

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

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### **Abstract**

Both Serres and Deleuze in effect "deterritorialize" sound as noise, thereby achieving a sort of regeneration of sound (sense). Serres's A-B communication, once it has become too efficient (too rational) and thus (as A-A monologue) entered a state of terminal equilibrium or "information death," must be interrupted by parasitical noise in order for the communication of meaning to be renewed. In Deleuze's "becoming-animal" (or "becoming-molecular," "becoming-multiplicity"), A also becomes B through a sort of "communication." This man-animal interchange is possible due to a "common voice"; one passes into the other through a continuum of intensive states in which both words and things are part of the "sonic block" itself, sound as pure force. In a certain way we have again the regeneration (from noise) of sound (sense). Here I bring into play both views to interpret the latter part of Kafka's "The Burrow," written as the author was (consciously) dying of lung disease. The story's narrator, a mole-like animal building underground tunnels, is disturbed by the sounds of many small creatures in or behind the walls; by the end these coalesce into the single sound (noise) of an unseen "beast" which steadily approaches him. Taking this as an inner-body scene in which the beast is the narrator-author's other—the multiplicity of invading micro-organisms now become(s) death itself against his own life—I read the final ("communicative," noise/silence) interplay or war-game between narrator and other, *via* Serres and Deleuze, in terms of the disjunctive functions of a now deterritorialized "mouth": breathing, eating, speaking and (by extension) thinking. Such an approach lets us reduce the "transcendental" problems in Kafka to "radically empirical" ones; by giving an equal priority to the narrator's own "interruption" of the (approaching) silence/noise of death, it also suggests that death is merely a neutral form of transformation.

### **Keywords**

disease, parasitic noise, silence, interruption, redundancy, deterritorialized sound,  
mouth's disjunctive functions, becoming-animal

We are digging the pit of Babel.  
—Franz Kafka<sup>1</sup>

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

According to Brod, it was written in Kafka's last year, 1923-24. [...] Spann calls it the last piece Kafka ever wrote. [...] It needed the imminence of his death to let him conceive of the Burrow as the most appropriate cipher for his work. On July 5, 1922, he wrote to Brod [...]: "What I have [only] pretended, is really going to happen. [...] I am enough of a writer to have the desire to enjoy all this with all my senses in complete oblivion of myself—not alertness but self-oblivion is the precondition of writing [...]." The tale of Kafka's work at the moment of his dying is "The Burrow." The image of the Tower of Babel has turned [...] into the image of the pit, the grave. Inasmuch as the animal's cave also represents Kafka's tomb, he seems to have intended the story as a way of enjoying his own funeral by participating in it as an eye-witness. (Politzer 321-22)

One of the most striking aspects of the story is the constant, all-too-human desire of the lone protagonist (other underground creatures are heard but not seen by him/her/it) not just to build (and obsessively continue building, rebuilding, "fixing") his fine house but to stand back and, on another, more reflective level, enjoy the feeling of "possessing" it, of having a store of food hidden in the burrow's inmost secret depths, enjoy the sense of security that this brings. Ironically the creature even goes up above ground sometimes, guarding the entrance to his burrow from a concealed position in order to be absolutely sure that no other creature breaks in. By doing this he enjoys a more objectified or totalized sense of possessing his own home

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of Kafka's Fragments; see Politzer 321.

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

(life, work, self), though paradoxically such a “transcendent” vantage point is also dangerous, life-threatening: he is now no longer protected by his home. The reverberating irony of this “situation”—he can only fully understand or appreciate the meaning of “home” when he stands outside of it, being thus no longer “at home”—is somewhat qualified when we read the creative “work” of the tunnels as the writer’s own literary life’s work; the mole’s “standing outside” may also be his attempt to gain an overview of the meaning of his life just as one might try to achieve an encompassing “interpretation” of a literary lifework (or lifetime). For his stories were Kafka’s whole life and his very identity.<sup>3</sup>

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

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

paradise.<sup>4</sup>

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

[...] 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 during my absence [...] (343). [...] Now it is a noise produced by the burrowing of some species of small fry who have infamously exploited my absence [...] (345). [...] But simply by virtue of being owner of this great vulnerable edifice I am obviously defenseless against any serious attack. The joy of possessing it has spoiled me, the vulnerability of the burrow has made me vulnerable; any wound to it hurts me as if I myself were hit. (355)<sup>5</sup>

