

Sydney Seminar for the  
**Arts and Philosophy**

Kafka and Philosophy



**Franz Kafka is perhaps the most often discussed modernist author by philosophers. From Benjamin and Adorno to Blanchot, Derrida and Deleuze, to mention just some of the most prominent philosophers, Kafka has been the subject of many essays and books. What has been so alluring about Kafka so that philosophers have a compulsion to return to his writings?**

The “Sydney Seminar” *Kafka and Philosophy* provides a series of possible answers to the above question. Paul Alberts takes up the issue of legal positivism in *The Trial* by staging a “confrontation” between Kafka and Hans Kelsen. Dimitris Vardoulakis compares the conception of the law in *The Trial* to Spinoza’s *Theologico-political Treatise* in order to show how it is possible to salvage a sense of freedom in Kafka’s worlds. According to Chris Conti, Kafka’s *Trial* is important because it signals the search of a new genre, the metaphysical crime novel. Henry Sussman argues that there is a virtual element to Kafka’s compelling and memorable literary scenes because they absorb and enmesh us within their parameters with the insistence of virtual reality, comprising free-standing self-referential worlds, to which all readers have access.

Paul Alberts teaches in philosophy at the University of Western Sydney, and is working on ways of making continental philosophy applicable to understanding nature and environment.

Dimitris Vardoulakis (University of Western Sydney) is the author of *The Doppelgänger: Literature’s Philosophy* (2010), the editor of *Spinoza Now* (2011) and co-editor of *Freedom and Confinement in Modernity: Kafka’s Cages* (2011).

Henry Sussman (Yale University) is the author of numerous books, including *Around the Book: Systems and Literacy – Kafka, Benjamin, Derrida* (2011), *The Trial: Kafka’s Unholy Trinity* (1993), and *Franz Kafka: Geometrician of Metaphor* (1979).

Chris Conti teaches at the University of Western Sydney and is the author of *Proofs: 104 Short Stories* (2011) and the co-editor of *Landscape, Place and Culture* (2011).

**Sydney Seminar Co-ordinator:** Dimitris Vardoulakis  
**Web Co-ordinator:** Alex Ling  
**Web Design:** Andrea Curr  
**Flyer Design:** Charlotte Kapor

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This Seminar presents Prof Henry Sussman, one of the most eminent Kafka scholars in the world, alongside three scholars from the University of Western Sydney working on Kafka.

## Seminar 17

Thursday 9 February 2012

1:25–5.00pm

University of Western Sydney  
Bankstown Campus, Building 20, Room G.06

**Cost:** Admission Free

Please RSVP to [philosophy@uws.edu.au](mailto:philosophy@uws.edu.au)

## Kafka and Philosophy

### Programme

1:25pm      **Welcome: Prof. Peter Hutchings**  
(Dean, School of Humanities and Communication  
Arts, University of Western Sydney)

1:30–3:00pm      **Chair: Sigi Jöttkandt**  
  
Paul Alberts (University of Western Sydney)  
*Knowing Life Before the Law*  
  
Dimitris Vardoulakis (University of Western Sydney)  
*Kafka's Empty Law: Laughter and Freedom in The Trial*

3:00–3.30pm      **Coffee Break**

3:30–5:00pm      **Chair: Gail Jones**  
  
Chris Conti (University of Western Sydney)  
*Kafka's The Trial: In Search of the Metaphysical  
Crime Novel*

Henry Sussman (Yale University)  
*The Calculable, the Incalculable, and the Rest:  
Kafka's Virtual Environment*