

Becoming Mole(cular), Becoming Noise: Serres and Deleuze in Kafka's "Burrow"

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"We are digging the pit of Babel."¹

Kafka's last story "*Der Bau*" ("The Burrow")², which describes in great detail the "lifework" of a small mole-like creature who lives underground—endlessly digging, reinforcing, and reflecting upon the labyrinthine tunnels which constitute its "home"—was written as Kafka was dying (and knew he was dying) of lung disease. It might then be some sort of allegorical description of his own "grave":

According to Brod, it was written in Kafka's last year, 1923-24. [...] Spanning the last piece Kafka ever wrote. [...] It needed the imminence of his death to conceive of the Burrow as the most appropriate cipher for his work. On July 5, 1924, he wrote to Brod [...]: "What I have [only] pretended, is really going to happen. [...] I am strong enough of a writer to have the desire to enjoy all this with all my senses in complete oblivion of myself—not alertness but self-oblivion is the precondition of writing." The tale of Kafka's work at the moment of his dying is "The Burrow." The image of the Tower of Babel has turned [...] into the image of the pit, the grave. Inasmuch as the animal's cave also represents Kafka's tomb, he seems to have intended the story as a way of enjoying his own funeral by participating in it as an eye-witness. (Politzer 321-2)

One of the most striking aspects of the story is the constant, all-too-human desire of the protagonist (other underground creatures are heard but not seen by him/her/it) not just to dig (and obsessively continue building, rebuilding, "fixing") his fine house but to stand back

¹ Kafka "in one of his Fragments"; see Politzer 321.

² "*Bau*" is "building," "construction," in the sense of both thing and process. A "burrow" is "a hole or tunnel dug in the ground by an animal"; the *Bau* of the story is an elaborate underground labyrinth of tunnels, suggesting a bureaucratic maze (*The Castle*, *The Trial*) but also the inner body.

another, more reflective level, enjoy the feeling of “possessing” it, of having a store hidden in the burrow’s inmost secret depths, enjoy the sense of security that this. Ironically the creature even goes up above ground sometimes, guarding the entrance burrow from a concealed position in order to be absolutely sure that no other creature breaches. By doing this he enjoys a more objectified or totalized sense of “possessing” his own home (work, self), though paradoxically such a “transcendent” vantage point is also dangerously life-threatening: he is now no longer protected by his home. The reverberating irony of this “situation”—he can only fully understand or appreciate the meaning of “home” when he is outside of it, being thus no longer “at home”—is somewhat qualified when we read the “work” of the tunnels as the writer’s own literary life’s work; the mole’s “standing outside” also be his attempt to gain an overview of the meaning of his life just as one might try to gain an encompassing “interpretation” of a literary lifework (or lifetime). For his stories were his whole life and his very identity.³

On the symbolic level then the story is richly suggestive, filled with deep, tragic ironies. To court death by standing outside our life (or the literary or literal meaning of our life) in order to “see” it is already a kind of riddle, a typically Kafkaesque parabolic discovery. To really appreciate our life we would have to be dead, would have to be present at its closure and attend its own funeral. We think too of that Door of the Law which is finally closed when the man who has waited in vain outside it all his life finally dies, the Hunger Artist who dies of starvation because he can “never find the food he likes to eat.” But the most poignant irony of the story is that its author knows he is about to die and therefore lose everything, lose whatever security or “meaning” he may have accumulated. Even if the creature’s detached and vantage-point “enjoyment” may mean (as Politzer suggests) that Kafka here fantasizes “enjoying his own funeral,” we sense that this is not likely to be the “deepest level” of the story; if it is the deepest meaning then it is all the more bitterly ironic (that is, darkly humorous, tragic-comic) because it is quite impossible. We are not very likely, after all, to think of the burrow as representing a sort of “Heaven,” given not just the prevailing theme of loss, absence, absurdity in the author’s *oeuvre*—the quest for God or Truth that always lies just beyond our reach, though perhaps there *might* have been a way to get there, the doorway to the Law *has* at least been left open for many years even if we were never allowed to enter and it closed the moment we died—but also because that underground tunnels seem more likely to represent the diseased body before death, the grave or tomb of the decaying body after death, than a transcendent paradise.⁴

³ Thus the mole’s compulsive tunnel-building is the author’s compulsive writing in his last years; the writing delayed or warded off death, or perhaps was an “exploding into death”: “The tremendous world I have in my head. But how free myself and free it without being torn to pieces. And a thousand times rather be torn to pieces than retain it in me or bury it” (qtd. from Kavanagh 1). Politzer (321) quotes Kafka from a journal entry of 1913: “I am nothing but literature and can and want to be nothing else.”

⁴ Dickinson’s *Death* brings the speaker (in a carriage together with Immortality) abruptly to “a House that seemed / A Swelling of the Ground,” even though she “first surmised the Horses Heads / Were toward Eternity—.” The poem’s first two lines—“Because I could not stop for Death / He kindly stopped for me”—bear comparison with “The Burrow”’s Life / Death game.

Bodily decay in either of the above senses (and Kafka may well be breaking down this distinction) but especially in the first—invasion of the living body by disease—is in fact a possible “reading” of the story inasmuch as the protagonist begins to hear the sounds of these creatures from somewhere within or behind the walls of the underground tunnels. The mole is mainly “small fry” which might, like *vira*, cancerous cells and other parasites that attack and consume *from within* the living body, be seeking the food he has stored in his “Castle” and/or seeking him, his inner body:

[...] it was an almost inaudible whistling noise that wakened me. I recognized it immediately; the small fry, which I had allowed far too much latitude, had burrowed a new channel somewhere during my absence [...] (343) . . . “Now it is a noise produced by the burrowing of some species of small fry who have infamously exploited my absence [...] (345) [...] But simply by virtue of being owner of this great vulnerable edifice I am obviously defenseless against any serious attack. The joy of possessing it has spoiled me, the vulnerability of the burrow has made me vulnerable; any wound hurts me as if I myself were hit. (355)⁵

Here the problem will be, taking burrow as diseased body, not so much that we must be outside our own house (body, life) or be “absent” from it in order to experience being “in” it, rather that even when we are “at home” we are still absent. For as the body is increasingly pervaded by a silent disease its “owner” inevitably remains unaware, cannot “hear” the disease in this sense (mentally or consciously) “absent.” Is the body’s owner or master then a Cartesian consciousness or soul which must in any case (even when “at home”) be separate from the body itself?⁶ The “. . . as if I myself were hit” makes the burrow-body connection clear yet through the irony of a certain self-distancing.⁷ But while the mole-narrator realizes his vulnerability to attack, indeed is already being ravaged by disease, Kafka does not dwell like Poe on the macabre details of disease and dying. Instead, he foregrounds the “scientific” problem of listening to and interpreting the noises in order to understand

⁵ This and all subsequent direct quotations from Kafka are from *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*.

⁶ Descartes speaks of the mind as pilot of the ship’s body. In addition to the “literal” reading of this “absence”—the narrator-mole went up above-ground to “watch over” his burrow and enjoy the sense of possessing it—and the reading I am now suggesting, there is also a third reading which is indeed closely tied to, perhaps an extension of, the second: the spirit is “absent” from the body after death, though in this case it has “returned from the grave.” This gives us the sense of death as otherness in another way, as pure detachment from oneself, just as (correlatively) the “small fry” are also detached from their own destruction of the burrow/body: “they have no intention of doing me harm, they are simply busied with their own work [...]” (345).

⁷ As Kavanagh (1) puts it, this shows how the individual is “directly responsible for his own powerlessness” precisely through his “possession” (of a burrow/body).

author's narrator (and mouthpiece) asks: What or who is the enemy? Are there one or many enemies? For the multiplicity of tiny noises (creatures) mysteriously converges into the one and encompassing sound of *one large creature*, or at least the narrator can no longer distinguish between the two kinds of sounds:

Nor is it growing louder [...]. But it is this very uniformity of the noise everywhere that disturbs me most [...]. Now I could not have foreseen such an opponent [...]. (343) [...] Then it occurs to me that they may be quite tiny creatures, far tinier than any I am acquainted with, and that it is only the noise they make that is greater. [...] I shall dig a wide and carefully constructed trench in the direction of the noise and not cease digging until, independent of all theories, I find the real cause of the noise. Then I shall eradicate it, if that is within my power [...]. (348)

Here it is as if that which creates the “oneness” of the “many creatures” is just the force of the noise they make: “it is only the noise they make that is greater.” Thus the distinction between “one” and “many” enemies is dissolved⁸: the multiplicity of noises/creatures becomes simultaneously one large noise/creature, the abstract personification or hypostatization of “many” as (a necessarily singular) “other.” For we do tend to hear noise as a sort of amorphous yet still homogeneous “background,” one whose “indefinite thingness” now becomes the monstrous “otherness.” Perhaps the concept of a pervasive “noise” already suggests, not an amorphous or chaotic homogeneity but a sense of virtual duality (doubleness) with no concrete essence. For the creation of noise requires at least two “elements,” air pushed by something (human lungs, wind) and the space or passageway through which it passes, and Kafka's creature dug by the small fry “must have chanced to intersect an older one, the air was caught there and that produced the whistling noise” (343). At this minimal level we do not need the intervention of strings (as of an instrument) or human vocal cords: this “wind pipe” is a dualism of space (wind) with no subject, no one playing (blowing into) the pipe(s); it already suggests the otherness of the purely “virtual,” and so reinforces the eerie sense of absent “subject,” “object,” of mere noise in place of subjectivity and objectivity.

