

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 canine whose speculations on the origins of "nourishment"—the dogs' food is apparently placed on the ground for them by humans who remain invisible—illuminate, parody, or ironically deflate mankind's own speculations on the gods/God and the meaning of life. In the story "silent music" plays a central role: at the beginning the soaring dogs motivate, with their silent performance, the young narrator-dog to commence his metaphysical "investigations"; at the end another dog's love song, heard only by the narrator, prompts him to turn to the study of the "science of incantation," which he feels can mediate between the science of music and that of nourishment. Here I approach this labyrinthine, parabolic tale *via* an interpretation, which compares the exploratory, expansive, opening force of speculative questioning with that of music. 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*. Kafka seems to suggest a *condition* which is further explored *via* my speculative-music reading: that of the apparent ignorance, thus isolation of each level (e.g. canine, human) in the order of being together with the implied commonality of this universal ignorance—even if this is a commonality (a "common refrain") we cannot know or understand.

Keywords

Kafka, "Investigations of a Dog," nourishment, desire, speech, silence, Deleuze, refrain, music, meaning of life, speculative, ironic questioning

[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 should we affirm to be distinctively human . . . in the full meaning of the word? . . . [T]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 [is] perfect happiness for a man. . . . [P]erfect 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* 10, 267-77

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* 8

We already see in *The Metamorphosis* that music is for Kafka a sort of “unknown nourishment,” something that can satisfy our spiritual (if not also physical) 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 playing the violin. He seems to crave some sort of transcendence or spiritual rebirth, or perhaps he simply desires—is it the same thing?—a literal (physical) transfiguration, a return to the “higher order” of the human world. More specifically, what he wants to become is also that which mysteriously “nourishes” him: “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 130-31).¹ Perhaps we think it means: “Must he not

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

then really still have been human?" But it might also mean: "Such a powerful effect suggests that the listener must be a non-human or trans-human being."

The transcendent (trans-human) music—non-human and inanimate though arguably still "organic" inasmuch as it is played on a wooden instrument—of the violin contrasts with Gregor's subhuman (trans-human) insect-voice, itself set in the context of other human voices and sounds: "'That was no human voice,' said the chief clerk in a voice noticeably low beside the shrillness of the mother's. . . . The words (Gregor) uttered were no longer understandable, apparently, although . . . 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). Yet 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; from a wider, more relativistic perspective we could just as well take human speech/nature as a "warping" of (pristine) animal speech/nature.

In fact we must set the fantastic strangeness (foreignness) of Gregor's insect-voice within a wider context, a wider range that includes at one end the (fantastic or science-fictional, that is, possible-future) "moth-voices" talking to Richard Gere on the phone in *The Mothman Prophecies* and the musical voice of the "beautiful" extraterrestrial woman singing to Bruce Willis in *The Fifth Element*, and at the other end the (realistic or perhaps surrealistic) "abnormal humanness" of human coughs and perhaps even singing voices as well as the sounds/voices of inanimate objects. In the early short piece "Great Noise" Kafka says: "I sit in my room, in the headquarters of the noise of the entire apartment. I hear all the doors slamming. . . . The apartment door is unlatched, rasping like a catarrhal throat, then opens further with the singing of a female voice, and finally closes with a dull, male thud, which is the most inconsiderate sound of all" (Neugrochel 17). This opening/closing door even passes through a gendered *rhythm*: from (male or androgynous?) catarrhal rasping—and here again we could just as well look at it the other way around and say that slightly "diseased" human voices can have the creaking sound natural to doors—to female singing (at the door's apogee) to the finality of a "male thud."

These non-, off-, or trans-human "musical voices" would also need, of course, to be contrasted with Kafka's fully "natural" voices expressing animal life-force. The caged panther's cry, for instance, clearly expresses this 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 (and here "male") 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).² Here of course we assume, though perhaps we cannot be sure, that the sort of "transcendent meaning" the artist was looking for is 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 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 becomes "too loud") since the animals themselves are under the control of humans, and on the other hand warped and neurotic (in a different way) human voices. But we also have the music of Gregor's sister's violin, which is perfect in its classical (all-too-human, and so in some way also repressed) rationality and therefore, at least in Platonic terms, also points to a "higher" trans-human world (for Plato one of a "pure beauty" indistinguishable from "pure logic"); yet once again all such assumptions must be placed against a relativistic ("up is down") background. And this is precisely the background we would need to keep in mind when approaching Kafka's late and perhaps final story, "Investigations of a Dog." Indeed here, as in his other late "animal" stories, "The Burrow" and "Josephine, or the Mouse Singer," the author seems to be moving toward more explicitly abstract and philosophical themes. In these late stories we more fully enter the animals' own world of thinking/speaking/ singing,

