

Silence, Speech and Speculative Music  
in Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog"

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ABSTRACT

In his late story "Investigations of a Dog" Kafka presents us with a philosophical dog, one whose speculations on the origins of "nourishment"—the dogs' food is apparently given them by humans who paradoxically remain invisible to them—remind us of, and parody or ironically deflate, mankind's own speculations on the gods/God and the "meaning of life." But in the story, silent music also plays an important role: at the beginning the "soaring dogs" motivate, with their silent performance, the young narrator-dog to commence his philosophical "investigations"; at the end another dog's love song, heard only by the narrator, prompts him to turn to the study of "incantation," which he feels can mediate between the "science of music" and that of "nourishment." Here I approach this long and labyrinthine, parabolic tale *via* an interpretation with sees speculative questioning itself as a sort of music (and/or sees music as a speculative force, movement, passage-beyond.) To develop this interpretation I turn to Deleuze and Guattari's biology-based discussion of the "refrain"—the rhythmic music of the natural (and in particular animal) world—in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and also to Deleuze's discussion of speculative-ironic questioning in *Difference and Repetition*. The insoluble paradox at the heart of this parable, explored by Kafka and further discussed *via* my "speculative music" reading, is, I will suggest, that of the ignorance, thus apparent (or assumed) isolation of each level (canine, human) of/within the "order of being," an ignorance which already opens the possibility of a certain "commonality" (seen here in the light of Deleuze's "refrain")—even if we cannot "know" or "understand" it.

Keywords:

Kafka    Deleuze    nourishment    meaning of life    music    refrain  
speculative questioning    ironic questioning    desire    speech    silence

[A]ll men seek pleasure because all desire life. Life is a form of activity [...and activities] are desirable in themselves when all that is asked of them is their own exercise. [...] But [...] what sort of pleasure [of activity] should we affirm to be distinctively human [...] in the full meaning of the word? [...]his activity has a speculative or contemplative character. [...] For “contemplation” is the highest form of activity, since the intellect is the highest thing in us [...]. But it is also the most continuous activity, for we can think about intellectual problems more continuously than we can keep up any sort of physical action. [Thus] it is this intellectual activity which forms perfect happiness for a man [...]Perfect happiness is a speculative activity. [...] But] such a [continuously contemplative] life will be too high for human attainment. It will not be lived by us in our merely human capacity but in virtue of something divine in us [...].

(Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book Ten, Thomson 267-277)

And have you ever seen a dog find a marrowbone? (In book two of the *Republic*, mind you, Plato says the dog is the most philosophical beast in the world.)

(Rabelais, “Prologue,” *Gargantua and Pantagruel* 8)

We already see in *The Metamorphosis* that music is for Kafka a sort of “unknown nourishment,” something that can satisfy our (physical or spiritual) hunger or desire within an explicitly “trans-human” context or world. Toward the end of the novella Gregor as a lonely, alienated dung-beetle, nostalgic for the human world, listens unseen to his human sister play the violin. He seems to crave some sort of transcendence, spiritual rebirth or transfiguration, or perhaps he simply desires—is it the same thing?—a literal (physical) transfiguration, a return to the “higher order” of the human world. “He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved.” And yet this sentence is preceded by the author’s striking question: “Was he an animal that music had such an effect upon him?” (Glatzer 130-131<sup>1</sup>) It could mean “Must he not then really still have been human?” But, given the amazing effect certain sounds have on dogs and other animals, it could also mean: “Such a powerful effect suggests that the listener must be a non-human or trans-human being.”

The non-human, even inanimate music of the violin (which might still be considered “organic” inasmuch as violins are made of wood) is here contrasted with Gregor’s “abnormal” insect-voice: “‘That was no human voice,’ said the chief clerk in a voice noticeably low beside the shrillness of the mother’s. [...] The words he uttered were no longer understandable, apparently, although [...]

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<sup>1</sup> All subsequent quotations of Kafka’s text are from this edition unless otherwise specified.

his ear had grown accustomed to the sound of them. [...] To make his voice as clear as possible [...] he coughed [...] yet] this noise too might not sound like a human cough [...].” (99). If dung-beetles may have their own proper cough then we need not necessarily assume that Gregor’s human voice has been warped by its becoming-animal; we could also take this speech as a human “warping” of pristine animal nature. In fact we must set the “strangeness” of Gregor’s insect-voice in a wider context, one that includes the “abnormal humanness” of the sounds or voices of inanimate objects, like that of the unlatched door in the early short piece “Great Noise” that creaks open, “rasping like a catarrhal throat” (Neugrochel 17). And here again we could just as well say that slightly “diseased” human voices can have a creaking, door-like sound.

These non-human or off-human “musical” voices would need to be contrasted with Kafka’s fully “natural” voices expressing animal life-force. The caged panther’s cry, for instance, clearly expresses its (his) pure life-force in “A Hunger Artist”: “The food he liked was brought to him without hesitation by the attendants; [...] his noble body [...] seemed to carry freedom around with it too; somewhere in his jaws it seemed to lurk; and the joy of life burst with such ardent passion from his throat that for the onlookers it was not easy to stand the shock of it” (277). The raw force of this earthly (Nietzschean) immanence is contrasted with the pale transcendence, the all-too-human spirituality of the hunger artist who, when asked why he could never stop fasting, whispers the reason into the overseer’s ear with his dying breath: “because I couldn’t find the food I liked” (277).<sup>2</sup> Here of course we suspect, though perhaps we cannot be sure, that the sort of “transcendent meaning” the artist was looking for was strictly “super-human” and not “sub-human.”

In “Jackals and Arabs” the jackals descend upon a dead camel: “It had hardly touched the ground before the jackals lifted up their voices. As if irresistibly drawn by cords each of them began to waver forward, crawling on his belly. [...]T]he immediate presence of the stinking carrion bewitched them. One was already at the camel’s throat, sinking his teeth straight into an artery. Like a vehement small pump endeavoring [...] to extinguish some raging fire, every muscle in his body twitched and labored at the task” (410). Here the camel’s “throat” is the object of their desire, their boundless hunger prompting the howling that explodes from their own throats. Yet this unquenchable desire

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<sup>2</sup> The “beauty” of this continuous fast is of course that it will still continue after death. This dialogue echoes *in modo reverso* the one concluding the parable “Before the Law,” embedded within *The Trial*: the dying protagonist whispers a question into the powerful doorkeeper’s ear—“In all these years why has no one but myself ever begged for admittance to the Law?”—and the doorkeeper roars in his ear, “This gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it.”

for food, for life, is qualified by the cracking whip of the jackals' human masters, who take a perverse pleasure in punishing the beasts even as they place the carrion there for them to eat. For all its healthy animal desire, after all, the panther is—like the hunger artist with his too-refined, too-human and thus (in its own way) perverse desire—kept in a cage at the zoo.

Thus we seem to have, on the one hand, healthy animal voices which are, nonetheless, somehow stunted or neurotic (perhaps their roar is “too loud”) since the animals themselves are under the control of humans, and on the other hand warped and neurotic, though in a slightly different way, human voices. But we also have the music (or inanimate voice) of Gregor's sister's violin. The perfect order and all-too-human rationality of this classical music may suggest, on the one hand, again a certain repression, while on the other hand pointing to a trans-human world—though here it is not entirely clear whether we are being invited to transcend “upward” or “downward.”

This is the background we would need to keep in mind when approaching Kafka's late and perhaps final story, “Investigations of a Dog.” However, in “Investigations” as in two other late animal stories, “The Burrow” and “Josephine, or the Mouse Singer,” it seems the author is moving toward slightly different, more abstract and explicitly philosophical themes precisely because—paradoxical as it may seem—we now more fully enter the animals' own world of thinking/speaking/singing. Here the animals' own “language” is, if not the “only” language, then clearly superior to all other possible languages. Thus the narrator-dog of “Investigations,” proud of the spiritually rich and meaningful canine language, muses on all those non-canine “creatures in the world” (and we have no reason to exclude humans here)—those “wretched, limited, dumb creatures who have no language but mechanical cries” (279). This “mechanical” could allude to the mindless rhythm of the crickets' chorus on a summer's night, but also that of a hyper-technologized mankind.