At the story's end the narrator-mole is listening to the sound of another mole, a creature (354) who is somewhere behind/beyond the narrator's burrow-wall digging its own burrow and its own tunnel steadily toward him; this concretized or personified other seems to be the narrator's double, counterpart, virtual equal, no longer the “small fry.” The narrator hears the approaching sound not, as he first thinks, of its digging (“burrowing” with the snout) but of its breath

⁸ As also by Deleuze in the sense that for him there are really only multiplicities; see the opening chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* (hereafter *ATP*), “One or Several Wolves?” and the later discussion of “becoming-animal.” The burrow's many tiny creatures (“small fry”) are probably insects and worms, which are primarily what moles eat; Kafka arguably also breaks down the distinction here between “X eats Y” and “Y eat(s) X.”

“indrawn breath” (354). But the narrator worries that his counterpart will also hear *him*, and be able to locate and attack him, just as he perhaps (or so his “other” might think, so that if we can no longer distinguish the two) wants to be able through hearing it to locate and (potentially) attack it. “So long as I knew nothing about it, it simply cannot have heard me, for at that time I kept very quiet [...]; afterwards [...], perhaps it could have heard me, though the noise of digging makes very little noise; but if it had heard me I must have noticed some sign of it, the beast must at least have stopped its work every now and then to listen. But all remained unchanged” (359).

Let us consider the possible nature of these two moles (beasts) in terms of the interaction model I am trying to elucidate here, namely, that “the burrow” is a (human, even the animal) diseased body, so that the various creatures within it are micro-organisms of one sort or another. Then we might think of the “other” mole as a negative, anti-life force (e.g. parasitic bacteria, bacterium, protozoan) and the narrator-mole as a pro-life force (e.g. defensive “anti-body” antibodies). If we could take the latter as life itself we might have life against death, the interplay of life-and-death. On the simplest level of interpretation it makes sense that “life” (a living “body” perhaps) is always be listening to the approach of “death” (the inexorable progress of a fatal illness), whose arrival it could never actually “hear” so that the wait would indeed be (as in *Interminable*: “all remained unchanged.”)⁹ It also makes sense that only “life” will be (for the most part) quietly listening while “death” just keeps blindly (or deafly) “coming,” not aware of the life it is destroying: “but if it had heard me I must have noticed some sign of it, the beast must at least have stopped its work every now and then to listen. But all remained unchanged” (359). We have a kind of impasse or paradoxical situation here: when life doesn’t “know” about the approach of death it remains silent (for thinking/knowing is already a kind of “noise”) and death cannot hear it, cannot clearly locate/attack it (“So long as I knew nothing about it, it simply cannot have heard me, for at that time I kept very quiet”); thus it is only when life knows death is coming that death has a chance to hear it (its noisy thinking): “afterwards . . . perhaps it could have heard me” What kind of relationship is this between A and B, life and death?¹⁰

Here it may help if we look at this whole A-B interaction on another “level.” Kafka has always emphasized the composite oneness of the many noises/small fry as a single (bestial) noise, just as he has given each of these two “antagonists” in effect its own burrow or body. It seems easier to see each mole as itself a single, composite noise-force, which could perhaps still be taken as life-force against death-force. We should also note here, recalling now the nature of the burrow as (subjectless, objectless) “wind-pipe,” that in fact the mere noise of a “wind-pipe” or “indrawn breath” would be the noise of the burrow-pipe if we took the burrow as larger body.

⁹ The story is, Brod tells us, unfinished; thus the “suspended state” (life? death? life-death?) in which the ultimate sentence leaves us is also a textual open-ending. This unending story or text (one thinks again of Dickinson) is part of the author’s larger, more composite literary “burrow,” or literary “noise.”

¹⁰ It may seem too “mundane” to see this in the light of psycho-somatic considerations: e.g. the carefree person (who has no idea he/she is sick) will be better able to “combat” the disease, etc.

breath as wind—which might blow either way, either “pushed” or “pulled.” But then we have two totally autonomous and in effect unrelated moles (beasts), each a kind of microcosm of the burrow itself: this raises the question of how then we could have A against B, “life” against “death” if the two forces are essentially “unrelated.” And Kafka does emphasize in effect the “indeterminacy” of each for/to the other—the disjunction of the two which is perhaps the other side of their “virtual doubleness.” And yet death keeps “blindly” coming. But what is “noise”? We think of life here as a living body (noisy force of body), but the only way we could see it as a “dead body” or indeed as any sort of “body” would be to see it as virtually equivalent to a living body which is now (gradually) becoming-dead? This reading might help to clarify not only the intuitively obvious point that the narrator (life, subjectivity) continues to silently listen to the approach of his unhearing/unknowing other-as-death, but also the point that death cannot hear/know (the location of) life once life knows/thinks about death: for now the noise of life’s thinking/knowing (about death) “spreads over into” the noise of death’s thinking/knowing (about life) although death then (as indeed at the story’s end) can never stop (like life at first) and “cannot listen.” That is, we would now have the larger field of noise as a composite, among other things, of a homogeneous, encompassing field of becoming-dead, or becoming-death.

Here then I would like to further develop this reading of the noise-passages in the last part of “The Burrow,” including the final passage with its interplay or war-game between the narrator and his Other.¹¹ Taking as guiding idea the notion that “disease” is “noise,” I want to read these passages¹² in the light of both Serres’ analysis of two-way communication and its interruption by the noise of the “parasite”—which becomes in the limit case the reordering of a blank-chaotic redundancy—and Deleuze’s analysis of the deterritorializing (noise) sound of “becoming-animal” (and/or “becoming-molecular”), his “disjunctive function” (breathing, eating, speaking, thinking) of the mouth. Finally I will briefly turn to “The Burrow” as companion-story, “The Great Wall of China,” with its reflection on building Walls and Towers of Babel¹³, its parable of the Imperial Messenger whose message to the reader is in effect suspended (delayed). A central point of both the Serresian and Deleuzian readings will be that they give us noise not just as a sort of amorphous whole consisting of an incomprehensible multiplicity of parts (particles, moles, molecules¹⁴) but as a deterritorializing and transforming

¹¹ Politzer sees “The Burrow” as an inverted (as Pit) expression of Kafka’s recurring theme of the Tower of Babel which, like his Castle, “represents [...] man’s never-to-be-fulfilled desire to take part in a dialogue with the ‘Other,’ whoever or whatever this ‘Other’ may be” (321). This is of course a very “standard” interpretation of the author, and I am in effect just taking this Other in one particular way.

¹² And here, particularly in the light of Deleuze’s notion of the “refrain” in *ATP*, one might even take “passages” in its musical sense.

¹³ See note 11.

¹⁴ Though a Deleuzian would distinguish “molecular,” as “extremely finely divisible,” from “molar” or “divisible only into much larger units.” (“Molar” is associated with arboreal tree-logic; see the later discussion.) In chemistry a molecule is the “smallest particle of an element or compound that can exist in the free state and still retain the characteristics of the element or compound”; a mole is “the quantity of a chemical substance having a weight in grams numerically equal to its molecular weight: one mole of a substance contains 6.002257×10^{23} molecules.” This “mole” comes from L. *moles* or “mass,” whereas the animal “mole” is from (the probably related) M.E. *molle*, earth, mold.

force—and thus a Kafka for whom disease, death and the infinite delay of meaning could (neutral) forms of transformation or metamorphosis.

Serres: Parasitic Noise

“Disease” is a concept suggesting “interruption”¹⁵: the word literally means “not a and “ease,” from Old French *aise*, is a reduction from the Vulgar Latin *adjaces*, adjacent next to and thus easy to reach.” Serres, in a relatively early formulation of his so philosophy based on chaos theory (non-linear dynamics) in *The Parasite* (1982), under “parasite” (literally “beside the food,” Greek *sitos* is “grain”) as the “noise” that d interrupts communication between two adjacent or contiguous parties, A and B.¹⁶ Th striking point is that, for Serres (and generally in what is called information theor communication theory), the interruption of noise is necessary for the renewal or “reordering dyadic (A-B) communication once it has become too “efficient,” for at the limit-point (sat point) of maximum efficiency, A-B communication enters a state of terminal equilibrium information death, a state of excessive or blank-chaotic redundancy.