Here the problem will be, taking burrow as diseased body, not so much that we must stand outside our own house (body, life) or be “absent” from it in order to experience being “in” it, but rather that even when we are “at home” we are still absent. For as the body is increasingly pervaded by a silent disease its “owner” inevitably remains unaware, cannot “hear” the disease, is in this sense (mentally or consciously) “absent.” Is the body’s owner or master then a Cartesian consciousness or soul which must in any case (even when “at home”) be separate from the body itself?<sup>6</sup> The “[...] as if I

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

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

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

myself were hit” makes the burrow-body connection clear yet only through the irony of a certain self-distancing.<sup>7</sup>

But while the mole-narrator realizes his body is vulnerable to attack, indeed is already being ravaged by disease, Kafka does not dwell here (as would Poe) on the macabre details of disease and dying. Instead, he foregrounds the abstract “scientific” problem of listening to and interpreting the noises in order to understand. The author’s narrator (and mouthpiece) asks: what or who is the enemy? Are there one or many enemies? For the multiplicity of tiny noises (creatures) mysteriously converges into the unified and encompassing sound of *one large creature*, or at least the narrator can no longer distinguish between the two kinds of sounds:

Nor is it growing louder [...]. But it is this very uniformity of the noise everywhere that disturbs me most [...] (345). [...] 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 [...]. (348)

Here it is as if that which creates the “oneness” of the “many creatures” is just the unified force of the noise they make: “it is only the noise they make that is greater.” Thus the distinction between “one” and “many” enemies is dissolved<sup>8</sup>: the multiplicity of noises/creatures is simultaneously one large noise/creature, the abstract personification or hypostatization of the “many” as (a necessarily singular) “other.” For we do tend to hear noise as a sort of amorphous yet still homogeneous “background,” one whose “indefinite thingness” now becomes the “it” of a monstrous “otherness.” Perhaps the concept of a pervasive “noise” already suggests, not just amorphous or chaotic homogeneity but a sense of virtual duality (doubleness) with no center or essence. For the creation of noise requires at least two “elements,” air pushed by some

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their own work [...]” (345).

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

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

force (human lungs, wind) and the space or passageway through which it passes, and Kafka's channel dug by the small fry "must have chanced to intersect an older one, the air was caught there, and that produced the whistling noise" (343). At this minimal level we do not need the intervention of strings (as of an instrument) or human vocal cords. This "wind pipe" is a dualism of space and air (wind) with no subject, no one playing (blowing into) the pipe(s); it already suggests the otherness of the purely "virtual," and so reinforces the eerie sense of absent "subject" and "object," of mere noise in place of subjectivity and objectivity.

At the story's end the narrator-mole is listening to the sound of another mole, a "beast" (354) who is somewhere behind/beyond the narrator's burrow-wall digging its own burrow, its own tunnel steadily toward him; this concretized or personified other seems to be the narrator's double, counterpart, virtual equal, no longer the "small fry." The narrator hears the approaching sound not, as he first thinks, of its digging ("burrowing" with the snout) but of its breathing, its "indrawn breath" (354). But he worries that his counterpart will also hear *him*, and thus be able to locate and attack him, just as he perhaps (or so his "other" might think, so that in effect we can no longer distinguish the two) wants to be able through hearing it to locate and thus (potentially) attack it:

So long as I knew nothing about it, it simply cannot have heard me, for at that time I kept very quiet [...]; afterwards [...], perhaps it could have heard me, though my style of digging makes very little noise; but if it had heard me I must have noticed some sign of it, the beast must at least have stopped its work every now and then to listen. But all remained unchanged.  
(359)