In “Investigations” the “transcendent” music of the soaring dogs' singing can most easily be compared with that “unknown nourishment” which the Hunger Artist never finds in this life, and which Gregor hears (or thinks he hears) in his sister's violin—and yet, we are no longer sure if this is a “merely human” instrument. The story is more explicitly philosophical precisely because we can take it's dog-world as an allegory of our human one, and/or *vice versa*. In my own reading, the exploratory probing of Kafka's speculative, trans-human questioning is closely associated with the exploratory force of a trans-human and, I will suggest, “speculative” music. For one thing, the narrator-dog's scientific-philosophical “researches” (investigations, questionings) into the

possible origins of food, of physical but also spiritual nourishment, lead him finally to see the importance of magical, mystical, religious “incantation” as a way of bringing nourishment down “from above”—from heaven/the gods/God but also, in this ironic context, from human masters. For another thing, the young dog’s curiosity, his eagerness to ask any kind of philosophical question—which later becomes focused on the more specific issue of “nourishment”—was first excited (stimulated, triggered) by his encounter with the “soaring dogs.” He is amazed, dumbfounded by their unbelievable dancing skill and “silent music”:

At that time I still knew hardly anything of the creative gift for music with which the canine race alone is endowed [...]; for [...] music had surrounded me as a perfectly natural and indispensable element of existence ever since I was a suckling, an element which nothing impelled me to distinguish from the rest of existence [...]; all the more astonishing, then, [...] were these seven great musical artists to me. They did not speak, they did not sing, they remained generally silent [...]; but from the empty air they conjured music. Everything was music, the lifting and setting down of their feet, certain turns of the head, their running and their standing still, the positions they took up in relation to one another, the symmetrical patterns which they produced [...]. But it is too much to say that I even saw them [...]. They appeared from somewhere, I inwardly greeted them as dogs [...]. (281, my emphasis<sup>3</sup>)

This silent music might represent something like our own life-force, our own existence—and perhaps too that physical or spiritual food which “nourishes” (gives rise to, grounds) this life-force. The young dog has always taken his existence for granted, has never “stepped back” to see how incredible it is.<sup>4</sup> Yet suddenly this silent music of a purely immanent canine existence becomes “questionable” to the still-youthful dog-narrator; its mystery or indeed *impossibility* is what prompts his life-long “research”: “[...] and so through all the din of the music I shouted out my questions [...]. But they—incredible! Incredible!—they never replied, behaved as if I were not there” (283). It is the sheer impossibility of this silent music which paradoxically spurs or sparks the narrator’s own questioning, his own seeking to know the unknowable. But his questioning is itself a form of noise or sound which has emerged out of the silence of the unknown/unknowable, and thus is itself also “musical.” Indeed,

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<sup>3</sup> In certain ways the passage invites a Deleuzian reading of this “music” as “deterritorialized refrain.” See the later discussion of “The Refrain” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (hereafter *ATP*).

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger speaks of the *Schritt Zurück*, the “step back” (out) of metaphysics.

the idea that this pre-existing silent music could be a “creative gift” the young dog never realized he possessed until he “hears” the music already implies that this music is the gift of curiosity as well as the gift of life, the ability not just to exist but to ask philosophical questions about existence. Here then I want to pursue an interpretation of Kafka’s “Investigations” which correlates the silence-sound of music with the silence-sound of speculative questioning.

The dog will soon become curious, not just about life itself but about the nature and origin of that (physical and spiritual) nourishment which is the ground and source of life. Just as creatures need and desire food, so they also need and desire knowledge: the dog’s desire to know (expressed in his praxis of questioning) parallels the desire to “eat”—he won’t be satisfied until he knows—so that his desire to understand the nature/origin of food can also mean, in what might be an infinite regress of self-reflection, the desire to understand the nature/origin of knowledge (understanding).<sup>5</sup> But if questioning is a form of desire then so is music—that expression of our own immanent life-force, our own existence—a form of desire. Just as speculative questioning can ultimately only further open (into) the grounding question (or lead to a plethora of new questions) and therefore “desires itself,” music also is pure desire, desire desiring itself. But now we are speaking of questioning/music (“speculative music”) as sound, as something audible. Silent questioning, like silent music, might be simply life itself—or that which nourishes, supports, grounds it—in its immanent, pre-reflective state of non-desire. Then an immanent, pre-desiring state (mode, force) of “silent music” would also have its counterpart in a state of questioning that does not yet desire (to know the answer), “silent questioning.”

In other words, this music is not just that “unknown nourishment” (divine or merely trans-human) craved by Kafka’s human/animal characters, that food which might satisfy our hunger; it is also itself an expression of animal/human desire or hunger. This is most obviously the case when we think of music merely as an abstraction (deterritorialization) of a human/animal voice in its mode of “howling with hunger” (or “crying with joy” when food appears). But if music is desire and also that which satisfies it, then the subject (as in German idealism) becomes its own object: what we desire is our own desire, or rather desire desires itself since there *is* only desire (or passion, or will). And this desire is (also) the force or mode of music: music desires itself, music plays itself, there

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<sup>5</sup> And when comparing the dogs’ “desire to eat” with that of the jackals, whose teeth tear into the dead camel’s throat, or the caged panther from whose throat bursts forth a cry of joy when he gets his food, we sense that we have now “transcended to a higher plane”—since the nourishment of the panther and jackals seems to be something “known.” Or has Kafka in “Investigations” merely made an implicit (and very subtle) earlier theme more explicit?

is only music. Thus Schopenhauer—attempting like Schelling and Hegel to overcome Kant’s subject-object distinction—claims that we know or rather *become* the (for Kant noumenal) “thing-in-itself” through experiencing our own body in action, that there is an pre-rational, universal “blind will” which precedes and underlies both subject and object, and that in a certain way music is the “expression” (or expressive force) of this will. His view is that while the visual arts allow us to momentarily escape from our slavery to the/our will (to all-pervasive desire) by contemplating pure Ideas, music with its immaterial, *fluid* nature expresses the true or *inner* (bodily) reality of the world-as-will and thus lets us momentarily escape from the will by in effect “becoming” it<sup>6</sup>:

Therefore music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but a *copy of the will itself*, the objectivity of which are the Ideas. For this reason, the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence. [...] This close relation that music has to the true nature of all things can also explain the fact that, when music [...] is played, it seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning [...] Accordingly, we could just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will [...] Everywhere music expresses only the quintessence of life and its events, never these themselves [...] What music expresses, is eternal, infinite and ideal; it does not express the passion, love, or longing of such-and-such an individual [...], but passion, love or longing in itself. (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* Vol. I, 257, 261-263)

Here I want to more fully develop this “musical questioning” (or “speculative music”) interpretation of “Investigations of a Dog” by turning to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of music as “deterritorialization of the refrain” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, and then bringing into play Deleuze’s discussion of ironic-speculative questioning in *Difference and Repetition*—in part based on Kierkegaard’s exploration of Socratic dialogue in *The Concept of Irony*. If the unknown nourishment of the sister’s violin music in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* may seem to imply a “transcendent” context, one closer to German idealism and (in reaction) Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the unknown nourishment of

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<sup>6</sup> Thus Nietzsche, also influenced by Wagner, in *Birth of Tragedy* makes music the quintessential “Dionysian” art-form, painting/sculpture the quintessential “Apollonian” one. Nietzsche is also much influenced by Schopenhauer’s notion of the “world as will and idea,” but for him the world is purely “will to power”; he takes a much more optimistic view of this universal will than does Schopenhauer, for now we joyously *assert* or *affirm* the (our) will, we “*will to will*.”

“Investigations” may also be approached in terms of a much more natural, empirical, even scientific context, thus inviting the turn to Deleuze’s “biological music.” The problem of the identity-and-difference of comic irony and serious philosophical speculation in the story’s major theme or mode of “questioning” can also, it is hoped, be further illuminated by the Deleuzian views of both music and questioning—although it seemst Deleuze does not directly associate these two themes (or modes) in his own work.<sup>7</sup>

### The Deleuzian Refrain in “Josephine” and “The Burrow”

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari speak of all organic life (and in an extended sense of the whole world) as a network of “desiring machines.” In *A Thousand Plateaus* (“Of the Refrain”), exploring their generalized notion of desire as positive force in an explicitly biological context—one in which desire becomes post-Darwinian, something more universal and foundational than a mere drive-toward-survival—they tell us that music is the “deterritorialized refrain.” In the first place these authors are using “refrain” (*ritournelle*) in a non-traditional sense, one which ties it directly to the “territorial” nature of living creatures. Bogue begins his discussion of the Deleuzian theory of music by pointing out the limitations of the traditional western (at least since the 17<sup>th</sup> century), classical, “harmonic” understanding of music. He quotes here from Susan McClary’s Afterword to Jacques Attali’s *Noise* (McClary 150):

[...] it is quite clear to most listeners that music moves them, that they respond deeply to music in a variety of ways, even though in our society they are told that they cannot know anything about music without having absorbed the whole theoretical apparatus necessary for music specialization. But to learn this apparatus is to learn to renounce one’s responses, to discover that the musical phenomenon is to be understood mechanistically, mathematically. Thus non-trained listeners are prevented from talking about social and expressive dimensions of music (for they lack the vocabulary to refer to its parts) and so are trained musicians (for they have been taught, in learning the proper vocabulary, that music is strictly self-contained structure). (Bogue 13).