² 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."

and here their “language” is clearly the only one—or at least it is superior to all other possible languages. Thus in “Investigations” the narrator-dog, 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 this story the “transcendent” music of the soaring dogs’ singing can most easily be compared with that “unknown nourishment” the hunger artist never finds in this life, and which Gregor hears (or thinks he hears) in his sister’s violin, though it is something he can never “have.” “Investigations” is more explicitly philosophical precisely because we can take its 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 here with the exploratory force of a trans-human and, I will suggest, “speculative” music. There may be at least three closely interwoven levels on which we can make this music-questioning connection. On the first (narrative-opening) level, hearing “silent music” (his *puzzlement* by this music) is what first prompts the young narrator-dog to commence his scientific-philosophical researches (investigations, questionings) into the possible origins of food, of physical but also spiritual nourishment. On the second (continuous-through-the-narrative) level, hard to really distinguish from the first, the nature of the narrator-dog’s own questioning is itself “musical.” And on the third (narrative-closing) level, which perhaps encompasses the first two levels and/or logically follows from them, his investigations finally lead the aging narrator to see the importance of magical/religious “incantation” as a way of bringing nourishment down to the earth, to the *ground* “from above”—from heaven/the gods/God but more specifically, in this ironic context, from human masters.³

³ In primitive “religious” thinking (that is, in primitive thinking), “nature spirits” were signs or expressions of “magic” (powers), of “religion” (gods), and of natural organic “rhythms” (music): such distinctions were not so clearly drawn. Thus, rather than approaching this story *via* Platonic or Christian notions of music’s (transcendent) “divinity,” I will be assuming a context closer to that of Deleuze and Guattari on “natural music” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (hereafter *ATP*): “‘The territory regroups all the forces of the different milieus in a single sheaf constituted by the forces of the earth’ (*ATP* 321). Every territory has a center of intensity where its forces come together, a center that is at once within the territory and outside it, like the kingdom of God. . . . (Deleuze and Guattari argue that religion is something common to animals and humans, and that in both it is related to the territorial gathering of forces)” (Bogue 22).

Another way of approaching the story, more strictly biology-based than the Deleuzian approach, would be an Uexküllian one. (See Ji-Pui Chien’s essay, “From Animals to Humans:

The young dog's philosophical curiosity, his eagerness to "step back" and reflect on the meaning of his own existence, is first excited 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, emphasis added)⁴

This silent music might represent something like our own life-force, our own existence—itself a "creative gift" the appears out of nothingness (silence). The young dog has always taken his existence for granted, has never "stepped back" to see how incredible it is. Yet suddenly this silent music of a purely immanent canine existence becomes "questionable" to the still-youthful dog-narrator; its mystery or

Uexküll's *Umwelt* as Read by Lacan and Canguilhem," in this issue of *Concentric*, 47-71.) This suggests itself in the first place due to Uexküll's (and Lacan's and especially Canguilhem's) emphasis on an animal's inward-turned isolation within its own environment, combined with the possibility of its "breaking beyond" itself (see the conclusion of this paper). In Canguilhem this breaking-beyond involves an organism's "extension" through a series of intermediary communicative or "symbolic spaces," which may combine to form a more widely extended *inter-species space*. Interestingly, Uexküll also suggested that an animal's own (isolated or inward-turned) understanding may be (from the human perspective) "magical," which could be one way of interpreting the dog-narrator's belief that food appears on the ground (not *via* the humans who put it there, who are invisible to him, but) through the *force of magic*: "Uexküll at one point comments that if a dog can be trained at all, it is only because it has mistaken the offered object—his master, for example—for something magical that has been functioning in its *Umwelt* cycle (67). (See the later discussion.)

⁴ The passage invites a Deleuzian reading of this "music" as "deterritorialized refrain." See the previous note and the later discussion of "The Refrain" in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

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). The pure “otherness” of this silent music initiates 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, 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.⁵ (See the epigraph from Aristotle’s *Ethics*).