But how can we look at the story’s final passage, quoted above, in terms of Serres’ no a parasitic third term (“noise”) interrupting the communication between A and B, whe seem to be only A and B here, the protagonist-mole (narrator, speaker) and his/her/its Though there is no clear third party here, in a sense it seems these two have been “always interrupted,” since the narrator and his counterpart are (apparently) not at all *try* communicate; rather, each seems to be living in its own solipsistic “world.” We might th see A and B as each itself a manifestation of parasitic noise, each in effect (in Serresian that third party or “background” which potentially could disrupt the communication b other A-B dyads. Then we would be dealing here simply with the ongoing interact inter-mixing) between two patterns of “noise.”¹⁷ And while in the final passage “life”-mole) often stops his own digging (breathing, noise) to quietly listen to “death”-mole) while B just keeps on coming, we could (given the virtual equivalence of A also say B stops and listens to an oncoming A¹⁸: we now would have a cat-and-mouse gar

¹⁵ To “begin from first principles,” as Hannibal (the Cannibal) Lecter advises Agent Starling in *Silence of the Lambs*, quoting Sextus Empiricus. Hannibal’s key “first principle,” which sends Jodi Foster to Buffalo Bill’s hometown in Ohio and so leads to the film’s unforgettable climax, is that a psychopathic killer will *first* kill because he “covets” (desires, longs for with envy); the second principle is that we only truly begin to “covet” that which we see every day—in Bill’s case a girl’s skin. He wants to “get under her skin” and wear it himself, perhaps like the parasite that “camouflages” itself as its own host.

¹⁶ “Noise” is from the Latin *nausea*, from the Greek *nausia*—*naus* is ship—thus literally “seasickness”; “noise” suggests more generally, beyond the immediate range of “sound,” a kind of tumult or chaos.

¹⁷ A variant form of this view would be to see the “parasitical background” here as simply the “difference” and/or “rhythm of alternation” between A and B, silence/noise and noise/silence.

¹⁸ And in fact Kafka (through his “mouthpiece,” the narrator-mole) does also suggest that B might (at least sometimes) hear A. Or at least A worries about this (and it is just such perhaps premature or

something more like a proper war-game, that is, an actual war) in which each noise becomes silent in order to hear the other's noise, in a sort of alternating rhythm. This also nearly catches our normal sense of one "field" of background noise, which may be very noisy (may appear as silence) from the perspective of *another* field of background noise.

In this scenario then we have A and B as alternating states of noise and silence—A only hears B's (death's) "noise" when A is silent, and B only hears A's (life's) "noise" when B is silent. Each is then waiting (not to attempt actual communication with the other, but) merely for the other to continue making its noise, which signifies only that the other is there, is still alive, or stop making any noise, which may signify that the other is alive and listening or that it is dead. Thus A's silence from B's perspective might mean A is (stopped and) listening or that it is dead; B's silence from A's might mean B is listening or that it is "dead" in the sense that the other's life-force has now been arrested or destroyed. "Silence" with its two possible meanings—its "positive" silence of stationary listening—which must be relatively "peaceful" or the other's "negative" silence of death—may be heard as noise the listener's thinking/worrying—and the "positive" silence of death. The other's noise, on the other hand, are all variations on moving/working/thinking/speaking, a sort of life-force—though of course (depending on whether one is making or listening to the noise) one might think of this noise as itself something either positive or negative, just as one might think of silence positively or negatively depending on one's own perspective. And "The Burrow" narrator (it's "burrower") generally craves silence¹⁹—is this only so that he can ("think"?—just as he always fears the terrible interruption of an invisible noise coming from within or behind the walls. In a striking passage toward the end of the story this silence seems to represent the (his) life-force:

Sometimes I fancy that the noise has stopped, for it makes long pauses; sometimes a faint whistling escapes one, one's own blood is pounding all too loudly in one's ears, then two pauses come one after another, and for a while one thinks that the whistling has stopped forever. I listen no longer, I jump up, all life is transfigured; it is as if the fountains from which flows the silence of the burrow were unsealed. I refrain from verifying my discovery at once, I want to find someone to whom in all good faith I can confide it, so I rush to the Castle Keep, I remember, for I and everything in it are awakened to new life, that I have eaten nothing for a long time, I snatch something and hurriedly begin to swallow it [...]; I listen, but the most perfunctory listening reveals at once that I was shamefully deceived: away there in the distance the whistling remains unshaken. And I spit out my food [...]. (350-351)

precognitive worrying that may generate or embody the noise heard by B): "afterwards [...] perhaps it could have heard me [...]."

¹⁹ Apparently not thinking of it as the silence of his own (imminent) death but as the silence of death's death, the stopping of death's noisy "work."

That a long enough “pause in the noise” (interruption of the noise by silence) means an unexpected new hope for life (continued life, the triumph of life over death) seems clear from the narrator’s ecstasy here (“all life is transfigured”) but also from the fact that, “awakened to new life,” he remembers he has “eaten nothing for a long time.” The “sometimes such a faint whistling escapes one, one’s own blood is pounding all too loudly in one’s ears” suggests that the first he knows is dying (as he hears the whistling noise from his own lungs, the blood pounding in his own ears as if he were perhaps in a feverish state); thus the ecstasy of “hearing” the noise is the regaining hope. But couldn’t the silence also mean the comfort and peace of a death that ends his suffering, his own terrible “whistling”? Kafka plays ironically with the notion of silence as itself a “signal”: we would only think of a single long pause (continued silence) as “two long pauses, one after another” if we had been expecting the first one to quickly be interrupted by noise (as almost as if the narrator’s expectation of interruption, the “noise” of this expectation, becomes the interruption.) This reinforces our sense of uncertainty as to which “sense” to give the noise. And we also note the proximity here of the food to the silence/noise or to life/death: in the act of eating again, once he thinks he will live, the narrator becomes himself a “parasite” (*parasit*, “beside-the-food”); perhaps if the death-noise stops eating him then he will (as part of the life-death background) begin consuming the life-nourishing food (since it is death that eats).

The possibility that the buzzing or whistling sound of the (his) Other is also his *own* buzzing or whistling as he nears death or comes into “proximity” with death—that he *is* the Other, the Beast—is perhaps more subtle, thus also more terrifying, in another passage:

The nature of the noise, the piping or whistling, gives me much food for thought. The sound of the scratch and scrape in the soil in my own fashion the sound is quite different. I can hear the whistling only in this way: that the beast’s chief means of burrowing is not its snout, which it probably employs only as a secondary resource, but its snout or its nose, which [...] must also be fairly sharp at the point. It probably bores its snout into the earth with one mighty push and tears out a great lump; while it is doing that I hear nothing; that is the pause; but then it draws in the air for a new push. This indrawing of its snout, which must be an earthshaking noise [...] I hear then as a faint whistling. But the incomprehensible remains the beast’s capacity to work without stopping; [...] without thinking of its object [...]. (354)

Here we get the picture of the beast (and/or narrator himself, its double) digging its snout into the earth, that is, “burrowing into” the earth with its snout which simultaneously suggests nose and mouth, breathing and eating. That is, though the creature does not literally eat the dirt (as if people were “food for thought”) the function of eating is nonetheless present, combined with breathing in the mode of disjunction or alternation: “It [...] bores its snout into the earth and tears out a great lump; while it is doing that I hear nothing; that is the pause; but then it d

the air for a new push [...] which [...] I hear then as a faint whistling.” The breathing of the beast draws back and momentarily (rhythmically) rests from “eating dirt”; yet (ironically perhaps, and not only because the author is dying of lung disease) the narrator only hears the breathing, not the (silent) parasitic noise of eating. “Ingestion” is silent destruction of the body; “inhaling” is non-destructive, it is the mere life-force expressing itself, yet it is this that makes the whistling noise and so interrupts the narrator’s own (noisy, food-consuming) thinking.

Thus the scenario: A and B (self/other, life/death) are two noises, or alternating patterns of noise/silence, which can rhythmically interrupt each other—as two parts or halves perhaps of a larger field of noise-silence, life-death. Each can silently listen to the noise of the other, “digging” (working/eating/breathing), but when itself working/digging/thinking it cannot listen. But does this mean that each can only be interrupted by the noise of the other when it is already silent, already “listening”? (Once it is listening, has it not already been interrupted and apprised of the other’s existence?) We normally think we are interrupted when silent because we are when thinking with great concentration, or thinking “rationally”—for then the order of thought is interrupted and dispersed by the chaotic disorder of noise. But if such thinking is already (as we have assumed) a form of noise, how can it be interrupted by another noise? Could it even “hear” the other noise in the first place?) Perhaps the narrator’s frequent, persistent worrying is a more chaotic, noisy level of thinking, while his more “rational” thinking—always like a soldier, scientist or philosopher (or author) he tries to analyze his existential situation *vis-à-vis* the other(s) within or just beyond his burrow—is relatively more “silent,” and thus more susceptible of being interrupted.