The point is that music is a fundamentally interpersonal, social activity, one

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<sup>7</sup> Thus I shall in effect be expanding on, and drawing tentative connections between, certain themes in Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition*, hereafter *DAR*) and Deleuze and Guattari (*ATP*).



that involves the “territorial” relationship of all organisms to their environment. We could say that all music is based on “communication” in the broadest sense of the term: intra-species but also inter-species communication, communication between organism and (both organic and non-organic) environment. Thus we are, like birds or crickets, intuitively able to appreciate and “understand” music. Bogue here contrasts the western “classical” idea of music— which comes from the Pythagorean and Platonic Logos, ancient Greek notions of mathematical-musical harmony, the Ptomelaic “music of the spheres” within a self-referential closed system or universe—with a much more “natural” view, one which takes music as an open-ended expression or enactment of the ongoing processes of nature, a complex, multiple activity-expression which is always pointing or opening beyond itself. The refrain is then the rhythmic repetition (where “rhythmic” means *not* purely mathematical, not purely mechanical but “natural” and “organic”) of such expressions, such enactments.

Musical refrains [...] have venerable associations with territoriality [... , they] resemble birdsongs, which ethnologists have long recognized as basic components in the delimitation of bird territories. Abstracting from these instances of geographically associated sonic motifs, Deleuze and Guattari extend the notion of the refrain to refer to any kind of rhythmic pattern that stakes out a territory. Three examples will suffice to indicate the basic ways in which this process takes place: (1) A child afraid in the dark sings a song to reassure herself, and in so doing establishes a stable point in the midst of chaos, a locus of order in a non-dimensional space; (2) a cat sprays the corners of his house and the trees and bushes in his yard and thereby demarcates a dimensional area that he claims as his possession; (3) a bird sings an impromptu aria at the break of day, and thus opens its territory to other milieus and the cosmos at large. A point of stability, a circle of property, and an opening to the outside—these are three aspects of the refrain (Bogue 16-17).<sup>8</sup>

The third aspect of the refrain is especially significant since, for Deleuze, “every territory combines forces in an intense center which is itself an opening whereby the territory issues forth onto the cosmos at large” (Bogue 23). Perhaps we must keep in mind this limit-case of “territorialization” when we consider what Deleuze might mean by saying music is the “deterritorializing of the refrain.” For now we are looking at the purely intentional force of “expression” of these acts of interaction between organism and environment, divorced from

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<sup>8</sup> Bogue is here summarizing, and clarifying, Deleuze/Guattari’s discussion in *ATP* (312).

their fully realized “expression” in the sense of concrete actualization, concrete embodiment in the various forms of other-referential “ritual behavior.” “Whereas the refrain is essentially territorial, territorializing or reterritorializing, music makes of the refrain a deterritorialized content for a deterritorializing form of expression” (*ATP* 300). We might compare this way of looking at art in general, and music in particular, to the Russian formalists’ understanding of “poetic language.” While for Mukarovsky “standard language” points beyond itself to the “real world” and thus makes communication (and social relationships) possible, “poetic language” points back at itself as a material, “linguistic” medium or force. Thus only in a poetic (as opposed to social-interactive) context would it matter that “What’s your name?” rhymes with “What’s your game?”; indeed, in a poem the sound value of the phrase might actually be more significant than its ostensible “meaning”-value. This comparison also catches the point that it is the refrain itself (ritualized social behavior), not the music of its deterritorialized form or mode, which is primarily “social” and, in this standard sense, “communicative.”

However, as we see in Deleuze’s discussion in *ATP* of Messaien’s musical compositions based directly on birdsong, or rather on the formal or artistic “deterritorializing” of birdsong, this deterritorializing praxis is one way of looking at the praxis of becoming-animal or (in this case) becoming-bird. “[...] Deleuze and Guattari insist that all great composers manage to unsettle the given conventions of their day and invent ‘a sort of diagonal between the harmonic vertical and the melodic horizon’ (*ATP* 300). The process through which a refrain is deterritorialized is essentially one of *becoming*, a becoming-woman, a becoming-child, a becoming animal or a becoming-molecular, a passage *between* milieus and territories that articulates the nonpulsed rhythms of an unmeasured time” (Bogue 23-24). Deleuze also discusses this transformational process, particularly becoming-animal, in terms of the deterritorialization of (human or animal) “voice” or “sound” as pure “noise” in *Kafka*, and it is the close connection in *Kafka* between sound/music/voice and the blurred boundary between human and animal “life-forms” which especially concerns us here.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Sounds, once detached from their animal function, are reterritorialized in sense (*sens*: sense, meaning), “and it is sense, as proper sense, that presides over the assignment of the designation a of sounds [...] and, as figurative sense, that presides over the assignment of images and metaphors [...].” What is crucial about a minor usage of language is that it deterritorializes sound, “detaches” it from its designated objects and thereby neutralizes sense. The word ceases to mean and becomes instead an arbitrary sonic vibration. Yet something does subsist from the sense, a means of directing lines of flight. In a becoming-insect, for example, a line of flight passing through the terms “human” and “insect” subsists from the sense of the words, but it is a line of flight in which there is no longer a literal or a figurative sense to the words. The thought of becoming-insect is not a question of metaphor [...]. Instead, words and things form “a sequence

But I would also like to interplay the extended notion of the refrain as “any kind of rhythmic pattern that stakes out a territory” with Deleuze’s conception of the “expansive” mode of speculative questioning in *Difference and Repetition*: [F]ar from being [...] destined to disappear in the response once a response is given, the question silences all empirical responses which purport to suppress it, in order to force the one response which always continues and maintains it [...], whence the power of the question to put in play the questioner as much as that which is questioned, and to put itself in question: Oedipus and his manner of never being finished with the Sphinx” (*DAR* 195-96). This could also be seen as the “self-desiring” of the question: what the question desires above all is its own continuous opening, and the answer-possibilities that it opens into, in what Deleuze sometimes calls the event or dice-throw of its asking, ultimately serve to maintain, further open, further deepen it. The aptness of this conception in the interpretive context of “Investigations” should already be implicitly clear, but before coming back to that story let us briefly look at Kafka’s other two late animal stories, “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk” and “The Burrow.” I will be reading all three in the light of territoriality and Deleuze’s three aspects or modes of the refrain, where the refrain is now conceived as that which, like the question, opens a kind of trans-human space—one that might be seen as both a “question-space” (“space of questionability”) and a “musical space.”

Even more unequivocally than the dog-songs of “Investigations,” the mouse-singing of “Josephine”—the only Kafka story whose explicit theme is music—points us in the direction of the empirical and radically immanent, thus clearly inviting a Deleuzian reading. Here the mouse-singer Josephine performs by not performing: her “singing” is nothing but “ordinary piping,” that which (we assume) passes among mice for “everyday speech” or even, on a still more “radically immanent” reading, for *breathing*. The story reminds us again of “The Hunger Artist” inasmuch as it parodies and deflates “high art”: this is the “art” of non-art, the performance of the ordinary, perhaps what now (as in Andy

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of intensive states, a scale or a circuit of pure intensities that one can traverse 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.” The process of becoming is one of metamorphosis rather than metaphor. “Metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor. There is no longer either proper or figurative sense, but a distribution of states in the range of the word. The thing and the other things are no longer anything but intensities traversed by the sounds or deterritorialized words following their line of flight. It’s not a matter of a resemblance between the behavior of an animal and that of a man, even less of wordplay. There is no longer man or animal, since each deterritorializes the other, in a conjunction of flows, in a continuum of reversible intensities.” When the image becomes becoming, “the animal does not speak ‘like’ a man, but extracts from language tonalities without signification; the words themselves are not ‘like’ animals, but clamber on their own, howl and swarm, being properly linguistic dogs, insects or mice.” (Bogue 104-105; Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 20, 22, 37-41)

Warhol's paintings of soup cans) would pass for postmodernism. And indeed Kafka emphasizes here the communal bond of the audience, a "mass, which, warmly pressed body to body, listens with indrawn breath" (364).<sup>10</sup>

This collectively "indrawn breath" could suggest the audience's utter amazement, as in "holding one's breath" or gasping with surprise, but Kafka points us in a slightly different direction: the others pity her because she has absolutely no talent for singing, they worry about her because she is so very vulnerable, so sensitive to their always-suspended criticism. "So there she stands, the delicate creature, shaken by vibrations especially below the breastbone, so that one feels anxious for her, it is as if she [...] is so wholly withdrawn and living only in her song a cold breath blowing upon her might kill her" (363). This turn to the physical body underscores the physical meaning of "indrawn breath": if speaking and singing (and piping, playing wind instruments, which we are perhaps to think is the way mice normally "speak") involve exhaling, we also need to inhale and just as often; our very life depends on the rhythmic alternation of the two operations. This hints at an important part of the story's meaning: the bare facts of (human and/or animal) existence, its transience, immanence, shocking vulnerability. Josephine is "performing" raw animality, reminding her audience (which in the wider sense includes her human readers/listeners, perhaps listening to themselves breathe as they read) of who or what they are; thus her audience cannot help but revere her.