But to reflect on the meaning of our own existence is already to reflect on that which “nourishes” it, gives rise to it, and makes it possible, and the origin of (physical and spiritual) “nourishment” now becomes the narrator’s main object of “study.” This is strange inasmuch as, while the dog seems to already have implicitly or unconsciously realized that “silent music” *is* this nourishment (for it is what has initially “nourished” him in his new life as a philosopher), he does not explicitly think *again* about music (remains “blind” or “deaf” to it perhaps) until the end of the story, where he turns to the study of “incantation.” This gradual development or emergence of what was at first hidden, implicit, in germinal or silent form might be seen as a sort of Hegelian movement of self-reflection, one which arguably pervades and guides the narrative itself and which here brings together (identifies) the three “moments” of music, existence, and nourishment: the impossibility of “music out of emptiness” (performed by representatives of the canine species) causes the dog to reflect on his own (on all dogs’) existence, which already means reflecting on the source or *ground* of this existence, which means reflecting on that which nourishes life—and yet he must already “know” that this is (silent) music.⁶

Thus the dog now becomes obsessed with knowing whence comes this (physical and spiritual) nourishment, which is the ground and source of life. Again,

⁵ Here please see the epigraph from Aristotle’s *Ethics*.

⁶ Of course, this may not be a serious form of Hegelian or off-Hegelian “logic” but something more like a parody or ironic deflation of any such logic, a “circular logic,” a running around in circles and biting one’s own tail. Such a comic reading fits the absurd context or “scene” of the story: all dogs think the appearance of physical food on the ground is, like silent music, something magical, for the humans who (like invisible gods or God) put it there for the dogs remain invisible to them. On the “physical” side, then, *this* is the mysterious origin of food, which the narrator is investigating. But this physical side is (for the dogs) already the “spiritual” side, and the absurd scene clearly also has a serious (allegorical, parabolic) meaning in terms of “orders of being.” Thus we see the almost symphonic complexity of the games Kafka is playing here.

Kafka is playing with a self-reflexive strategy here. 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).⁷ But if questioning is a form of desire then so is music—as an 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 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 "thing-in-itself" (for Kant *noumenal*) 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,

⁷ 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?

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:⁸

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 261-63)

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 “pointed to” by the sister’s violin music in *The Metamorphosis* may seem to imply a “transcendent” context, one closer to German idealism and (in reaction) Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the unknown nourishment of “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 be further illuminated by the

⁸ 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*.”

Deleuzian views of both music and questioning—although it seems Deleuze does not directly associate these two themes (or modes) in his own work.⁹

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

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari speak of all organic life (and in an extended sense the whole world) as a network of “desiring machines.” In “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. Ronald Bogue begins his discussion of the Deleuzian theory of music by pointing out the limitations of the traditional Western (at least since the 17th century), classical, “harmonic” understanding of music. He quotes here from Susan McClary’s Afterword to Jacques Attali’s *Noise*:

[I]t 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). (qtd. in Bogue, *Deleuze on Music* 13)

The point is that music is a fundamentally interpersonal, social activity, one 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 and inter-species communication, communication between organism and (organic and non-organic) environment. Thus we are, like birds or

⁹ Thus I shall in effect be expanding on, and drawing tentative connections between, certain themes in Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition*, hereafter *DAR*) and in Deleuze and Guattari (*ATP*).

crickets, intuitively able to appreciate and “understand” music. Bogue contrasts the Western “classical” idea of music—which comes from the Pythagorean and Platonic Logos, ancient Greek notions of mathematical-musical harmony, the Ptolemaic “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 or mechanical but natural and organic) of such expressions, such enactments. Deleuze and Guattari suggest three cases or “levels” of the refrain:

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, *Deleuze on Music* 16-17)¹⁰

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 “deterritorializes” the refrain: now we are looking at the purely *intentional* force of expression of these interactions between organism and environment, divorced from their fully realized “expression” in the

¹⁰ Bogue is here summarizing and clarifying Deleuze/Guattari’s discussion in *ATP* (312).

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 purely “linguistic” thing, medium or force. Thus only in a poetic (as opposed to social-interactive) context would it matter that “What’s your name?” rhymes with “Where’s the game?”; indeed, in a poem the sound-value of a 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. Bogue explains:

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, *Deleuze on Music* 23-24)

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze/Guattari also discuss this transformational process of becoming-animal in terms of the deterritorialization of (human or animal) “voice” or “sound” as pure “noise,” and it is the close connection in Kafka between sound/music/voice and the blurred boundaries between human and animal “life-forms” which especially concerns us here.¹¹

¹¹ On this, Bogue also says, “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 of sounds . . . and, as figurative sense, that presides over the

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. (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, “The Burrow” and “Josephine the Singer, or 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 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, *Deleuze and Guattari* 104-05; Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 20, 22, 37-41).

Mouse Folk.” 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 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).¹²

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.

¹² 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 also might suggest the foreclosure of the transcendent realm of “divine inspiration”—but only by alluding to the dangerous allure of silence itself.