I would now like to suggest an interpretation of the burrow-scene in which we think of the narrator’s (and author’s) rational reflection—often focused on analyzing the other’s noise—thus attempting to “locate” the other (“locate death”)—as a relatively “silent” A-A dialogue or self-communication which might then be interrupted by Serres’ parasitical noise as third party. (In this case B could now play the role of the “parasite.”) Serresian theory now gives us a way of picturing the process through which the interplay of two noises or noise-fields (A and B) becomes a single, larger (composite) noise-field (noise-force). For Serres, the ideal case of A-B or “maximally efficient” A-B communication tends (at the limit of non-interference or non-interruption) to become A-A communication, that is, a monologue which is “silent” in Serres’ terms the “blank chaos” of its hyper-rationality. Blank chaos is the nonsense (though in another sense) of redundancy, for hyper-rationality becomes redundant: the prime case of logical tautology “A=A” which, while suggesting “maximum efficiency of (A-A) communication”

²⁰ Or can it? (See note 18.) The beast of the final passage “could have heard” the narrator even though it apparently keeps coming toward him; it is not the beast’s actual digging which makes the noise but its alternate action of breathing, implying that the beast might have heard the narrator’s own breathing even as the latter silently listened. (Of course the beast’s breathing is the only noise the narrator hears; the noise the beast itself “makes” might be that of its digging/thinking.) For the sake of simplicity I will assume one can only listen while silent.

tion,” also tells us nothing we did not already know and is thus nonsensical.²¹ At the “pure” A-B (= A-A) communication, then, there is *no* communication (no exchange of information). This is because the communication of information depends upon a certain amount of (“dark-chaotic”) noise to interrupt, in effect to create gaps or spaces between “bits”—otherwise there *are* no bits, as in “Pleaseclosethedoor,” which could be an ambient signal. At this extreme limit we are in a state of self-repetition or hyper-redundancy (A=A=A=A=A), blank (white) noise, blank chaos, the entropic homogeneity or terminal equilibrium of “information death.” It is perhaps, then, when the narrator-mole’s “self-reflection” reaches this limit-state of a silent blank chaos that it is interrupted by the dark-chaotic other; furthermore, this very interruption (“life”’s interruption by “death”) restores to him (to his silent/noisy “thinking”) order and meaning (sense).

This noisy interruption must also be a minimal one, for too much noise would destroy the signal (in this case the A-A signal), return us directly to static, to the dark-chaotic background. “this noise I hear then as a *faint* whistling” (354, my emphasis). Yet a minimal (“faint”) amount of noise is indeed necessary to create gaps between the bits of a now too “tightly-packed” (redundant, self-repeating) flow of information, in order that order and meaning may be (temporarily) restored—or in order that (information) “death” may experience its noisy “return” into meaning through a very slight (faint) disruption by the dark-chaotic background (“underground”). Although thus far, then, we have been taking the death-noise (noise of parasitic “eating” of the body) in a mainly *negative* sense, one of Serres’ main points in *Parasite*, *Hermes* and later works like *Genesis* is that such noisy disruption by the parasitic “third party” (C) of a too-“clear” communication within a closed system (an A-B dyad that becomes an A-A dyad) is necessary and good because *transformative* and *regenerative*. The extreme (terminal equilibrium) state of this information-death would theoretically persist to eternity if it were not “interrupted” by parasitical noise and thus transformed to a (presumably higher) level of meaning.²² But, we remember, “The Burrow” ends (or rather

²¹ To test the nonsensicality of logical tautology, try asking people: “Did you know this pen is a pen?” Serres’ treatment of this issue can be indirectly tied to Derrida’s critique of (phal)logocentric thought, which assumes the priority of (silent) speech—in which, as with “A=A,” the truth is “immediately self-present”—to (a noisier?) self-deferred or self-different “writing.” By extension we also have Derrida’s “violence of metaphysics,” grounded in the “violence of difference” of such first laws (of the Father, of God, of Logos) as “A=A,” and Serres’ attribution in *Hermes* and *The Parasite* (see the following discussion) of redundant hyper-order to totalitarian and high-technology-based political systems.

²² For “communicational ‘harmony,’ understood as the consensus achieved between interlocutors who understand each other perfectly, is only ‘an ante-chamber to death.’ Cultural vitality depends on ‘parasitic dissonance’ (*The Parasite* 126). As order emerges from chaos, so sense requires nonsense. Meaning emerges not as predictable derivative but as stochastic departure from tradition (*invention*)” (White 268). White further expounds: “From a martial perspective successful communication between two individuals depends on the exclusion of a third person [...] who threatens constantly to disrupt the transmission of messages (*Hermes* 67). The optimum performance of any system depends upon communicative transparency, noise must be eliminated [... But] the exclusion of noise amounts to an exclusion of genuine information. Information, understood in Gregory Bateson’s phrase as the “differ-

open-ended, it does not end) with the protagonist and antagonist “suspended” in what might be a sort of “terminal equilibrium” state—whether we read this ending as life listening to death’s interminable and continuous (though only faintly heard, virtually inaudible) approach of itself (death), or as the cat-and-mouse game, self and other by turns noisy and silent, listened to and listening. In this case the interplay between the two forces of pure noise seems to have reached a deadlock, such that neither can fully regenerate the other.

Therefore, potentially at least, we can also read this “parasitic dissonance,” this “war”²³ between the narrator-mole and his Other in “The Burrow” in a more positive light. As we see each as a powerful noise which can disrupt, transform, renew any too-rigid, too-rational, too-hegemonic and totalized form or structure, death’s incursions upon life (life hidden there and silently listening to us breathe), like life’s upon death (life listening for death to show itself so that it can beat it back), may—if only one of the two could, for the moment, overcome the other—be after all something necessary and good. More specifically, the possibility of death as other to “disrupt” and “return to chaos” the too-rational thinking of the protagonist-narrator-author might be salutary.²⁴ In the case of an individual’s death—something Kafka was understandably concerned about—this could imply the possibility of some form of transcendence but of transformation. Paulson claims in *The Noise of Culture* that works of art, and more precisely literary texts can serve as noisy parasites, opening society’s too-rigid, too-rigidified cultural forms, its militaristic-fascistic political structures into new forms and possibilities.²⁵ This move *via* non-linear dynamics back to the issue of literary culture also reminds us of Politzer’s interpretation of “The Burrow” as a story about the author’s “lifework” which he has stored away as a kind of buried treasure, one almost equivalent to his own life, now about to end. If literary creativity renews (as with Kafka) one’s culture long after one’s individual death, then the author’s burrow as literary archive is not merely a monument to hopelessness; it already embodies, in its amorphous, fragmentary and paranoid totality, in its silence, a powerful force for cultural transformation.

Yet even if we view the life-death interplay at the end of “*Der Bau*” as a renewal of

makes a difference,” is excluded in favor of information-free, wholly redundant messages. The system endlessly reiterates, ratifies itself. But such a system, however self-coherent or optimally efficient, is nevertheless doomed to entropic degradation. In a closed system, it can only run down. The achievement of redundancy—when everything that needs to be said has already been said—is analogous to entropic homogeneity when matter-energy settles into terminal equilibrium. In cultural system, then, just as in physical systems, noise or chaos amounts to a force for renewal. Serres thus imagines a “parasite”—precisely, static in a communication channel—who intervenes to interrupt normal communications [... and] provoke the production of novelty” (267-268). The “opening” of a (logical or narrative) system is then the opening of possible pathways of wider communication on a “higher level.”

²³ Of course, if only in English, a “mole” is also a deeply-buried “double-agent” or “spy.”

²⁴ But what quality of Death does the Life-noise disrupt? Death’s self-identity as terminal equilibrium?

²⁵ Serres in *The Parasite* already makes the explicit connection between this super-efficient form of communication (read “late capitalism,” “Microsoft, Inc.”)—which becomes frozen in hyper-redundancy or information-death—and totalitarian, fascistic, militaristic political structures.

chaos (noise) by dark chaos (noise), or of life by death, we are still after all picturing an in-between between two noises or noise-fields which could as well be viewed as a larger encompassing “block of noise,” a whole within which one constituent noise transforms into other—or rather a whole (made up of molecular multiplicities) which simply transforms into Y, “becomes-other.” This latter model is essentially what is implied by Serres’ scene of “renewal” or “reordering”; it might be further elucidated by turning to the (in certain respects congruent) “transcendental-empirical” metaphysics of Deleuze and Guattari.

Deleuze: Deterritorialized Sound

Beginning with *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Deleuze and Guattari²⁶ are looking at the world in terms of interconnected desiring-machines. These machines are in fact systems or “assemblages” of self-generating flows and the self-blockages of flows, and in general terms such a picture is clearly relevant to the mole’s labyrinthine underground burrow in Kafka’s story and more specifically to the patterns of A-B communication or “discourse” that burrow—patterns of flow and blockage, where arguably in the story it is the blockage of flow perhaps to schizophrenic solipsism or, in Serresian terms, the “terminal equilibrium” (with its hyper-repetition and redundancy) which predominate. If Serresians like Paulson and White see cultural (and specifically literary) “noise” as a creative force for renewing a culture whose systems of communication are too rational-efficient, Deleuze sees “writing” (“literature”) as a kind of vast assemblage or machine connected to and also operating within other (socio-cultural) machines; he sees all of Kafka’s writing as a vast, rhizomic writing-machine or “burrow.”

How can we enter into Kafka’s work? This work is a rhizome, a burrow. The cave has multiple entrances [...]. The hotel in *Amerika* has innumerable main doors and side doors Yet it might seem that the burrow in the story of that name has only one entrance; the most the animal can do is dream of a second entrance that would serve as a trap for surveillance. But this is a trap arranged by the animal and by Kafka himself. The whole description of the burrow functions to trick the enemy.²⁷ We will enter, through any point whatsoever; none matters more than another [...]. We will be trying to discover what points our entrance connects to, [...] what the map of the rhizome connects. Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy. Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only a

²⁶ From now on I will cite only Deleuze even when, as with *Kafka* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, he co-authored a book with Guattari.

