KAFKA, Ben. *The demon of writing*: powers and failures of paperwork. New York: Zone Books, 2012. 182 p.*

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It is through remarkable yet quotidian episodes that Ben Kafka develops his book on the demon of writing. Referring to the reproduction of paperwork as such, Kafka goes back to the start of the French Revolution, where bureaucracy was applied as the tool for the representative government, the new kind of political system that the revolution introduced in the end of the XVIII century in Europe. Kafka, hence, leans on those episodes and through the historical characters, he illustrates the topics to address about the essential role paperwork took in society and why, after all, it would still be to blame for the problems of the State.

Edme-Etienne Morizot is the first important character in the book, and he is the one that represents the revolution of paperwork that the episode of 1789 brought to France. As he was fired from his job in the Ministry of Finance, a year before the revolution, the real reasons for his dismissal were yet legitimate for the time: he was replaced by the son-in-law of the king's aunt's chambermaid. Unsatisfied with his circumstances, the following years for Morizot were marked by his claims to get his job back, or at least a financial compensation, but the French Revolution had transformed the whole official sphere: Morizot, trying to find someone to help him, could only find paperwork and processes in a depersonalized system that "gave a damn to his problem", as Kafka points out.

The representativeness the revolution sought to settle in France came with bureaucracy, and accountability was the key word. Making a contrast to

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the elitist system of the Old Regime, since 1789 everything would have to be documented and accounted. Thus, accountability became an individual right and everyone could, then, have access to the government's affairs. As the paperwork would be a public domain and would represent every individual of society, the personalization the previous king had didn't exist anymore; it was all a depersonalized bureaucracy: "All memoirs will be seen and examined. […] Letters of recommendations will be perfectly useless; they might even be dangerous, in that they can foster the belief that one is soliciting as a favor or a grace what one does not have the right to obtain through justice" (p. 47).

Lejeune, Lindet, Carnot and Labussière, however, exemplify the effects of paperwork as the technology for representativeness, especially during the Terror of the revolution. All of these characters had to deal with the excess of paperwork, and writing became a demon, in a vicious sense, as the episodes show us. First, Lejeune, the Chief of the General Police Bureau, used writing as a strategy for delaying prosecutions during the Terror: he was known for the amount of details his officers added to documents, so it would take more time for people to be executed in judgments, maybe enough time for the Terror to end. Lindet and Carnot, on the other hand, were the ones to give signatures in documents to authorize executions during the Terror. After this period, they would be judged for the excesses, but their justification in court would even make them future ministers: there were so many documents to sign, they could not even have time to see the paperwork, before signing it. And, for last, Labussière, who became a national hero in France, was responsible for the disappearance and destruction of paperwork, so people would not be executed due to the excesses of Robespierre's terror.

The 'demon of writing' expression lays on these episodes as they show how paperwork reproduced so quickly in offices to a point where they became a problem in managing the duties. If, on one hand, the documents had power enough to define people's destiny, as one paper could be responsible for executing a person, on the other, the amount of paperwork emptied the content of documents. From representativeness, they became solely a process of signatures. This is the conflict between two principles of paperwork during the revolution, as Kafka theorizes: surveillance and acceleration. The revolution wanted to be everywhere in society, through paperwork, and officers wanted to know everything. However, bureaucracy also was meant to be the technology of the acceleration of the revolution, through uniform

processes. As it could be seen, though, surveillance and acceleration were incompatible in practice and paperwork, which was meant to be the solution, became a demon.

If the old regime had hereditary power and was politically stable, the new order was the opposite: unstable, with layoffs and abuses from officers who weren't even known by the society. Ymbert, the division chief in the Ministry of the Interior, recognized that the problem however was not bureaucracy itself, but the abuses. Yet, bureaucracy often was still credited as the blame of society's and State's issues by individuals. Balzac writes about it when he illustrates the competition between fictional characters for leading an office in the government: Rabourdin, a reformer, notable, great man, with aims of reducing personnel, and Baudoyer, a common bureaucrat. Rabourdin was much more qualified and superior than Baudoyer for the job, but his plans of layoffs for efficiency, obviously documented in paperwork, when found by the clerks, made them help Baudoyer to get the spot; otherwise, most of them would be fired. Losing the competition for the job, Rabourdin decides to invest his time in commerce to, as Balzac suggests, earn money.

Balzac shows how bureaucracy and paperwork are inefficient in their essence, once there are too many people involved, who keep the processes as they are, to maintain their job as it is. Rabourdin, the wise and great men, would be smart enough to be out of it, in Balzac eyes. However, Balzac is not alone: Tocqueville, for instance, when traveled to the United States, could see the lack of paperwork the Americans dealt with, and then realized that the French had, more than just paperwork, yet a paperwork culture. Even before the revolution, Paris was a very centralizer city, in fact, the best in Europe in such capacity. Bureaucracy, then, represents this want of organization, the want of achieving something unachievable: people just need paperwork to blame their political frustrations on it.

This conception that Kafka calls as the State of Want leads to the last chapter of the book, which is more focused in the psychoanalysis of paperwork. First, Von Zuccalmaglio's episode inspires Marx's theoretical praxis of paperwork and, then, Freud's slips lead to Timparano's banalization. Von Zuccalmaglio finds himself in an impasse situation, as an inspector: Masel winemakers claimed for tax reduction, and the inspector, after analyzing the situation, sees no solution for their problem – nothing could be done, rules are rules. Both seemed irreducible: the former, selfish, and the latter, corrupt.

They needed a third element, which Marx would argue was the free press – paperwork, but not official. His argument leaned on the fact that what the Mosel winemakers actually wanted was recognition, resources, and only the free press could give it to them, once official paperwork was not meant to regard their feelings, but just relevant and practical information.

And, even to Freudian psychoanalysis, paperwork can be found – especially as Timparano evaluates our cognitive and mechanic failures. Freud had episodes where his unconscious tricked him, making him commit language and physical slips – such as withdrawing an incorrect amount of money in a bank or mistaking an artist name. Freud's explanations for the episodes sought deep in his unconscious, leading to repression and personal issues that would manifest into those slips. Timparano's interpretation of the case was quite different and had a much more simple explanation: those slips are a product of the banalization of codes people get from documents, paperwork, representations. Freud's slips weren't anything more than cognitive and mechanic issues that resulted from bureaucracy.

Kafka's Demon of Writing is indeed a very complex and comprehensive analysis of paperwork, which finds the rise of paperwork as the technology of a representative government but also identifies its different consequences over society, be it as problem, as a medium, as a state of want or also as a bodily practice of jouissance, as Barthes would affirm. Hence, paperwork is a demon, but is a needed one. Perhaps there wouldn't be that many problems if paperwork didn't have such central role in society, but certainly, society wouldn't be the same without it.