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,” 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 non-dimensional space” (Bogue, *Deleuze on Music* 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. He then continues:

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. (360-61)

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 but also fits an old mystical tradition, and 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.”¹³ 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 (rational) understanding.¹⁴

Perhaps then the “questionability” of the logic here, of the discourse, may be the questionability of the (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. 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 somehow congruent with 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, *Deleuze on Music* 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

¹³ Zarathustra speaks to his listeners, showing them “all the steps to the overman”: “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” (Kaufmann, *Portable Nietzsche* 136).

¹⁴ 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.)

“eating,”¹⁵ 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, *Deleuze on Music* 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 the narrator himself—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*, an infolded maze, multiplicity or rhizome and—closely related, I think, to this notion of the rhizome—a question-space or “space of questionability” (3, 39, 41, 96), here explicitly perceived or “marked” in terms of noise:

. . . it was an almost inaudible whistling noise that wakened me. I 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. . . . (343-48)

¹⁵ 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 indrawing 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).

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.¹⁶ 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): 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 metaphysical questions (“What am I?”) when their meaning *as questions* is understood, since such questions by their very nature express what is not now known 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

¹⁶ 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 latter discussion.

possibility of there being “questions and answers” on a deeper, perhaps ontological level.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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 and rational meaning—musical harmonies. 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 everyday speech, conversation) of our immanent existence, “establishing a locus of order in a non-dimensional space” (Bogue, *Deleuze on Music* 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; it becomes his mode of listening to the

¹⁷ 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*.

¹⁸ 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). The final image is striking: “silence flows from fountains”; it is material (sound) and immaterial (silence).

Other's refrain which comes from *outside* his own territory (even if this Other is also himself).

The narrator-mole's listening-refrain as silent refrain, as a *ritournelle* or repetition of silence, is then 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"

And this already points us toward the third Deleuzian mode of the refrain as an "opening toward the cosmos." 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."¹⁹

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari claim in *Kafka* "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, especially insofar as (thinking of music as deterritorialized refrain) it suggests that the central, "continual questioning" part of the story is also its properly "musical" part, that once the narrator becomes explicitly focused on music as a

In this not-quite-final scene 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.²⁰ 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. . . . (313-14)

At the beginning of the story the narrator dog had “run in darkness . . . blind and deaf to everything, led on by nothing but a vague desire” (280), but then the impossible silent music of the soaring dogs “literally knocked the breath out of me . . . [and] my mind could 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). And here at the story’s end the hunting dog’s silent love-song

socially pragmatic instrument (incantation) he is returning to the (story’s) “refrain.” However, it is not really clear that the dog at the end has become more “socialized” or even “sexualized,” and indeed his final speech is about “freedom”; also, the whole story is about socialization in the sense of our (the dogs’) shared sense of isolation as a species (or “order of being”). This opening beyond our own (or all) milieus actually depends on our seeing the depths of our own ignorance, our own radical finitude. As for this silent music that can only be heard by the narrator, see note 2.

²⁰ The hunting dog is clearly male; the narrator’s gender is less certain (more equivocal), though he/she/it could well also be a (smaller and weaker, if also more intellectual) male.

pushes the now-aging narrator to a new level of “research”: “I next carried my researches into music” (314)—which again seems absurd inasmuch as this is really the research he *has* been doing all along, though (apparently) without realizing it. 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). He now sees that 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)²¹—and that the pragmatic ritual of *incantation* can mediate between the two. “A border region between these two sciences . . . had already attracted my attention to . . . 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) as well as *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 fictional narrative we are talking about—“pure art,” “pure music,” a deterritorialization or “defamiliarization”

²¹ 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.

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 even think 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.²²

Of course, any sort of mediation or transformation here must be thought of primarily in "vertical" rather than "horizontal" terms. Incantation is after all praxis, a way of attracting food downward, bringing it down *from above*.²³ 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 "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), and 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:

²² Deleuze and Guattari speak of the "oscillation" of Kafka's animals between their own "becoming-inhuman and an all-too-human familiarization" (*Kafka* 36). But even the "all-too-human" world of literature (myth, allegory, parable), Kafka likes to remind us, has its radical (unthinkable) ruptures and transformations, like that of "becoming-parable": this is what 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" itself, may be a way of mediating between, equating or "equivocating" actual (real-world) transformation and the purely "allegorical" transformation, displacement or leap of faith.

²³ 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 . . . [while] *incantation, dance, and song* . . . *serve principally to attract the food from above*" (303-04, emphasis added).

