjured here, must, alas, go by the board--be carried away at sea--in what follows.

The American translation of this essay by Sam and Sherry Weber is competent, often.

Kafka's world is like the world of petty shopkeepers. Think of the lawyer-horse Bucephalus, Josephine the singing mouse, or even Gregor Samsa the giant vermin, none of whom are shopkeepers, though perhaps one does not want to think of them too insistently as white elephants either. Odradek--that hybrid, inorganic, irrepressible spool- and star-like creature (is he a dredl ?)--fits better. (endnote: 5) But the Webers' mistake has an unexpected tutelary value: it is better than a mistake, it is an error, or part of the error throughout Adorno's essay, which presses all of Kafka's stories and parables into the service of a vast fable, told in Freudian and demonic terms, of the capitalist reification of human consciousness.

Kafka's world of motifs and ideas is like a world of white elephants, Adorno continues, because "no theological principle comes so close to him as the title of an American film comedy: "Shopworn Angel" (271). Here, the "inner logic" is more persuasive than the logic. But, as I have suggested, part of the blame for the mistranslation is Adorno's, who compels his reader to read Kafka's parabolic figures as ciphers of the modern class history of goods and their relations--something that Kafka pejoratively called "property and its connections" ("Besitz und seine Beziehungen"), those things that "language" treats only because it is forced by its own practices to abandon its wish to address things "outside the sense of the literal human" (GrW 291-2).
Adorno first speaks of this "other sort of theology" in his correspondence with Benjamin, conjuring a Marxist-Freudian fable into which, unlike "existentialism"--or, for that matter, dialectical theology--Kafka does fit. (endnote: 6) This "inverse" theology reads traces of "the Law" in the devolution of commodities under monopolistic capitalism. I want to examine this other theology of economic-cipher-reading, while repeating my concern as to the right way of producing a verdict. Consider the following case in detail. Adorno is writing of a domain of experience common to both "the Third Reich" and "Kafka's world":

war in Kafka's works. (endnote: 8) So one is prepared to say that the analogy is false, but that would also be wrong, because the analogy is not completely false. In Amerika (One Who Sank Out of Sight), a sort of concierge, the Head Porter, is gratuitously violent to Karl Rossmann, more sinned against than sinner.

"They are in each case declassés," Adorno continues, saved from total collapse "by the organized collective and permitted to survive, like Gregor Samsa's father" (259). But they are not in each case members of a class, even as declassés, since the subjects referred to in this sentence do not belong together: some belong only to the empirical reality of the Third Reich and others to both the Third Reich and Kafka's world. How then are we to understand Adorno's likening them "in each case" to Gregor Samsa's father, who is neither a non-commissioned officer nor a prisoner of war though, if you will, he is a kind of Head Porter in the Samsa household. The latter point might be granted, and the figure of Herr Samsa then grafted onto the Head Porter of Amerika (One Who Sank Out of Sight ), whereby we can begin to construct a significant constellation of spasmodically aggressive, vacuous, politically instrumentalizable adults--sublimations, presumably, for Kafka, of his very own Herr Herrmann Kafka. The link is an interesting one and owed to Adorno's logic. And yet, the passage continues, "As in the era of defective capitalism, the burden of guilt is shifted from the sphere of production to the agents of circulation or to those who provide services, traveling salesmen, bank employees, waiters." But what, now, is the relation of "the era of defective capitalism" to either the Third Reich or to Kafka's world? Is this era a third thing, to which these two worlds are likened, on the basis of the fact that in all three worlds "guilt is shifted from the sphere of production to the agents of circulation"? Or is it a thing that already pervades both halves of the binary of the Third Reich and Kafka's world? But this thing now sounds very little like the Third Reich, which was not notoriously set against "its agents of circulation," so long as these were not wandering Jews or Gypsies (certainly,
employees," but the latter--bank employee--is not what Gregor Samsa is but just what Gregor Samsa's father is, so Gregor and his father are now being tarred with the same brush as creatures rendered subordinate by the vagaries of capitalism. (One hopes, surely, under "bank employee," that Adorno cannot have in mind Joseph K., since he is a bank official of