²⁷ This last phrase may have implications going beyond the immediate scope of Deleuze’s discussion in *Kafka*. Is the “enemy” here (also) the reader (with his too limited, too totalized, too “molar” attempts at *interpretation*) as well as the Beast? Is the real life-threatening Noise here our attempts at interpreting the story?

experimentation. (*Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* 3²⁸)

Deleuze's discussion of the writer in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*²⁹ is, like any analyses of anything, extremely complex and open-ended—that is, containing “many entrances each of which is perhaps the inclusive disjunctive equivalent (X or Y or both) of another.” The main argument of the book is that in a work of “minor literature” it is as if the internal “writing (a multiplicity, collectivity)³⁰ vibrates within a perhaps “virtual,” outer and conventional (elitist, canonical, “individualist”) literary “text”—in a certain way deterritorializing³¹ or subverting it (like a sort of parasite perhaps³²), even threatening to (make) “vibrate” that whole text or indeed “whole system of *langue*” (“He Stuttered”). This notion is close in the prime case of Kafka, to the view that his writings are already in effect parts of a “writing machine” which has already deterritorialized language and meaning. Kafka's famously fragmentary or “incomplete” three novels (*Amerika*, *The Castle*, *The Trial*) are paradoxically the most “complete” of his works, while the stories and letters, though ostensibly self-contained or complete in themselves, are in fact finally incomplete insofar as they consist of smaller fragments of the larger whole.³³ “Only in novels movement continues *uninterruptedly* . . . lines of flight are connected in specific circuits . . . The novel (especially *The Trial*) can never be terminated . . .” (K 78, my emphasis). Of course, essay-stories like the “Great Wall of China” and stories like “The Burrow” (where at the end “all remained unchanged”) may seem interruptible, but what Deleuze's “map” of the Kafkaesque writing-machine here predicts is that the circuitous lines of flight of a story will be interrupted, precisely the dynamic (the on-going “interruption” of A and B, of noise/silence) we have been exploring *via* Serres.

Another way to think of the writing machine is as a sort of body-without-organs or, as Deleuze calls it, a “rhizome.” *Rhiza* means (Greek) “root”; a rhizome is a “creeping stem lying, usually horizontally, at or under the surface of the soil and differing from a [normal] root in . . . bearing leafy aerial shoots near its tips, and producing roots from its under-surface.” The “Introduction” to *Thousand Plateaus*³⁴ defines a rhizome as a “horizontal” structure—a maze of contiguous

²⁸ See previous note. If such a text cannot be “interpreted” but only “experimented” (one reading of the last sentence), then perhaps this “experimentation” could only be the transformative process of a noise which renews (gives new meaning/order to) a blankly chaotic text. Is the life-mole the signifier here and the death-mole the (absent) Signified, or is it not the other way around, life as signified and death as (floating) Signifier?

²⁹ *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* will hereafter be abbreviated in the main text as *K*.

³⁰ As in traditional societies, folk communities, developing countries, oppressed and displaced (diasporic) peoples—e.g. the German-speaking Jews in pre-World War II, Czech-speaking Prague.

³¹ Extracting but also abstracting it from (out of) its initial, more concrete context or “territory”; that is, placing it within another (more abstract) context.

³² This metaphor, suggesting of course Serres, also raises the problem as to which (parasite or host) is finally merely “virtual” and which is “real”? Or are they not (as more obviously in the case of computer viruses) both “virtual,” one virtuality feeding upon another? Here we must remember that the narrator-mole listens to a purely “virtual” noise, composed only of air / space, no subject or object.

³³ As the narrator-mole says: “[...] they may be quite tiny creatures, [...] it is only the noise they make that is greater” (348).

³⁴ Hereafter abbreviated as *ATP*.

intertwined, overlapping³⁵, half-submerged roots or passageways—which contrasts with the “vertical” (arboreal) structure of a tree: the latter’s roots are clearly below ground, above is a trunk which then bifurcates into branches, suggesting traditional western “tree-logic” of forking branches (a strict A or B, not both) of dualistic or dialectical thinking. What then would mean that Deleuze considers Kafka’s “work” to be a rhizome (and thus a sort of indefinitely expanded “burrow”), a self-enfolded structure or house with “multiple entrances”?³⁶ For one thing it means that Kafka is always, like an animal, feeling trapped and so looking for a way out” or “line of flight.”³⁷ Writing his self-complete yet ultimately incomplete stories he occupies a very particular intermediary situation, since he himself exists between still being an animal and already being an assemblage” (*K* 37).

The becoming-animal effectively shows a way out, traces a line of escape, but is incapable of following it or making it its own [...]: not only do the animal stories show that the becomings-animal are themselves incapable of following, but already the way which enabled them to show the way out was something different that acted inside [...]. Because in the exact moment Kafka begins the novels (or tries to expand a story into a novel) he abandons the becomings-animal in order to substitute for them a more complex assemblage. The stories and their becomings-animal had already been inspired by this underground assemblage, but they weren’t able to make this assemblage function directly—they weren’t able to make it see the light of day. It was as though the becoming-animal started to become a *becoming-molecular*: [...] the confused animal of “The Burrow” faced with the thousands of sounds that came from all sides from underground smaller animals [...]. In any case, the animals [...] in the stories, are caught in an alternative: either they are beaten down, caught in an impasse, and the story ends there; or, on the contrary, they open up and multiply, digging new ways out all over the place leading to a new way to molecular multiplicities and machinic assemblages that are no longer animal and can only be given proper treatment in the novels. (*K* 36-38, Deleuze’s emphasis)

Perhaps we should first note here that “The Burrow” seems to contain (or is read in terms of) both alternatives: it ends in an impasse, an interminable suspension (“But all re

³⁵ A and B where the two become indistinguishable, so that we could as well say “A or B.”

³⁶ And thus, we assume, also a body-without-organs (BwO) and a machine, at least the sort of machine and BwO (in effect “non-human” body or body deterritorialized from the human point of view) that a “story” can be—that is, “complete in itself” but ultimately “incomplete,” part of a larger whole.

³⁷ The grounding text here is the ape-become-man’s statement in “A Report to an Academy”: “No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right or left, in any direction; I made no demand. [...] Only not to stay [in a small cage ...]. I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out [...]. I managed to reach the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, but it is something as it has helped me out of my cage and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity [...]. There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice” (253-258). See also note 3 above.

unchanged”) and yet they also, we might say, “give way to molecular multiplicities” and even (given the larger burrow with its “virtual noise” of wind/space lacking subject and object) to “machinic assemblages.” But Deleuze’s key point here is twofold: first, “becomings-animal and/or “the animal stories” (this may be another inclusive disjunction) “show a way out” (the animal protagonist/narrator/author), which the “becoming-animal” (and/or animal itself) is “incapable of following”; second, “that which enabled them [with its multiple reference] to find the way out was something different that acted inside them”: this something-different is a potential move, more fully actualized in the novels, from (the more whole) “becoming-animal” to “molecular multiplicities and machinic assemblages.” Perhaps “The Burrow” itself functions in an “intermediary situation” between these two stages, with the two readings of the ending: impasse (no way out for A and B) and the “mutual” (A and B) transformation into an encompassing “noise” which would break through the logical boundaries of any clearly defined “burrow” or “structure” (*Bau*). Our interpretation may depend on the way we read the “becoming-Other” (becoming-A or becoming-B by “eating” A or B): as “becoming-animal” or as a more molecular and inorganic “becoming-noise.” Perhaps we can say the story “embodies” this “something different that acted inside them” in the form of the multi-entranced burrow is itself a sort of large animal, a Beast; it may finally be *this* B (or A), in its rhizomic, porous non-totality, which the narrator-mole “listens” to; the sound of the (A/B) rhythm is merely the virtual noise of empty tunnels/blowing wind.

The point I wish to foreground here, then, by way of developing my Deleuzian reading as an extension of the Serresian one, is that this “becoming-mole(ular)”³⁹ is in Deleuze often associated with, or expressed by, deterritorialized (“asignifying”⁴⁰) sound, that is, noise. For in this place “each language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue and the ear” (*K* 19), described by Bogue (104) as “a detachment of certain oral activities from such functions as eating, drinking, howling, humming, and so on. Sounds, once detached from their animal function, are reterritorialized in sense (*sens*: sense, meaning) . . .” A passage near the end of “The Burrow” that we have already discussed *via* Serres, and which I hear quote again for the sake of convenience, gives us a partial picture of just such a deterritorialization:

³⁸ Deleuze’s notion of “exclusive disjunction” (e.g. a mouth is used for two seemingly unrelated functions, eating and speaking) combines “faraway and contiguous [...]. The essential text in this respect would be the short aphorism where Kafka says that the contiguous village is at the same time so faraway that it would take a lifetime to reach it. [... T]he offices [in *The Trial*] are very far from each other because of the length of the hallway that separates them [...], but they are contiguous because of the back doors that connect them along the same line [...]. [... T]he bureaucratic Other is always contiguous—contiguous and faraway” (*K* 77). One might compare to this “contiguous village” passage the final line in the madman’s Death of God speech (Nietzsche, *Gay Science* 182): “This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves.”