Let us consider the possible nature of these two moles (beasts) in terms of the interpretive model I am trying to elucidate here, namely, that "the burrow" is a (human, even the author's) diseased body, so that the various creatures within it are micro-organisms of one sort or another. Then we might think of the "other" mole as a negative, anti-life force (e.g., parasitical virus, bacterium, protozoan) and the narrator-mole as a pro-life force (e.g., defensive "anti-body"); if we could take the latter as life itself we might have life against death, the interplay of life-and-death. On the simplest level of interpretation it makes sense that "life" (a living "body" perhaps) would be listening to the approach of "death" (the inexorable progress of a fatal

illness), whose final arrival it could never actually “hear” so that the wait would indeed be (as in Beckett) *interminable*: “But all remained unchanged.”<sup>9</sup> It also makes sense that only “life” will be (for the most part) quietly listening while “death” just keeps blindly (or deafly) “coming,” not aware of the life it is destroying: “but if it had heard me I must have noticed some sign of it, the beast must at least have stopped its work every now and then to listen. But all remained unchanged.” Still, we have a kind of impasse or paradoxical situation here. When life doesn’t “know” about the approach of death it remains silent (for thinking/knowing is already a kind of “noise”) and thus death cannot hear it, cannot clearly locate/attack it (“So long as I knew nothing about it, it simply cannot have heard me, for at that time I kept very quiet”). Thus it is only when life knows death is coming that death has a chance to hear it (its noisy thinking): “afterwards [...] perhaps it could have heard me [...]” What kind of relationship is this between A and B, life and death?<sup>10</sup>

Here it may help if we look at this whole A-B interaction on another “level.” Kafka has after all emphasized the composite oneness of the many noises/small fry as a single (bestial) noise, just as he has given each of these two “antagonists” in effect its own burrow or body. It thus seems easier to see each mole as itself a single, composite noise-force, which could perhaps still be taken as life-force against death-force. We should also note here, recalling now the image of burrow as (subjectless, objectless) “wind-pipe,” that in fact the mere noise of a body’s “indrawn breath” would be the noise of the burrow-pipe if we took the burrow as larger body, the breath as wind—which might blow either way, either “pushed” or “pulled.” But now we would have two totally autonomous and in effect unrelated moles (beasts), each a kind of microcosm of the burrow itself: this raises the question of how we could have A against B, “life” against “death” if the two forces are essentially “unrelated.” And Kafka does emphasize in effect the “indeterminacy” of each for/to the other—the disjunction of the two which is perhaps the other side of their “virtual doubleness.” And yet death keeps “blindly” coming. But what is “death”? We think of life here as a living body (noisy force of body), but is the only way we could see death as a “dead body” or indeed as any sort of “body” to see it as virtually equivalent to that living

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

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

body which is now (gradually) becoming-dead? This reading might help to clarify not only the intuitively obvious point that the narrator (life, subjectivity) continues to silently listen to the approach of his unhearing/unknowing other-as-death, but also the point that death can only hear/know (the location of) life once life knows/thinks about death. For now the noise of life's thinking/knowing (about death) "spreads over into" the noise of death's thinking/knowing, although death then (as indeed at the story's end) can never stop (like life at first) and "quietly listen." That is, we would now have the larger field of noise as a composite, amorphous, homogeneous, encompassing field of becoming-dead, or becoming-death.

Here then I would like to further develop this reading of the noise-passages in the last part of "The Burrow," including the final passage with its interplay or war-game between the narrator and his Other.<sup>11</sup> Taking as guiding idea the notion that "disease" is "noise," I want to look at these passages<sup>12</sup> in the light of both Serres's analysis of two-way communication and its interruption by the noise of the "parasite"—which becomes in the limit case the renewal or reordering of a blank-chaotic redundancy—and Deleuze's analysis of the deterritorialized (as noise) sound of "becoming-animal" (and/or "becoming-molecular"), his disjunctive functions (breathing, eating, speaking, thinking) of the mouth. Finally I will briefly turn to "The Burrow"'s companion-story, "The Great Wall of China," with its reflection on building Walls and Towers of Babel,<sup>13</sup> its parable of the Imperial Messenger whose message to the reader is infinitely suspended (delayed). A central point of both the Serresian and Deleuzian readings will be that they give us noise not just as a sort of amorphous whole consisting of an incomprehensible multiplicity of parts (particles, moles, molecules<sup>14</sup>) but as a deterritorializing and transformative force—and thus a Kafka for whom disease, death and the infinite delay of meaning could only be (neutral) forms of

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

<sup>12</sup> And here, particularly in the light of Deleuze's notion of the "refrain" in *A Thousand Plateau*, one might even take "passages" in its musical sense.

<sup>13</sup> See note 11.

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



transformation or metamorphosis.