Perhaps the "mouse folk" are not likely to really think about their own breathing, that most interior and immanent manifestation of the life force, most essential form of "nourishment" or life-source, until it is defamiliarized or "deterritorialized" by Josephine's performance. (We think of the young narrator-dog's realization, upon encountering the soaring dogs, that "At that time I still knew hardly anything of the creative gift for music with which the canine race alone is endowed [...]; for [...] music had surrounded me as a perfectly natural and indispensable element of existence [...]" ) This "singing" allows them to step back and see, not their creative gift but their radical vulnerability, the fleetingness of their own little (mouse-like) existence. Such a reading could be extended *via* Deleuze's notion of the refrain in its first aspect: "A child afraid in the dark sings a song to reassure herself, and in so doing establishes a stable point in the midst of chaos, a locus of order in a

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<sup>10</sup> We think of Fredric Jameson's debt to Andy Warhol's "art as advertising," as "simulacrum" or mere "surface" in *Postmodernism*, and of Walter Benjamin's anti-aura appeal to the masses in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin claims in "Franz Kafka" that "Kafka's sirens are silent," which suggests the foreclosure of the transcendent realm of "divine inspiration" but only by alluding to the dangerous allure of silence itself.

non-dimensional space” (Bogue 17). That is, this reassuring (*via* Josephine’s “song”) of all the “mouse folk” that they do indeed exist begins from the “center of territorializing forces,” establishing a locus of order and/or meaning, sense.

Yet in its very nature the space or territory of which Josephine’s “singing” becomes the locus or center is a questionable space or territory, a *space of questionability*. This is clear in the first place from the fact that her listeners can never actually understand what this singing is: “I have often thought about what this music of hers really means,” says the mouse-narrator. “For we are quite unmusical; how is it that we understand Josephine’s singing or [...] at least think we understand it. The simplest answer would be that the beauty of her singing [gives us] a feeling that from her throat something is sounding which we have never heard before and which we are not even capable of hearing [...]. But [...] that is just what does not happen [and] we admit freely to one another that Josephine’s singing, as singing, is nothing out of the ordinary” (360-361). We note the questionable logic of this line of reasoning: “We (think we) understand her singing because it is (sounds like) something we have never heard and are (therefore?) incapable of hearing; yet in fact this is not some unknown or transcendent sound but the most immanent, everyday, ordinary and familiar sound.” To say “we understand it because we’ve never heard it before” is paradoxical, yet it reminds us of the young dog-narrator’s stunned reaction, his sense of being overwhelmed—as if perhaps by “the sublime”—when he first hears the “impossible” music of the soaring dogs. In both cases the “unheard” (or “unheard of,” *Unerhörtes* in Zarathustra’s *Prologue*) quality of the music is also its “beauty” and it is perhaps this “beauty” that the listeners secretly feel they understand, even when they say “we do not after all understand this music at all.”<sup>11</sup> Thus we have again (as in “Investigations”) the sense that the radical immanence of Josephine’s music (like the sound of our own voice or breathing, of our own existence) is precisely what places it beyond our understanding.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps then the “questionability” of the logic here, of the discourse, may be the questionability of the (of a) question itself, of that question which desires only itself and allows, as Deleuze says, only those answers which point back to and continue it. On the “deepest” level perhaps this is the singing or music not just of ordinary language but of ordinary questioning, the music of the question.

<sup>11</sup> “To the hermits I shall sing my song, to the lonesome and the twosome; and whoever still has ears for the unheard-of—his heart shall become heavy with my happiness.” (Zarathustra to his listeners, showing them “all the steps to the overman,” in Kaufmann, *Portable Nietzsche* 136)

<sup>12</sup> There are numerous cases in religious discourses of the Chan Buddhist “identity of *nirvana* and *samsara*” (transcendence and immanence), the Daoist *ch’ang Dao* which “cannot be spoken of” because it is too close to us and/or already “within” us. (When Lao-tzu’s “*Dao ke dao, fei ch’ang Dao*” is translated: “The way that can be spoken of is not the constant Dao,” this “spoken of” may mean rationally known, understood, objectified or distanced-from-the-subject.)

For the discursive force of a (voiced, spoken) question “makes no sense” (is “unheard of” at least insofar as its answer has not yet been “heard”) while simultaneously (as a syntactically correct question-sentence) making perfect sense; perhaps this is analogous to the way in which Josephine’s singing makes sense (as “music”) to her audience (and by extension to us, the readers of the story) while simultaneously making no sense. We human readers indeed play a key role, for the trans-logical break that creates a space of questionability is also the trans-human (mouse-human) rift in understanding, which could be seen in terms of Deleuze’s musical model: “[...] all great composers manage to [...] invent ‘a sort of diagonal between the harmonic vertical and the melodic horizon.’ The process through which a refrain is deterritorialized is essentially one of *becoming*, a [...] becoming-animal or a becoming-molecular [...]” (Bogue 23-24).

In Kafka’s “The Burrow” Josephine’s “indrawn breath” (her breathing but also her singing) is replaced by an underground animal’s ferocious, desire-driven “eating”<sup>13</sup>, and the narrator-mole’s underground burrow or “home” is now clearly his own territory, one he is constantly and obsessively “marking” as in the second mode or aspect of the Deleuzian refrain: “a cat sprays the corners of his house and the trees and bushes in his yard and thereby demarcates a dimensional area that he claims as his possession” (Bogue 17). That the mole is in the first place concerned with defending his territory, and that his heard but unseen enemy is (potentially) a mortal threat to him, is all too clear: [...] I am obviously defenseless against any serious attack. [...] The] vulnerability of [my] burrow has made me vulnerable; any wound to it hurts me as if I myself were hit” (355). But the burrow, and thus himself—and on one reading the burrow may be the narrator’s/author’s own body—is so “vulnerable” precisely because it is indefinitely extended and thus unknowable. This burrow is, as Deleuze says in *Kafka* (3, 39, 41, 96), an infolded maze, multiplicity or rhizome and—closely related, I think, to this notion of the rhizome—a question-space or “space of questionability,” here explicitly perceived or “marked” in terms of noise:

[...] it was an almost inaudible whistling noise that wakened me. I

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<sup>13</sup> That is, while we may have thought that the burrowing-toward-him of his enemy-mole, as heard by the narrator-mole, is an “eating” of the dirt (as forerunner, foreplay to eating one’s enemy), Kafka instead foregrounds the primarily respiratory (and secondarily “musical”) function of the animal’s snout: “I can explain the whistling only in this way: that the beast’s chief means of burrowing is [...] its snout or its muzzle [...]. 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 indrawal of its breath, which must be an earthshaking noise [...] because of the beast’s [...] furious lust for work [...]: this noise I hear as a faint whistle” (354).

recognized what it was immediately; the small fry, which I had allowed far too much latitude, had burrowed a new channel somewhere [...] 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 [...]. 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 from 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 [...]. (343-348)