³⁹ “(Mole)cular” being a convenient way to formulate, perhaps, the disjunctive proximity of the animal-molecule “series.” See previous note.

⁴⁰ Or at least now “signifying” in a completely new context so that we would have no way of “understanding” it. See note 31.

I can explain the whistling only in this way: that the beast's chief means of burrow is not its claws, which it probably employs only as a secondary resource, but its snout and muzzle, which [...] must also be fairly sharp at the point. It probably bores its snout into the earth with one mighty push and tears out a great lump; while it is doing that it draws in its breath; nothing; that is the pause; but then it draws in the air for a new push. This indrawing of breath, which must be an earthshaking noise, [...] I hear then as a faint whistling.

Here the digging snout⁴¹—the “projecting nose and jaws, or muzzle, of an animal,” the nose and *adjacent* mouth—has a double function, digging and breathing, but it can't perform both functions at the same time; the creature can only breathe when it is not thrusting its snout forward into the earth in front of it. This is the kind of exclusive disjunction which for Deleuze helps define the “body without organs,” and which is in a sense the “opposite” of redundancy, while the mouth's capacity for breathing may be redundant (thus in effect “useless”) given that we already have a nose for breathing (and also smelling, which the mouth cannot really do). The mouth's disjunctive functions are eating, breathing and/or speaking; normally of course we use it for two (and *a fortiori* for all three) of these functions at the same time. In this passage there is a sort of metonymic slide from nose to adjacent mouth: we think of the snout as “eating” the dirt, especially as this fits in with the pervasive theme of (parasitic, noisy) *earth-eating* in the story, just as such eating is tied (as noise) to *thinking* (at least on my Serresian reading of *Kafka*, Deleuze also brings (the author's own) “writing” into play as part of this series:

The mouth, tongue and teeth find their primitive territoriality in food. In the transition from themselves over to the articulation of sounds, the mouth, tongue and teeth deterritorialize. Thus, there is a certain disjunction between eating and speaking, and even more, between all appearances, between eating and writing. Undoubtedly, one can write while eating more easily than one can speak while eating, but writing goes further in transferring words into things capable of competing with food. Disjunction between content and expression. To speak, and above all to write, is to fast. Kafka manifests a permanent obsession with food, and with [...] the mouth and with teeth [...]. *K* 19-20

The beast of the “Burrow” cannot both push its snout forward to dig (“eat”) and pull it back to breathe (“indrawal of breath”) at the same time: perhaps on a Deleuzian reading we could think of breathing as more contiguous or adjacent (as in an inclusive disjunction) to speaking (if we think of the indrawal of breath that makes the beast's “whistling” noise) and by extension to writing. Kafka has after all written a story that literally “whistles” through its multiple holes and passages. And yet here (on the Serresian reading) it is the Other's noise (whistling) that not only c

⁴¹ German *die Schnauze*, like the English “snout” related to Indo-European *sneu*, “to drip fluid,” “wetness” and to Latin *natare*, “swim” and *nutrire*, “to nurse.” Thus this “snout” already suggests both “flow” and “nurturing,” “feeding”—perhaps the very life-force itself.

but threatens to “devour” the private thinking-noise of the protagonist, forcing him to breathe and listen (where silence is perhaps a “fasting of speech”).

Already in the earlier *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze gives us an anthropological analysis of the human mouth’s evolution, from the most primitive functions of eating and (reduced) breathing—shared with many lower animal forms—to the more highly evolved and specific function of speaking⁴², which Deleuze then ties “by further extension” to the more specific human function of (rational) *thinking*.⁴³ The interpretive framework in which this “disjunctive series of the mouth” is presented is that of a biogenetic-evolutionary theory of language. Here are given four “stages of development” of the body, tied by Deleuze in various ways to schizophrenia and other abnormal psychological states and also to the emergence of sound and speech out of noise.⁴⁴ Reduced to the simplest terms, Deleuze claims here that the “inner noise of the body” (where, as in “The Burrow,” this inner noise could be both animal and proto-human) as the first level of a still primordial and chaotic “pre-language,” is projected further “outward” (but still within the body) to become (human) “voice”; voice is projected further outward to become “speech” (and thus more properly “language”), which is then projected outward to become the “metaphysical surface” of the body as the disjunctive “infinitive Verb” (e.g. “to go,” which is the linguistic force of a horizontal “opening out” in all directions.) Corresponding to these biogenetic stages then are the evolutionary stages of the mouth: at the “earliest” stage (which is closely allied to the anus at the other end of the alimentary tract) the mouth is for eating and breathing (both of which are “noisy”); with both voice and speech we correlate its function with speaking (which thus has evolutionary “levels”); the metaphysical surface of the body is correlated explicitly with “thinking” and indeed thinking on the most abstract level.⁴⁵

This sort of structural-anthropological view of mouth and mind might be used to develop, along more vertical-evolutionary lines, a Serresian reading of “The Burrow,” in which

⁴² A question of interest to Bataille and Kristeva as well as Deleuze would be, where do we place the mouth’s function of “laughing” on this scale—closer to breathing or to speaking?

⁴³ Piaget also showed that children of a certain age think that they think with their mouths.

⁴⁴ This latter form of emergence strongly suggests Serres’ later theory (e.g. in *Genesis*) that all sounds/meanings/languages can be seen as a kind of “tuning in” out of (chaotic) background noise. Strangely Saussure is not so far from this notion when he describes the signifier (sound-image) “cat” as a random slice out of the background flow of possible human sounds, just as its corresponding signified (concept) “cat” is such a random slice out of the background flow of possible meanings.

⁴⁵ “Language is rendered possible by that which distinguishes it. What separates sounds from bodies makes sounds into the elements of a language. What separates speaking from eating renders speech possible. [...] The surface and that which takes place at the surface is what ‘renders possible’ [...]. It is a question of a dynamic genesis which leads directly [...] *from depth to the production of surfaces* [...]. [...] We posit eating and speaking by right as two series already separated at the surface. They are separated and articulated by the event which is the result of one of them [...]. Henceforth, everything takes place in the depth, beneath the realm of sense, between two nonsenses of pure noise—the nonsense of the body and of the splintered word, and the nonsense of the block of bodies or of inarticulate words . . . And then the first stage of the dynamic genesis appears. The depth is clamorous [...]. [...] The shattered sounds of internal objects, and also the *inarticulate howls-breaths of the body without organs* which respond to them—all of this forms a sonorous system bearing witness to the oral-anal voracity [...]. [...] Speaking will be fashioned out of eating and shitting, language and its univocity will be sculpted out of shit [...].” (*The Logic of Sense* 186-93, my emphasis)

key point is the interruption of A's noisy thinking or self-reflection by the parasitic devouring noise (and too devouring-silence) of B.⁴⁶ For it is as if the primordial "mouth-noise" (noise) of the beast (the narrator's other) intrudes upon, interrupts, eats the civilized "noise" (now projected into thinking-noise) of the narrator. Or perhaps the Mouth eats the Mouth. Perhaps the primitive mouth-noise of the other (or other-as-burrow) eats (and/or drowns or drowns noise) *itself* at a higher level of development or civilization—the story's author being in the human thinking-narrating mouth which must then exist at a still higher level of development than the thinking-narrating mouth of the narrator-mole. But if the primitive beast-mouth disrupts the civilized mind-mouth⁴⁷, in what sense might the latter also disrupt and mentally devour the former?⁴⁸ A closely related problem is this: if the war-game between the narrator and his other (beast and/or burrow) is really a question of becoming-other as (becoming-animal as becoming-molecular as) becoming-noise, we still have not fully accounted for the role of silence and the silence of listening and that of death—in its interplay with noise.

One approach to both issues combines Serres and the somewhat Freudianized Deleuze. We note that both terms of the narrator-beast (or mouth-mouth) dyad are extreme disjunctions in Deleuze's sense, a point which may seem to reinforce the idea that we are speaking fundamentally of noise in both cases: the beast-mouth is a multiplicity/single totality of noise, and the narrator's/narrative thinking (the "metaphysical surface" of the story in Deleuze's sense) which it disrupts is a hyper-rational, maximally-efficient self-communication (communicative dyad) which therefore becomes the blank noise (blank chaos) of reduction, entropic homogeneity and information death. This extreme doubleness at (of) the highest level of "thought" (as hyper-logic and blank noise) suggests a "wider" disjunction (logical gap) or disjunction between order and chaos, than we get the more homogeneous noise (dark-chaos) of the beast-mouth: in this way we could say the rational-mouth "eats" the beast-mouth. This can also be expanded *via* the association of the infinite Verb with silence and death. In Deleuze's "emergent" theory of language, where noise is already becoming voice, voice becoming speech the radical disjunction of the infinitive Verb at the metaphysical surface, this is explicitly associated with the "silence" of Freud's *thanatos*, death-instinct:

Speaking, in the complete sense of the word, presupposes the verb and passes through the verb, which projects the mouth onto the metaphysical surface, filling it with the events of this surface. The verb is the "verbal representation" in its entirety, as well as the highest affirmative power of the disjunction (univocity, with respect to that which it diverges) [...]. The verb, however, is *silent*, and we must take literally the idea that the verb is sonorous and the *death instinct is silence*[...]. (*The Logic of Sense* 241, my emphasis)

⁴⁶ It is as if the whole burrow would now be a "mouth" devouring itself.