“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 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.²⁴

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 all-too-human pretensions, our “vanity.” 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.²⁵ (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.²⁶

²⁴ 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:

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. (pars 1-3, 10)

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze says:

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.²⁷ Thus while

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. (5)

We may compare it with what Kafka writes in “Investigations”:

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 . . . (283-84)

Here we may more likely think of Deleuze’s “humorous” mode, yet is it not also combined (is it not perhaps always combined?) with his “ironic” mode? In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze claims, “*humor* is the art of surfaces and of the complex relation between the two surfaces” (248).

²⁷ 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). It seems that 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

the notion of a dog-philosopher, a Platonic trope picked up by Rabelais (the second 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.²⁸

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/on 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

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 (195-96).

²⁸ 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. (A recent research 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, and I quote Litt again: “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” (my emphasis; see note 23).

out 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*, 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 (Kaufmann 199-202). 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 may be 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 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. (qtd. in Litt, par 13; see note 23)

Here this “manna from heaven” is taken as the nourishing source of both the writer’s physical health and energy, now sustained at a level enabling him to write with intense concentration, and 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 Universal Ignorance

Thus in all three late animal stories it may well seem 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 focus on his/their sense of hopeless isolation, of entrapment within one’s own species with no chance of understanding what lies beyond it. Josephine never mentions non-rodent creatures; the mole-narrator (who seems totally alone), trying in vain to know “what’s out there,” seems to assume that the “Other” behind the wall is another mole, and Kafka suggests that it/he could also be his/its own alter-ego; the dog-narrator shares with Josephine a powerful sense of same-species solidarity, and Kafka (a Prague Jew) clearly is stressing this theme in those two stories. Indeed the dog 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” (289-90).²⁹

The only problem with this interpretation is that, though the human author (famed for his sense of overwhelming isolation, 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 in not (“really”) 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

²⁹ The last sentence beautifully combines comic absurdity (for the human reader) with a serious philosophical point: to get it we need only change the last word to “human.”

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—and a sense of isolation, a capacity for really caring (like the dog-narrator) about our own species. The trans-human comes into play through a limitation, lack, loneliness, self-negation, which we *feel* is itself “universal”—common, we assume without really knowing, to (at least) all organic life-forms.³⁰

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 we do know without knowing that we know. In “Investigations” there is a pervasive ambivalence of knowing/not-knowing what is “beyond ourselves”—that Other, that “unknown nourishment” which clearly has a meaning “beyond” that of physical food, and it is of this beyondness that the silent music which opens and closes the story so powerfully reminds us. This silent music embodies both silence (the impossibility of knowing or deep concealment of what is known) and a sort of noisy speculative 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

³⁰ Perhaps it is the musical (deterritorialized) form of the totalized refrain which expresses this sense of isolation felt at each level in the order of being, combined with the intuitive sense that such a sense of isolation (sadness, loneliness) is universal, pervading all levels (joy, hope).

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. (290-97)

Here the mode of open-ended (finally “vain”) questioning that drives the narrative 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) questions, 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.³¹ The discourse of questionability is then a noisy discourse, one that gathers itself out of silence into an incipient questioning but never fully reaches the solidified or completed form of sound, sense, meaning.³² 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’”

³¹ 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.)

³² 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.

(290), 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-communicative context given to the whole issue of questionability here, one also may speculate on the possibility of taking this music of silence-emerging-into-noise or noise-into-silence as the “babel” of a very large number of people (dogs, mice, moles, birds), all having intelligible conversations with one another, now heard across-species and/or from a very great distance³³—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).³⁴

³³ Perhaps this inter-species “babel” (taken in a more or less positive sense as “life-force”) would be the most totalized form of Deleuze’s “refrain,” that everyday expression of all animal species’ “communicative behavior,” before it is deterritorialized as music. In this case its “musical” form (if only the gods could hear it?) would be, we assume, both more “beautiful” and more “sensible.” Or is it rather its musical form, which turns it into babel? (Perhaps the gods hear it only as music.)

³⁴ 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 he proclaims that “We are digging the pit of Babel”; see Politzer 321.) Surely Kafka would enjoy the absurdity, perhaps ironic deflation of the idea that it was the disruptive noise of human speech, rather than mankind’s “becoming evil” from God’s “point of view” (as in the *Genesis* version), that led the gods to destroy the world with a flood. But in the context of “Investigations,” we might picture that higher, divine world or level of gods as now being unable to “understand” (decipher) human speech, just as the gods/God must finally remain “inscrutable” to man. And yet 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” (243-44). Whether we take it as musical and/or architectural, the point is that this sense of “fragmentation” is universal.

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