### Serres: Parasitic Noise

“Disease” is a concept suggesting “interruption.”<sup>15</sup> The word literally means “not at ease,” and “ease,” from Old French *aise*, is a reduction from the Vulgar Latin *adjaces*, adjacent, “lying next to and thus easy to reach” (*Webster’s* 403, 439). Serres, in a relatively early formulation of his scientific philosophy based on chaos theory (non-linear dynamics) in *The Parasite* (1982), understands “parasite” (literally “beside the food,” Greek *sitos* is “grain”) as the “noise” that disrupts, interrupts communication between two adjacent or contiguous parties, A and B.<sup>16</sup> The more striking point is that, for Serres (and generally in what is called information theory, also communication theory), the interruption of noise is necessary for the renewal or “reordering” of a dyadic (A-B) communication once it has become too “efficient”; otherwise at the limit-point (saturation point) of maximum efficiency, A-B communication enters a state of terminal equilibrium and information death, a state of excessive or blank-chaotic redundancy.

But how can we look at the story’s final passage, quoted above, in terms of Serres’s notion of a parasitic third term (“noise”) interrupting the communication between A and B, when there seems to be only A and B here, the protagonist-mole (narrator, speaker) and his/her/its other? Though there is no clear third party, in a sense it seems these two have been “always already interrupted,” since the narrator and his counterpart are (apparently) not at all *trying* to communicate; rather, each seems to be living in its own solipsistic “world.” We might therefore see A and B as each itself a manifestation of parasitic noise, each in effect (in Serresian terms) that third party or

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

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

“background” which potentially could disrupt the communication between other A-B dyads. Then we would be dealing here simply with the ongoing interaction (or inter-mixing) between two patterns of “noise.”<sup>17</sup> And while in the final passage A (the “life”-mole) often stops his own digging (breathing, noise) to quietly listen to B (the “death”-mole) while B just keeps on coming, we could (given the virtual equivalence of A and B) also say B stops and listens to an oncoming A.<sup>18</sup> We now would have a cat-and-mouse game (and something more like a proper war-game, that is, an actual war) in which each noise by turns becomes silent in order to hear the other’s noise, in a sort of alternating rhythm. This also more nearly catches our normal sense of one “field” of background noise, which may be very quiet (may appear as silence) from the perspective of *another* field of background noise.

In this scenario then we have A and B as alternating states of noise and silence—A (life) only hears B’s (death’s) “noise” when A is silent, and B only hears A’s (life’s) “noise” when B is silent. Each is then waiting (not to attempt actual communication with the other, but) merely for the other to continue making its noise, which signifies only that the other is there, is still “alive,” or stop making any noise, which may signify that the other is alive and listening or that it is dead. Thus A’s silence from B’s perspective might mean A is (stopped and) listening or dead; B’s silence from A’s might mean B is listening or that it is “dead” in the sense that the oncoming death-force has now been arrested or destroyed. There are then two kinds of “silence”: the “positive” silence of stationery listening—which must be a silent listening or the other will hear as noise the listener’s thinking/worrying—and the “negative” silence of death. The causes of noise, on the other hand, are all variations on moving/working/thinking/speaking, a sort of active force—though of course (depending on whether one is making or listening to the noise) one might think of this noise as itself something either positive or negative, just as one might take silence positively or negatively depending on one’s own perspective. And “The Burrow”’s narrator (it’s “burrower”) generally craves silence<sup>19</sup>—is this only so that he can (noisily) “think”?—just as he always fears the terrible interruption of an invisible noise

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

<sup>18</sup> And in fact Kafka (through his “mouthpiece,” the narrator-mole) does also suggest that B might (at least sometimes) hear A. Or at least A worries about this (and such perhaps premature or precognitive worrying may generate or embody the noise heard by B): “afterwards [...] perhaps it could have heard me [...]” (359).

<sup>19</sup> Apparently not thinking of it as the silence of his own (imminent) death but as the silence of death’s death, the stopping of death’s noisy “work.”

coming from within or behind the walls. In a striking passage toward the end of the story this silence clearly seems to represent the (his) life-force:

Sometimes I fancy that the noise has stopped, for it makes long pauses; sometimes such a faint whistling escapes one, one's own blood is pounding all too loudly in one's ears; then two pauses come one after another, and for a while one thinks that the whistling has stopped forever. I listen no longer, I jump up, all life is transfigured; it is as if the fountains from which flows the silence of the burrow were unsealed. I refrain from verifying my discovery at once, I want to find someone to whom in all good faith I can confide it, so I rush to the Castle Keep, I remember, for I and everything in me has awakened to new life, that I have eaten nothing for a long time, I snatch something [...] and hurriedly begin to swallow it [...]; I listen, but the most perfunctory listening shows at once that I was shamefully deceived: away there in the distance the whistling still remains unshaken. And I spit out my food [...]. (350-51)

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

death that eats life).