⁴⁷ Which clearly may have more than merely Freudian implications.

⁴⁸ Through high-tech rationality, and/or by telling its story. (The Burrow as vast intertextual Library.)

This correlation of (an abstract-rational-linguistic) Verb with silence and death—with Deleuze’s correlation of the more primordial and pre-human (pre-rational), innoises and voices with a “sonorous” (noisy) Eros and with (off-Freudian) “orvoracity”⁴⁹—might then let us picture the hyper-rational (self-conscious, A-A self-re-mole-narrator-author as himself “eating” the approaching beast through the encom“disjunctive infinity” of his rational speech and/or (the same thing finally) the encomsilence of his own “death.” For once he is dead the beast cannot kill him, once hi-encompasses all possible “meanings” (horizontal openness of the infinitive) the bea-cannot chaotically disturb him, drown him out in meaninglessness. But rather than pursuereading any further here, I will briefly return to the context of Deleuze’s explicitly post-F-A *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Kafka*—a context which can perhaps be most easily delineated-very abstract projection onto metaphysical surfaces we have just been speaking of, whibecome more explicitly geometrical surfaces, diagrams—and to the notion of “becoming-a(or “becoming-molecular”) analyzed in terms of deterritorialized *sound*:

Sounds, once detached from their animal function, are reterritorialized in sense(sense, meaning), “and it is sense, as proper sense, that presides over the assignmthe designation of sounds [...] and, as figurative sense, that presides over the assi-of images and metaphors [...]” What is crucial about a minor usage of language is deterritorializes sound, “detaches” it from its designated objects and thereby neu-sense. The word ceases to mean and becomes instead an arbitrary sonic vibrati-something does subsist from the sense, a means of directing lines of flight-becoming-insect, for example, a line of flight passing through the terms “huma-“insect” subsists from the sense of the words, but it is a line of flight in which the-longer a literal or a figurative sense to the words. The thought of becoming-insect-question of metaphor [...]. Instead, words and things form “a sequence of intensiv-a scale or a circuit of pure intensities that one can traverse in one direction or the-A passage emerges between what had formerly been designated “human” and “in-continuum of intensive states in which words and things can no longer be differe-At this point, “the image is this passage itself, it has become becoming.” The pro-becoming is one of metamorphosis rather than metaphor. “Metamorphosis is the c-of metaphor. There is no longer either proper or figurative sense, but a distribu-states in the range of the word. The thing and the other things are no longer anyth-intensities traversed by the sounds or deterritorialized words following their line o-It’s not a matter of a resemblance between the behavior of an animal and that of-even less of wordplay. There is no longer man or animal, since each deterritorial-other, in a conjunction of flows, in a continuum of reversible intensities.” W

⁴⁹ See notes 45, 46, 47.

image be- comes becoming, “the animal does not speak ‘like’ a man, but extracts language tonalities without signification; the words themselves are not ‘like’ animals, they clamber on their own, howl and swarm, being properly linguistic dogs, insects or mammals.” (Bogue 104-105) [K 20, 22, 37-40]

Clearly such an “analysis” could only be used to interpret any work of art (and most musical work) or literature on the most abstract level, even going one step beyond the level arrived at with the projection of the verb onto the metaphysical surface of the body-mind-voice. For when trying to think what it might mean for “The Burrow”’s narrator to become animal and/or become-molecular in *these* terms it seems we are left only with the most abstract “musical diagram” of the Burrow itself.⁵⁰ Similarly, that physical chaos theory or nonlinear dynamics which influences Serres takes some of its famous “images”—e.g. butterfly-wing-shaped “strange attractor” diagram—from second- or third-level “abstracted” (second- or third-level equations used to explain) the immediately perceived phenomena (flow-patters in rivers or in the earth’s atmosphere). What we really have now is a human vibrating burrow, a burrow that has “become mole(cular),” seen as totality in the way a physicist might try to see the universe as totality. We thus can note two crucial points in Deleuze’s view of this becoming-animal as a “sonic” phenomenon: first, the centrality of the notion of the molecular multiplicity of things (which if nothing else makes it clearer than that we could not distinguish self/other/ burrow), and second the notion of “sound” itself as a physical force which physics has seen ambivalently as waves/particles; Deleuze seems to keep both the “wave” and “particle” interpretation of sound here as he analyzes noise/voice/speech of animals/humans.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Which we would need to set in relation to at least two other “musical diagrams” in Deleuze. First we have the diagram of a “musical score” at the beginning of *ATP* Chapter 1, “Introduction: Rhizome” (3): here the traditional notation of notes becomes an abstract drawing whose roughly “rhizomic” (and also perhaps insect- and bird-like) lines/diagrams overflow(s) the spatial limits of the “score proper.” Then we have Paul Klee’s 1922 painting “Twittering Machine” at the opening of “Chapter 11: 1837: Of the Refrain” (*ATP* 310): in this “musical assemblage” four little birds stand in/on a line within a sort of abstract diagram/machine, perhaps again an abstractly-portrayed musical score in which case the birds replace four distorted (elongated) musical notes. (Kafka died in 1924.)

⁵¹ For the first step in attempting to elucidate the connection of becoming with noise is to see that “becoming (mole)cular” is not essentially a transformation or metamorphosis of/in “form”: “Becoming animal is only one becoming among others. [...] In a way, we must start at the end: all becomings are already molecular. That is because becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion formal relations. [...] Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. This principle of proximity or approximation is entirely particular and reintroduces no analogy whatsoever. It indicates as rigorously as possible a *zone of proximity* or *copresence* of a particle, the movement into which any particle that enters the zone is drawn. [...] Becoming is to emit particles that take on certain relations of movement and rest because they enter a certain zone of proximity. [...] That is the essential point for us: you become-animal only if, by whatever means or elements, you emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule. You become animal only mole-

“The thought of becoming-insect is not a question of metaphor [...]. Instead, words and things form ‘a sequence of intensive states, a scale or a circuit of pure intensities that can be traversed in one direction or the other.’ A passage emerges between what had formerly been designated ‘human’ and ‘insect,’ a continuum of intensive states in which words and things can no longer be differentiated. At this point, ‘the image is this passage itself, it has become becoming.’” In fact here Deleuze seems to be abstracting the common “essence” of words and meanings (all functions of human language now reduced to the force of sound or noise) to humans-animals, also reduced to noise-sound-voice, the human-animal continuum itself reduced to a sound continuum, to sonic vibrations, waves/particles. We begin from a trans-human (or animal, or Other) perspective, from which a human word such as “cup” or “dog” is reduced to meaningless sound, at a level of “meaninglessness” (nonsense, blank noise) which goes beyond that at which we think a foreign word (in a language we can’t understand) is “nonsense.” Words and things can no longer be differentiated” because they both—the idea or metaphor of becoming a mole and an actual mole (or molecular structure)—are “pure intensities,” “multiplicities,” that is, states or blocks of sound-energy. Thus when the image becomes becoming—that is, becomes a flow of intensities *most nearly captured or expressed by the force of sound itself*—“the animal does not speak ‘like’ a man, but extracts from language to itself without signification; the words themselves are not ‘like’ animals, but clamber on the animal’s howl and swarm, being properly linguistic dogs, insects or mice.” And jumping to the direct or perspective “human civilization” (language, literature) in a way that ties it directly to animals through the voice, Deleuze also asks (*ATP* 6): “(What if one becomes animal *through* literature, which certainly does not mean literarily? Is it not first through the voice that one becomes animal?)”⁵²

cularly. You do not become a barking molar dog, but by barking, if it is done with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition, you emit a molecular dog” (*ATP* 272-275). At the end of this passage we already get the shift from the first step—the molecular rather than molar (see note 14) nature of these becomings, to the second, the priority Deleuze gives to sound in this context. It is not that we become-animal by learning to make the animal’s sounds, but rather sound itself is the “model” for (or “projection” of) this dynamic “emitting of particles (molecules)” in the becoming-animal: “Instrumentation and orchestration are permeated by becomings-animal, above all becomings-bird [...]. The lapping, wailing of molecular discordances have always been present [...]: the sound-molecule, relations of speed and slowness between particles. Becomings-animal plunge into becomings-molecular” (*ATP* 272). Another way to put this is that Deleuze’s becomings are not changes from state A to state B but in each case a single “block” (including A and B, the whole “AB” rather than the A-B dyad), which can be disjunctively described as a “block of sound” in which the “sound” has become “deterritorialized sense” as *force*.