But in fact the mole can never find the “cause of the noise” or indeed its “nature” or “essential meaning”—as with the investigator-dog’s quest to uncover the nature and origin of “nourishment” in “Investigations.” Thus here again we have entered the paradoxical space of unknowability or questionability. Like the burrow itself, the question “What *is* this noise I hear?” is ultimately unanswerable, it only points back to itself.<sup>14</sup> For the enemy’s noise is ambivalently a multiplicity of tiny noises (sounds of the “small fry,” perhaps insects) and one single noise into which this molecular multiplicity is sometimes perceived as coalescing: “But it is this very uniformity of the noise everywhere that disturbs me most [...]. Now I could not have foreseen such an opponent [...].” This ambiguous nature of (the) noise itself is akin to that of a question, perhaps of that overwhelming question toward which all the “little” questions are pointing. The noise is questionable to the narrator as a physical sound whose nature and source (again like that of “nourishment” for the dog-narrator) is indeterminate, but even when it becomes sound that is formed into phonemes, into linguistic meanings on another level (one perhaps more proper to “Investigations” though also implicit in “Burrow”), noise still has a physical basis: it arises out of background noise and can easily decay back into it. Thus we note a curious sort of symmetry here between noise and questions (or questionability), for noise in its “molecular” sense is the fundamental or “original” level of a question as of any other form of speech, but it is also the true “sense” of speculative questions when their meaning *as questions* is understood, since questions by their very nature express what is not now known

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<sup>14</sup> There is also a kind of absurd hyperbole here that undercuts itself, as in the possibility, denied from the start by the narrator, that Josephine’s non-singing could be the highest form of music: the narrator-mole is assuming from the outset that he cannot possibly win against an aggressor; “I am obviously defenseless [...]”; the quest to defend one’s territory against invaders—ultimately the desire to never die—is hopeless from the start. But this suggests the close connection between speculative and *ironic* questioning. See the concluding discussion of this issue.

and what may be unknowable, if not ultimately “nonsensical” (“noise-like”).

In the final scene of “The Burrow” the narrator-mole is listening to another, unknown and questionable mole (his Other) coming toward him from beyond his burrow-wall. Here the narrator must be silent (keep his mind calm) in order to hear the Other’s approach, but this is difficult since his paranoid fear means that his mind is often busy thinking, worrying, wondering, *asking itself*. Kafka gives us the resultant interplay between A and B as an interplay between (physical/mental) noise and (physical/mental) silence, where the measured, rhythmic interplay of noise-silence is essential not only to the transmission (communication) of meaningful signals—meaningful sentences, including question-sentences—but also to the possibility of there being “questions and answers” on a deeper, perhaps ontological level.<sup>15</sup> Thinking too, as with Josephine’s “unhearable” or “unthinkable” music, of Heidegger’s *Dasein* (human being) as *Seinsfrage* (question of Being), the key point is this: in the context of philosophical-scientific speculation, that is, of a “questionable” world or environment (*Umwelt*), a question emerges in effect out of silence into noisy or incipient speech, proto-speech, and insofar as it may be an “unanswerable” question it also returns us to silence. At the end of “The Burrow” this silence marks the fundamental questionability (unknowability) of the narrator-mole’s Other, and thus too of himself. When he tries to answer the “question” of this silence by bringing it into noise, the narrator doesn’t know whether to take it as the silence of a no-longer-approaching or a still-silently-approaching enemy. Thus silence itself is ambivalent, equivocal, but only because we feel bound to interpret or understand it, bring it into the noise/sound/meaning of an answer.<sup>16</sup>

If, then, we hear the sound of the question as mere inchoate noise in relation to the sound of its answer, we can go one step further back and say the speculative question itself emerges like noise out of silence, while its possible answers may be thought of as embodiments of fully-formed sound, rational meaning, the harmonies of music. That is, from the silence of pre-thinking emerges the exploratory, pre-formed, pre-rational noise of the question, and out of the question arises the more fully-formed (fully-thought) answer. While we might interpret Josephine’s singing as the self-expression (like singing and

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<sup>15</sup> In “Becoming Mole(ular), Becoming Noise” I have interpreted this in terms of Serres’ chaos and communication theory, as developed in books like *The Parasite* and *Genesis*.

<sup>16</sup> By assuming the optimistic (self-serving) answer to an unanswerable question “Why is the Other silent?”—namely the answer (assumption, guess, speculation) that it is silent because it is not moving, not approaching him—the narrator is able to keep a relatively peaceful (quiet) mind. Now he virtually worships this newfound silence in an ecstatic state which also suggests the “soaring dogs” passage of “Investigations”: “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” (350).



everyday speech, conversation) of our immanent existence, “establishing a locus of order in a non-dimensional space” (Bogue 17), this singing (this music) remains at the level of noise, which is why, like breathing, it is not understood by the others to be “music” at all. In the midst of a silent space a noisy, childlike singing has erupted. We could take the noise encountered by the narrator-mole in a similar way, though here the problem for the mole (as for Josephine’s audience) is primarily that of listening: the narrator’s “refrain” becomes in effect his mode of *listening* to the pattern of noise/silence that emerges from his enemy (and/or from his double, from himself), that is, his mode of listening to the Other’s refrain which comes from *outside* his own territory.

And this already points us toward the third Deleuzian mode of the refrain as an “opening toward the cosmos.” But the narrator-mole’s listening-refrain as silent refrain, as a *ritournelle* or repetition of silence, is also his exploratory mode of speculative questioning. The silent music of this questioning is the music of its own emergence from silence into noise. This exploration of a space or world (*Umwelt*) through questioning is already a projection of possible futures, possible answers, possible explanations of what one hears, just as symphonic music seems to be always expanding as it feels its way toward sense and meaning. Yet as Deleuze says the possible answers can only point back to the questionability of the question itself, maintaining or suspending it in this “musical” state of questionability, or widening it into an ever more labyrinthine and encompassing question.

### Speculative and Ironic Questioning in “Investigations”

If in “The Burrow” the questionability of silent music is tied to a horizontal space or territoriality, to the problem of the ambivalent existence of one’s mirror-Other and/or (in a rhythmic pattern of alternation, of an alternating signal) of oneself, then in “Investigations of a Dog” it is tied to a vertical-hierarchical territorial space, to the problem of the ambivalent ontological “status” of these musical-philosophical dogs in relation to the vertical Other, to heaven and earth, to supra-canine (e.g. human) and sub-canine worlds. Thus as in *The Metamorphosis* the possibility of a trans-canine (trans-human) transcendence arises here, for we have in effect entered into the third mode of the Deleuzian refrain: “a bird sings an impromptu aria at the break of day, and thus opens its territory to other milieus and the cosmos at large.” In fact the soaring dogs’ astounding operatic aria at the opening of the story is repeated with variation by a hunting dog’s love-song at the end—a form of “silent music” that expresses

the equivocal or self-contradictory nature of desire, and can only be heard by the one for whom it is intended—and in both cases the effect on the dumbstruck listener (the narrator-dog) seems to be one of awakening, of opening him (his territory) to other milieus and perhaps even “beyond all milieus.”<sup>17</sup>

In the final scene of “Investigations” the narrator-dog is performing an empirical experiment to determine the “source” of food: having already almost starved himself to death (like the hunger artist), he waits quietly in an open field to see if, when and how food will “appear.” Here he encounters a hunting dog who demands that he go away (wanting any food for himself) while at the same time sexually desiring him.<sup>18</sup> This hunting dog now proclaims:

“My dear little dog, can it be that you really don’t understand that I must [contradict myself]?” I made no answer, for I noticed—and new life ran through me, life such as terror gives—I noticed [...] that in the depths of his chest the hound was preparing to upraise a song. “You’re going to sing,” I said. “Yes,” he replied gravely [...]. “You’re beginning already,” I said. “No,” he said [...]. “I can hear it already [...],” I said, trembling. He was silent, and then I thought I saw [...] that the hound was already singing without knowing it, nay, more, that the melody, separated from him, was floating on the air in accordance with its own laws, and, as though he had no part in it, was moving toward me, toward me alone. [...] The melody [...] was quite irresistible. It grew stronger and stronger; its waxing power seemed to have no limits, and already almost burst my eardrums. But the worst was that it seemed to exist solely for my sake, this voice before whose sublimity the woods fell silent [...]. (313-314)

At the beginning of the story the young narrator’s scientific-philosophical curiosity, his “desire to know,” was enkindled by the mysterious silent music of the “soaring dogs”—before this experience “I had run in darkness [...], blind and deaf to everything, led on by nothing but a vague desire” (280), but now the impossible music “literally knocked the breath out of me [...], my mind could

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<sup>17</sup> Deleuze and Guattari claim in *Kafka* that “the dog in ‘The Investigations’ is deterritorialized by the musical dogs at the story’s beginning, but he is reterritorialized, re-Oedipalized, by the singer-dog of the ending” (36). There is merit in this reading but I tend to see it differently, inasmuch as, first, it is not really clear that the dog at the end has become more “socialized” (now that he is obsessed with “incantation”) and indeed his final speech is about “freedom,” and second, the whole story is about socialization in the sense of our (or dogs’) shared sense of isolation as a species (or “order of being”): the opening beyond our own (or all) milieus actually depends on our seeing the depths of our own ignorance, our own radical finitude. (See the later discussion.) As for this “silent music” that can only be heard by the narrator, see note 2.

