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Bureaucratic Fiction:

Aesthetic Regimes of Administration in World Literature and Film

Abstract

What can literature tell us about bureaucracy that philosophy or political science cannot? This presentation introduces the concept of *bureaucratic fiction*—a narrative mode that explores the aesthetics, ethics, and affective dimensions of administrative life. From Kafka to contemporary television series like *Severance*, fictional works have long portrayed bureaucracies not merely as backdrops but as dynamic, often grotesque systems of power and meaning-making.

Bridging literary analysis with political theory, I trace the historical evolution and global diffusion of bureaucratic fiction across genres and media. These narratives uncover how institutions are constituted and contested through language, paperwork, and ritualized procedure. Drawing on thinkers like Castoriadis, Foucault, and Weber, I argue that such fictions dramatize the shared suspension of disbelief at the heart of both literature and political authority. Whether comic or dystopian, analog or digital, bureaucratic fiction offers vital insights into how administrative systems shape—and are shaped by—human experience.

As high-tech modernism replaces paper trails with algorithmic decision-making, bureaucratic fiction remains a crucial site for political reflection, where the absurd and the everyday converge. By turning our attention to clerks, forms, and filing systems, these works help us grapple with the paradoxes of governance, legibility, and control in the 21st century.

Keywords:

bureaucratic imagery, administrative aesthetics, institutional writing, political imagination, media and affects