⁵² These questions are parenthetically placed within a reflection on writing-machines: “A book itself is a little machine. [...] But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine is plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work [...]. Literature is an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology.” (*ATP* 6) Is animal-human “Life” then contained within the Machine? Within Death?

The Pit of Babel

Yet one might still be tempted to place all such Deleuzian speculations on language and sound, ranging from the macro-level of human civilization, culture and literature to the extreme micro-level (molecular, atomic, sub-atomic, sub-nuclear level) of noise, within the Serresian framework in which we see all sounds/meanings/languages as emerging (self-organizing) out of the chaotic pre-order of background noise, like stations out of static on the radio, and “decaying” back into it again. This “chaos” model would at least give us a clearer way to interpret the Burrow as also that “pit of babel” which Kafka claimed he was “digging.” The narrator’s frenzied tunneling is meant to represent the author’s obsessive writing—his creative works in order to actually delay or beat back death as much as to accumulate a “treasure-house” (Castle Keep), which after he could not personally enjoy after he is dead—then we will also tend to associate the noises of the multitudinous “small fry” with the noise behind the walls (which become totalized as the noise of the beast, death itself) with a “lifework” reduced to mere “babble,” or noise. It is reduced to noise because the author knows that he will finally (once he is dead) be noise “to him,” and because he also knows it will (in the long run of history and a perhaps all-too-temporary human civilization) be mere noise in any case. Rather than a paradise of coherent “language after death” (Benjamin’s “pure language” project toward which all translations ideally aim) the burrow looks more like the tomb of language (culture, civilization), in which the sounds of that rational and coherent language within which the author had always lived and worked now become hopelessly mixed, a “textual body” reduced into a state of chaotic decay.

In the *Genesis* story God confused or fragmented the common language of mankind into a chaotic multiplicity, babble or “noise” of many languages, so that men could no longer communicate with one another and thus could no longer build this tower which, God thought, would be a transgression into his own divine domain, a challenge to his divine authority. Biblical Babel is associated with a great tower pointing up to Heaven yet never reaching it; thus, nostalgically, with a (lost) transcendence, then the burrow as “pit of Babel”’s linguistic chaos at the other end of the spectrum, that is, the more radically immanent and its imminent end. In his essay-story “The Great Wall of China,” in some respects a companion piece to both *The Castle*⁵³ and “The Burrow,” Kafka says: “[...] the Tower of Babel failed to reach its goal [...] because of the weakness of the foundation. [...] The Great Wall alone would

⁵³ It is not quite clear how far “up” the hierarchical levels or “orders” of the Castle will reach, but in any case the protagonist K can never even get to the first step, which is to *enter* it. Politzer points out that in “The Burrow,” “at last Kafka allows himself to enter the Castle, which now turns out to be both his work and his grave. [...] Moreover, the animal [...] has also created it” (322). Perhaps here it is as if Kafka were telling the story of the impregnable Castle *from the inside*, so that the approaching Beast heard by the narrator could now be Kafka (the author, perhaps the already-dead author) himself. (But in “The Great Wall of China,” that reflection on a great wall whose historical purpose was to keep out the barbarian hordes, the author-narrator is clearly trapped “inside.”)

for the first time in the history of mankind a secure foundation for a new Tower of Babel, the wall, therefore, and then the tower” (238-239). It is clear that Kafka, in associating “Burrow” with the “pit,” also associated it with the broken-down (porous, mole-like) underground foundations of such a Great Wall that might have supported a Tower to God. In this context that we need to think about the famous parable of the Imperial Messenger, embedded within the (story of the) Great Wall, with its infinite delay of the king’s message, the imperial-divine command that the wall should be built.

The Emperor [...] from his deathbed has sent a message to you alone. He has *whispered* the message to [the messenger, and] ordered the messenger to *whisper* into his ear again. [...] The messenger immediately sets out on his journey [...]. The multitudes are so vast; their numbers have no end. If he could reach the open field, so fast he would fly [...]. But [...] still he is only making his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them [...] and once more through the courts; and once more another palace; and so on for thousands of years; and if at last he should burst through the outermost gate—but never, never can that happen—the imperial capital would lie before him [...]. Nobody could fight his way through, even with a message from a dead man. But you sit at your window when evening comes and dream it to yourself. (244, my emphasis)

This imperial-divine command to build a Wall which would keep out the “people of the north,” the enemy, the Other—death of course, but perhaps also *the future*?⁵⁴—“has existed since all eternity, and the decision to build the wall likewise.” Yet—like the imperial messenger who never got beyond even the first of an infinite number of enclosing concentric circles or horizontal burrow-walls—it never actually reached the people of China, who therefore quite understood what the wall meant, why it was being built or even perhaps if it *was* being built. Here we may take the Tower supported by the Wall as a vertical striving upward toward God or at least toward knowing if there *is* a God, a vertical seeking of final understanding of life and death, noise and silence. But the Emperor’s message to “you, the humble subject” (you the reader “at your window”), that message which would explain why the Wall was built—to support a tower that would reach to God? Support a seeking to know or understand the meaning of things?—or even (if the Emperor is already God) give us the ultimate Answer, the final Truth, is infinitely delayed so that you will never receive it.

How then might we see this infinite delay in the context of A-B communication? In the infinity of obstacles, multiplicity of physical and bureaucratic walls which delay the message, is there itself a sort of noise which disrupts communication between A and B? Perhaps we might

⁵⁴ Kafka on building the Tower of Babel in “The City Coat of Arms”: “It is far more likely that the next generation with their perfected knowledge will find the work of their predecessors bad, and tear down what has been built so as to begin anew. Such thoughts paralyzed people’s powers [...]” (433).

this way, just as in “The Burrow” the noisy beast continuously yet interminably (and infinitesimal regress) approaches the silent, listening narrator—as perhaps the narrator simultaneously approaches the beast—so that the other’s noise is then a continuous interminable disruption of the listener’s own thinking. There is never an attempt at communication between A and B in “The Burrow,” and more (arguably) than in “The Messenger”: both games continue indefinitely, their endings infinitely suspended. Perhaps the only message that could ever have been delivered to “you the reader” by beast, emperor or Death is mere noise, and/or (its virtual equivalent) mere silence. For perhaps the approaching beast (as absolute Other) is after all trying to send its message, the message of its coming, to a listener whom it can never reach because he cannot make sense of

Or again, perhaps the reader/listener could have heard, and made sense of, this message if his own thinking were not already too noisy, his own reflection, his own *wondering* about what (ironically) the truth he is waiting to hear might be. It is just what he is relentlessly pushing forward snout-first into the unknown—digging “a wide and carefully constructed trench in the direction of the noise and not [ceasing] from digging until, independent of all theories, I find the real cause of the noise . . . know the truth” (348)—that the narrator cannot hear the noise of the Other, who is at this moment sitting still as a statue and listening to him. (Even when he pauses for breath he can only hear the whistling sound of his own breathing.) Yet at the end of the (unfinished) story he seems more or less content with the idea that “the world remained unchanged,” as if resigning himself to the need for a state of equilibrium, perhaps knowing that he lacked the power not only to eradicate the noise but even to know what it was. Similarly, at the end of “The Great Wall” the narrator reflects on his people’s basic weakness, their lack of curiosity, imagination, self-reflection: yet “this very weakness [is] one of the great unifying influences among our people; indeed [...] the very ground on which we live. To speak about establishing a fundamental defect here would be undermining [...] our feet. And for this reason I shall not proceed any further at this stage with my inquiry into these questions” (247-248).

Perhaps this sort of equilibrium state is what we finally arrive at when, like ancient armies in weary lands, we see the futility of violence; or perhaps we come to this state when we see, like Kafka’s Ulysses, that “the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely silence” (431).⁵⁵ And this brings us back to Deleuze, who like Nietzsche looks at the world as a violent force-field, a purely contingent interplay of forces and then goes one step further, abstracting it as a diagram of rhythmic and chaotic flows. The Machine (writing-machine, body-machine, war-machine, world-machine) is now on the “outside,” encompassing and transcending organic Life/Death which could itself be nothing but assemblages of molecules and particles, lines of force. The infinite series of concentric walls in the parable of the Imperial Messenger, like the endless labyrinthine tunnels and rhizomic roots of the mole’s burrow— while they

⁵⁵ Upon which Benjamin comments (118): “Kafka’s Sirens are silent.”

suggest that we are forever enclosed within a mechanical universe, a non-human world that dwells both within and without us—no longer need mean an infinite delay of meaning and communication. For there was no “message” in the first place: all is transformed into molecules, an abstract diagram of forces, intensities, noise.

Forces of chaos, terrestrial forces, cosmic forces: all of these confront each other and converge in the territorial refrain. [...] From chaos, *Milieus* and *Rhythms* are born. [...] *Milieus* are open to chaos, which threatens them with exhaustion or intrusion. *Rhythms* are the *Milieus*' answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between. [...] Chaos is not the opposite of rhythm, but the milieu of all milieus. There is communication whenever there is a *transcoded passage* from one milieu to another, a *communication* between milieus [...]. ([...] The cosmos as an immense deterritorialized refrain).

(ATP, “1837: Of the Refrain,” 313, 327, my emphasis)

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