<sup>18</sup> The hunting dog is clearly male; the narrator’s gender is more uncertain (or again equivocal), though he /she/it could well also be a (smaller and weaker, if also more intellectual) male.

attend to nothing but this blast of music which seemed to come from all sides [...], surrounding the listener, overwhelming him [...], over his swooning body still blowing fanfares so near that they seemed far away and almost inaudible” (282). But here at the story’s end the hunting dog’s silent love-song pushes the now-aging narrator to a new level of “research”: “I next carried my researches into music” (314). For the hunting dog’s singing has made the narrator more sensitive to the magical “attracting” power of that “incantation, dance, and song” which “serve principally to attract the food from above” (304). Indeed, while heretofore he has been torn between “the science of music” and “the science of nurture”—the former “is accorded greater esteem” than the latter but it “has never penetrated so deeply into the life of the people” (315)<sup>19</sup>—now he sees that the pragmatic ritual of *incantation* can mediate between the two. “A border region between these two sciences [...] had already attracted my attention [...] the theory of incantation” (315).

Incantation in this context suggests the magical power of enchantment as a power of “attraction,” where now the nourishment to be attracted is simultaneously that of food and that of a potential lover. Just as this musical power or force of incantation/enchantment can mediate between music (“pure art”) on the one hand and science (the “science of nourishment”) on the other, Deleuze’s “refrain” is the total “system” or “form” of animals’ communicative, ritualized behavior, which could be approached or understood *via* traditional science (biology, ethnology) or *via* a “musical” approach like that of Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed we must remember that we have been speaking of three aspects, modes or movements of the “refrain”—itself a radically empirical, practical “form of life”—and not of “music” in the proper sense (music as such, music *qua* music, music as, for Deleuze, deterritorialization of the refrain.) This potential congruence between Kafka’s incantation and the Deleuzian refrain is reinforced by the mediating role of ritual in both cases: the narrator-dog’s ritual incantation, the refrain as the totalized pattern of ritual animal behavior.

Perhaps indeed it is as “magical” force that, in the first place, this incantation at the story’s end becomes equivocal or even self-contradictory. On the one hand magic (at least if we don’t “take it seriously”) suggests the supernatural, fantasy, romance, reminding us that this is after all just a story, a

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<sup>19</sup> Shades of “Josephine”: art (like philosophy) is admired, considered “cultured” and “upper-class,” precisely because it has no practical use, is useless, cannot actually “penetrate” (as does food) “into the lives [and bodies] of the people.” Or, it is admired by the people because (like Josephine’s listeners) they cannot understand it. Yet while we may at first think that what is useless in real-life terms may be hard for non-philosophers and non-artists to understand, paradoxically Josephine’s listeners also think (know) that her music is after all *not* music or art at all but rather simple “piping,” breathing, the ground of everyday existence, being-in-the-world.

fictional narrative we are talking about—“pure art,” “pure music,” a deterritorialization or “defamiliarization” of the behavioral refrain (the refrain of everyday action and life) in Deleuze’s sense. And thinking of the story solely as narrative discourse we might be forced to admit that, like “The Burrow” and (even more obviously) “Josephine,” “Investigations” could be purely allegorical, purely a *fable*: that is, all these animals are really just humans, they are “speaking for human beings,” thus there is really no “trans-human” sense or possibility here. Yet on the other hand magic is by definition a force of material and/or physical transformation; even if we most often see this at work in myths, folk tales and fairy tales, transformation is the whole “sense” of magic.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, any sort of mediation or transformation here must be thought of primarily in “vertical” rather than “horizontal” terms. Incantation is after all a praxis, a way of attracting food downward, bringing it down *from above*.<sup>21</sup> Coming back to Deleuze’s third mode of the refrain, even as the bird, dog or human being “opens its territory to other milieus and to the cosmos” it still remains *situated* within its original milieu, is still in effect subject to the first two “movements” of the refrain. Thus in Kafka’s “Investigations,” where the narrator-dog seeks to test his hypothesis that the mysterious nourishment comes down from above by actually watching it appear, there is a clear emphasis on the hierarchical levels within and between milieus, species, orders of being (earthly/heavenly, empirical/metaphysical), even orders of discourse (realistic/fictional, serious/ironic). As for this last pair, whose pattern of correlation with the earlier must remain uncertain, we could perhaps just as well say serious/absurd. For the story’s whole vertical-hierarchical “situation” (narrative space, territory, milieu) is at once very serious and quite absurd:

“The Investigations of a Dog” is narrated by an old hound who has dedicated his life to the subject which has, since their earliest days, preoccupied dog-kind: food. More exactly, inquiring into the origins of food. Kafka’s dogs do not perceive either men or women – although, for

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<sup>20</sup> Thus for Kafka the key transformation may be that of “becoming parable,” as the sage in “On Parables” suggests we do in order to “get rid of all our daily cares” (457). In this way, he says, we “win in reality” even though we “lose in parable.” That is, “becoming parable,” like “incantation,” may be a way of mediating between, equating or “equivocating” actual (real-world) transformation and the purely “allegorical” transformation, displacement or leap of faith.

<sup>21</sup> Not content with the pragmatic notion that “If you have food in your jaws you have solved all questions *for the time being*” (303), the narrator-dog insists on asking: “Whence does the earth procure this food?” (302) He can easily see it’s not true that “the earth brings forth all food.” On the contrary, “the main part of the food that is discovered on the ground [...] comes from above; indeed customarily we snap up most of our food [...] before it has reached the ground at all” (303). Thus “science [...] recognizes two chief methods of procuring food [...]. The scratching and watering of the ground [...] serves to produce both kinds of food [...]; incantation, dance, and song, however, [...] serve principally to attract the food from above” (303-304).

the reader, there is no doubt that men and women are invisibly there and are the most likely source of the food. This blindness is one of the main eccentricities of Kafka's view of the dog view of the world.<sup>22</sup>

The ironic-absurd quality of the dog's investigation into this mysterious matter is based on a contradiction: the investigation is prompted by the dog's "subhuman" blindness, yet at the same time it (the investigation but also the blindness) ironically deflates our own all-too-human pretensions. For just as the narrator cannot figure out where the dogs' food comes from (it is placed on the ground for them by to-dogs-invisible humans), humans wonder and speculate about such things as spirits, gods and/or God, the "meaning of life" and so forth.<sup>23</sup> (And Kafka underscores the analogy by making humans "invisible" to dogs.) Irony is, after all, always the force of a split or difference in meaning, whether horizontal or vertical; in the latter case it tends to foreground hierarchical meaning-levels such that a "lower" level may subvert a "higher" one. Therefore Deleuze says of irony in his *Introduction to Difference and Repetition* that it is the comic mode by which we move (in thought or discourse) up to the highest principles in order to undercut or deflate them.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> From young British novelist Toby Litt's discussion of the story on a commercial website (<http://readers.penguin.co.uk/nf/shared/WebDisplay>) promoting Penguin's new edition of Kafka's *The Great Wall of China*, which includes "Investigations of a Dog." Litt also says here: To write about Kafka is, I would say, to get him wrong. His stories demand interpretation almost as much as they resist it; this is how he tantalizes and disconcerts. And perhaps the most disconcerting thing about Kafka's stories is how short a step, within them, takes one from no-particular- interpretation to a grand, all-encompassing, all-limiting interpretation. '*Forschungen eines Hundes*' was written in the summer of 1922, towards the end of Kafka's life (1883-1924). Translated as "The Investigations of a Dog" it is one of a clutch of stories ("A Fasting-Artist," "The Burrow") which share an amazing density along with what feels like an improvisatory lightness. Kafka, here, is juggling with black holes. [...] [L]ike many of Kafka's stories, [it] gives a strong sense of progressing, sometimes very fast, without actually moving forwards. By the end of the story, the dog – unable to perceive people or understand ownership – is no closer to discovering where his food comes from.

<sup>23</sup> Thus Aristotle says (see the first epigraph) that man's most *truly human function* and highest happiness is "pure contemplation" (speculation), and yet our capacity for this actually *comes from "something divine in us"*—so that we are, compared with the gods, limited and incomplete.

<sup>24</sup> *DAR* 5: "By adopting the [moral] law, a falsely submissive soul manages to evade it and to taste pleasures it was supposed to forbid. We can see this in demonstration by absurdity [*reductio ad absurdum*] and working to rule, but also in some forms of masochistic behavior which mock by submission. The first way of overturning the law is ironic, where irony appears as an art of principles, of ascent towards the principles and of overturning principles. The second is humor, which is an art of consequences and descents, of suspensions and falls." (Cf. "Investigations" 283-84: "But why should [...] the very thing which our laws unconditionally command not be allowed in this one case? [...] Those dogs were violating the law. [...] T]he wretched creatures were doing the very thing which is both most ridiculous and indecent in our eyes; they were walking on their hind legs.[...] They were uncovering their nakedness, blatantly making a show of their nakedness: they were doing that as though it were a meritorious act [...]." Here we may more likely think of Deleuze's "humorous" mode, yet is it not also combined here (is it not perhaps always combined?) with his "ironic" mode? (In *The Logic of Sense*, 248, Deleuze claims that "*humor* is the art of surfaces and of the complex relation

That is to say, the force of mammalian desire has, in this late story, in effect become the force of a “questioning” simultaneously speculative and ironic. While Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony* distinguishes speculative questioning, which digs deep in order to create an open space for the emergence of new answers, new meaning-possibilities, from ironic questioning which deflates, laying bare the emptiness of all possible answers (as in Socratic irony), Deleuze in *Repetition and Difference*, concerned with the same issue and also referring to Socrates in Plato’s *Sophist*, explicitly equates (or “equivocates”) the two question-modes.<sup>25</sup> Thus while the notion of a dog-philosopher, a Platonic trope picked up by Rabelais (see the epigraph) which simultaneously raises dogs to the “highest” human level and makes humans no more than dogs, is at once a very serious philosophical point and a comic-absurd one, we need not necessarily attempt to cut through the absurdity here, through the author’s ironic tone, to get to the “serious” point, the serious issue or question—since the most serious question is ultimately indistinguishable from the ironic one; or, the most serious pursuit of the question to its utmost limits or depths is simultaneously an ironic un-grounding or deflation of the question.<sup>26</sup>

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between the two surfaces.”)

<sup>25</sup> In his doctoral dissertation, *The Concept of Irony: With Continual Reference to Socrates* (1841), Kierkegaard contrasts the mode of “interrogation,” which is neither totally contingent (lacking a projected unity of the *topos*) nor absolutely necessary (in which case the answer simply repeats the question), with the Socratic, purely “ironic” mode:

[O]ne can ask with the intention of receiving an answer containing the desired fullness, and hence the more one asks, the deeper and more significant becomes the answer; or one can ask without any interest in the answer except to suck out the apparent content by means of the question and thereby to leave an emptiness behind. The first method presupposes, of course, that there is a plenitude, the second that there is an emptiness. The first is the speculative method; the second the ironic. Socrates in particular practiced the second method. When the Sophists . . . had befogged themselves in their own eloquence, it was Socrates’ joy to introduce . . . a slight draft that in a short time expelled all these poetic vapors. [Ironic “music”?] [...] Socrates [...] circumnavigated the whole empire of intelligence and found the whole domain to be bounded by an Oceanus of illusory knowledge. [Ironic “exploration”?] (Hong 35-38)

On the other hand, Deleuze in *DAR* seems not to make such a clear distinction between these two modes of questioning. “Irony consists in treating things and beings as so many responses to hidden questions, so many cases for problems yet to be resolved” (63): irony is now itself a force that opens each “answer” into a deeper question back behind it, into the field of possibility of the question, into its own “un-grounding” in/as a “moment of difference” (68). This un-grounding of any possible answer by opening (speculatively, ironically) the background question behind it, which will in turn be opened/ungrounded to reveal a deeper-lying or perhaps more encompassing question, arguably begins from a kind of Heideggerian perspective—“the discovery of the question and the problematic as a transcendental horizon, as the transcendental element which belongs ‘essentially’ to beings, things and events” (195)—yet moves beyond it (195-196).

<sup>26</sup> And this same irony is, in its force of deflation, also (at least potentially) a force of reversal: the dogs may after all be “higher” or “better” than humans in certain ways. Their “silent music” might suggest a sense of hearing, or even a sense of smell, which goes far beyond that of vision-dominated humans. (Dogs can hear much higher frequencies than humans and their *sense of smell*—which is after all what we might most naturally tend to associate the dog’s curiosity or “investigative instinct” with (“He’s on the scent,” “He’s sniffing out the truth”)—is legendary.

Of course, there may be a certain correlation or congruence between an interpretive approach to the story which takes it in the first place as an equivocal discourse of ironic/speculative questioning and one which takes it as a discourse that is ambiguously philosophical-scientific and fabulist-magical; whereas speculation is clearly the driving force of philosophy-science, irony might be taken (in its “original” sense) as a purely linguistic-literary trope, praxis or effect. In any event, it seems clear that this questioning of (the origins of) “food”—the source of our own life-force, our human/canine existence—can easily be extended allegorically into a questioning, on the more abstract or metaphysical plane, of the meaning of our own (human/canine) life or existence, and/or of our ontological “status,” our human/canine “situation.” The latter can easily be extended, in turn, into a questioning of questioning itself, that is, a questioning of the ultimate “point” of questioning, where suddenly it becomes questionable in another (more ironic, “deflating”) sense in a world where what we really need to do—and especially if we are mice, moles and dogs, in which case eating constitutes a very substantial part of our existence, of the meaning of our lives—is to eat and where eating is something we never need to think about or “question.” Nietzsche wonders, at the opening of *Beyond Good and Evil* (Kaufmann 199-202), why we always want to ask “why?”: he argues that this drive or will to truth is ultimately *not* a metaphysical one (this is only its sublimated form) but an expression of the life-force, the survival instinct. Thus there is a practical-empirical “value-for-life” in knowing things like “Why does X fall?” and even (“originally”) in being able to answer such hyper-sublimated questions as “Why do I exist?” On a Nietzschean reading, then, we might deflate this highest-level, most sublimated “questioning of questioning” to lay bare its original basis, the “questioning of food,” and Kafka too may be ironically deflating the pompous human questioning of the transcendental origins of our existence,” of the nature of God, of God’s existence, since all we really need to know is “Where can we find food?”—though again, Kierkegaard’s ironic deflation is for Deleuze indistinguishable from speculative un-grounding.

Thus the “divine” meaning of food, its ultimate “mysteriousness,” must finally be taken both seriously and ironically. Our very life depends on food, our questioning into its origins is a questioning into the origins of life itself (opening us into the trans-human realm, or for Kafka’s dogs the trans-canine realm of the

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(A recent study strongly suggests that dogs can detect breast cancer in women, and even more infallibly than traditional tests.) And there is indeed a sense in which Kafka seems to invite our substitution or rearrangement of his “displaced” senses here: “Even more eccentric is that his dogs, so far as we are shown, have no dominating sense of smell. When they wish to communicate, they don’t sniff, they bark; when they water the ground, it is not to spread news of their sexiness, but to bring forth food.”(Toby Litt; see note 22.)

invisible human food-providers) and thus into what we can never finally know; yet in another sense we know very well where our actual, physical food comes from, and it would be absurd to question *this* in a (strictly) “speculative” manner. That Kafka liked to imagine an “invisible source” of food, that he was aware of food’s “divine power” in both a serious and ironic way, is clear from a letter written by him nine years before “Investigations,” in 1913:

I have often thought that the best mode of life for me would be to sit in the innermost room of a spacious cellar with my writing things and a lamp. Food would be brought and always put down far away from my room, outside the cellar’s outermost door. The walk to my food, in my dressing gown, through the vaulted cellars, would be my only exercise. I would then return to my table, eat slowly and with deliberation, then start writing again at once. And how I would write! From what depths I would drag it up! Without effort! For the most extreme concentration knows no effort. The trouble is that I might not be able to keep it up for long, and at the first failure... would be bound to end in a grandiose fit of madness. (Cited by Litt, see note 22)

Here this “manna from heaven” is taken as the nourishing source of the writer’s physical health and energy, now sustained at a level enabling him to write with intense concentration, and/or of his mental-spiritual “inspiration.” But again we fall into a sort of (meta-allegorical if not quite infinite) regress, since what he is writing is often of the most highly “questionable” nature, thus tending simultaneously to point (as the speculative question) beyond itself to positive answer-possibilities and (as the ironic question) to deflate or negate itself.

### Silence, Noise, and Overflowing Ignorance

In all three late animal stories, it could of course be argued that far from opening the animal-narrator—and/or its intra-species “others” (or in the case of “The Burrow” perhaps simply its own alter-ego), and/or its/his/her human readers—into a trans-species (trans-canine, trans-human) world, the main thrust of the tales is on the contrary their sense of hopeless isolation, of entrapment within one’s own species with no chance of understanding what lies beyond it. Thus Josephine never mentions non-rodent creatures, the mole-narrator (who seems totally alone) is trying in vain to know “what’s out there,” and the dog-narrator shares with Josephine a powerful sense of same-species solidarity. Indeed he asserts: “Only with the assistance of the whole dog world could I



begin to understand my own questions. [...] For what is there actually except our own species? To whom but it can one appeal in the whole wide and empty world? All knowledge, the totality of all questions and all answers, is contained in the dog” (289-290).

The only problem with this interpretation is that, though the human author (famed for his sense of overwhelming isolation and alienation) constantly “sets it up” he also constantly subverts it by appealing to a hierarchical pattern, a series of epistemological levels which extend *beyond* the (in this case) canine species. Thus, as we have just seen, the dogs’ blindness in not knowing the source of “nourishment” parodies, ironizes, deflates the analogical human blindness of not knowing what the meaning of life is—for the “nourishment” the Hunger Artist seeks is after all something like “knowing the meaning of life” and/or “knowing God.” And in “Investigations” this sense of epistemological uncertainty, of “not knowing” extends inward as well as outward: “If one could but realize this knowledge, if one could but bring it into the light of day, if we dogs would but own that we know infinitely more than we admit to ourselves! Even the most loquacious dog is more secretive of his knowledge than the places where good food can be found” (290). (“Secretive of one’s knowledge” here becomes the logical or epistemological equivalent, paradoxically and ironically, of “secretive of one’s ignorance.”) In other words, all three stories place us within a sort of trans-human domain, if for no other reason than that we (as humans) apparently share with all creatures an ignorance—of what is both outside and inside ourselves, above and below ourselves—a sense of isolation, of being capable of really caring (like the dog-narrator) about our own species. The trans-human comes into play through a limitation, lack, loneliness, self-negation which is itself “universal”—common (we assume without really knowing) at least to all organic life-forms.<sup>27</sup>

Yet “secretive of one’s ignorance” (hiding one’s ignorance from others and/or from oneself) *can* also mean “secretive of one’s knowledge”: perhaps we *do* know more than we think we know, perhaps without knowing that we know it. And in “Investigations” this ambivalence, this paradoxical knowing/not-knowing what is “beyond ourselves” (the Other) is equated with both silence (the impossibility of knowing or deep concealment of what is known) and a sort

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<sup>27</sup> If we saw this movement through a sort of double-negation as a human-animal (or trans-human) fluctuation, then we might tie it to Deleuze and Guattari’s “oscillation” of Kafka’s animals between their own “becoming-inhuman and an all-too-human familiarization” (*Kafka* 36). On the other hand, the Deleuzian refrain of *ATP* as the *unthinking* or *mindless* communicative behavior (intra- but sometimes inter-species, as with warning signals) of animals is by definition a “universal form” of animal life such that this “unthinking” takes on a positive (Nietzschean, life-affirming) sense of everyday existence, of actual communication.

of noisy questioning (the possibility of knowing, the on-going desire to know):

Now one might say: “You complain about your fellow dogs, about their silence on crucial questions; you assert that they know more than they admit, more than they will allow to be valid, and that this silence, the mysterious reason for which is also, of course, concealed, poisons existence and makes it unendurable for you [...]” [And yet] I am a dog; in essentials just as locked in silence as the others, stubbornly resisting my own questions [...] which] only serve as a goad to myself; I only want to be stimulated by the silence which rises up around me as the ultimate answer. [...] Every dog has like me the impulse to question, and I have like every dog the impulse not to answer. [...] We [philosopher-dogs] are the dogs who are crushed by the silence, who long to break through it, literally to get a breath of fresh air; the others seem to thrive on silence. [...] One question sounds like another; it is the intention that counts, but that is often hidden even from the questioner. [290-297]

Here the mode of questioning is perhaps a noisy transition-state (movement) between the silence of not-knowing and the silence of an absolute knowledge that is hidden, “secretive”; while the ordinary (non-philosopher) dogs are content with the silence in either or both of these senses, the narrator-dog can’t stop questioning. But this silence might then be that of a state *preceding* the beginning of questioning (a state in which ordinary dogs/humans may be happy to linger), or it might be the silence that follows an unanswerable question, the silence of the finality of “no possible answer.” In either case it contrasts with the noisy reaching-out of the (philosopher-dog’s) question, the ongoing, lingering noise of questioning. And yet if the question is unanswerable, then we have not only the absolute concluding silence of “no possible answer” but simultaneously this ongoing presence of the question, indefinitely or infinitely lingering precisely because it is unanswerable. The (final) silence becomes in this case indistinguishable from noise; perhaps it is the “rising silence”—“the silence which rises up around me as the ultimate answer”—that surrounds the narrator-dog, the rising silence of a speculative music.<sup>28</sup> The discourse of questionability is then a noisy discourse, one that gathers itself out of silence

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<sup>28</sup> Or, a variation on the same “reading” (or “listening”) perhaps: the unanswerable “riddle-question” is indistinguishable from the “rhetorical question” whose answer we already know because it is nothing but the (inevitable, pre-determined) repetition of the question itself....in which case again it is nothing but a sort of background noise (the chaotic confusion of question-mode with answer-mode) or, again, of speculative music. (Also, if there were only noise then noise might itself become indistinguishable from silence.)

into an incipient questioning but never fully reaches the solidified or completed form of sound, sense, meaning.<sup>29</sup> As such we might think of it (hear it) as a sort of speculative music, moving between silence and sound, different from that “silent music” of the soaring dogs and hunting dog; the latter, which can only be heard by the narrator, and perhaps too by the reader, has a sense of finality, of hidden and/or manifest, absolute form.

But the above passage begins with the words “Now one might say: ‘You complain about your fellow dogs, about their silence on crucial questions [...]’” so that we are also left wondering about the uncertain identity, the indefinitely wide range of reference of this “one” which seems to include human as well as canine “readers,” a human as well as canine “population at large.” And thinking of the explicitly social context given the whole issue of questionability here, one also may speculate on the possibility of taking this music of silence-emerging-into-noise or noisy silence as the “babel” of a very large number of people (dogs, mice, moles, birds), all having intelligible conversations with one another, as heard from a very great distance—like the noise of humans as heard by the gods “above” in *Gilgamesh*: “In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour. Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in council, ‘The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel.’ So the gods agreed to exterminate mankind” (Lawall 41).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> A close reading of the above passage from “Investigations” also reveals a certain gap or self-contradictoriness in its “narrative logic”; that is, there may be also a kind of “background noise” in the trans-logical elisions or “slides” of the text itself.

<sup>30</sup> This amazing *Gilgamesh* passage predates (by several centuries) and clearly influences (during the Babylonian Captivity, 586-539 B.C., when the Jews probably wrote the Pentateuch) the crucial Genesis passages on the Flood and the Tower of Babel, in both of which Kafka was very interested. (In “The Great Wall of China” the trope of the Biblical Tower plays an important role, and in one of his Fragments the author proclaims that “We are digging the pit of Babel”; see Politzer, 321.) It seems he would have enjoyed the absurdity, perhaps ironic deflation of the idea that it was the disruptive noise of human speech, rather than mankind’s “becoming evil” (as in the *Genesis* version) from God’s point of view, that led the gods to destroy the world with a flood. But in the context of “Investigations” we might picture that higher, divine world (level) of gods as being now unable to “understand” (decipher) human speech, just as the gods/God must finally remain “inscrutable” to man. This is a perspective which, we assume, undercuts or deflates (in a way perhaps reminiscent of Rabelais) that of Aristotle in the *Ethics*. (See the two epigraphs.) For here again it is the ignorance, at each particular level, of other levels which is shared, thereby allowing for a certain “commonality” among levels. Thus Politzer, describing Kafka’s “architectural rather than musical” style, speaks of the author’s “sentences of great latitude, symmetrically structured, phrase following phrase with inexorable necessity, moving along in seemingly unending circles until the whole edifice is broken off suddenly, pointing to further heights which it can no longer reach. The Tower of Babel is one of Kafka’s favorite images” (243-244). This sense of “fragmentation” is universal, or rather, it extends indefinitely.

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