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

The nature of the noise, the piping or whistling, gives me much food for thought. When I scratch and scrape in the soil in my own fashion the sound is quite different. I can explain the whistling only in this way: that the beast’s chief means of burrowing is not its claws, which it probably employs only as a secondary resource, but its snout or its muzzle, which [...] must also be fairly sharp at the point. It probably bores its snout into the earth with one mighty push and tears out a great lump; while it is doing that 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 [...] I hear then as a faint whistling. But quite incomprehensible remains the beast’s capacity to work without stopping; [...] always thinking of its object [...]. (354)

Here we get the picture of the beast (and/or narrator himself, its double) digging its tunnels, that is, “burrowing into” the earth with its snout which simultaneously suggests nose and mouth, breathing and eating. That is, though the creature does not literally eat the dirt (as if perhaps it were “food for thought”) the function of eating is nonetheless present, combined with that of breathing in the mode of disjunction or alternation: “It [...] bores its snout into the earth [...] and tears out a great lump; while it is doing that I hear nothing; that is the pause; but then it draws in the air for a new push [...] which [...] I hear then as a faint whistling.” The breathing comes as the beast draws back and momentarily (rhythmically) rests from “eating dirt”; yet (ironically perhaps, and not only because the author is dying of lung disease) the narrator only hears the breathing, not the silent parasitic noise of eating. “Ingestion” is silent destruction of the earth/body; “inhaling” is non-destructive: it is the mere life-force *expressing* itself, yet it is this which makes the whistling noise and so interrupts the narrator’s own (noisy, food-consuming) thinking.

Thus the scenario: A and B (self/other, life/death) are two noises, or alternating patterns of noise/silence, which can rhythmically interrupt each other—as two parts or

halves perhaps of a larger field of noise-silence, life-death. Each can silently listen to the noise of the other's "digging" (working/eating/breathing), but when itself working/digging/thinking it cannot listen.<sup>20</sup> But does this mean that each can only be interrupted by the noise of the other when it is itself already silent, already "listening"? (Once it is listening, has it not already been interrupted and so apprised of the other's existence?) We normally think we are interrupted when silent but also when thinking with great concentration, or thinking "rationally"—for then the order of our thought is interrupted and dispersed by the chaotic disorder of noise. But if such thinking is already (as we have assumed) a form of noise, how can it be interrupted by another noise? (How could it even "hear" the other noise in the first place?) Perhaps the narrator's frequent, paranoid worrying is a more chaotic, noisy level of thinking, while his more "rational" thinking—as when like a soldier, scientist or philosopher (or author) he tries to analyze his existential situation *vis-à-vis* the other(s) within or just beyond his burrow—is relatively more "silent," and thus more susceptible of being interrupted.

I would now like to suggest an interpretation of the burrow-scene in which we think of the narrator's (and author's) rational reflection—often focused on analyzing the other's noise and thus attempting to "locate" the other ("locate death")—as a relatively "silent" A-A dialogue, a self-communication which might then be interrupted by Serres's parasitical noise as third party. (In this case B could now play the role of the "parasite.") Serresian theory gives us a clearer way of picturing the process through which the interplay of two noises or noise-fields (A and B) becomes a single, larger, composite noise-field (noise-force). For Serres, the ideal case of a pure or "maximally efficient" A-B communication tends (at the limit of non-interference or non-interruption) to become A-A communication, that is, a monologue which is "silent" in what Serres's terms the "blank chaos" of its hyper-rationality. Blank chaos is the nonsense (thus noise in another sense) of redundancy, for hyper-rationality becomes redundant: the prime case is the logical tautology "A=A" which, while suggesting the maximum efficiency of (A-A) communication, also tells us nothing we did not already know and is thus nonsensical.<sup>21</sup> At the level of "pure" A-B (= A-A) communication,

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

<sup>21</sup> To test the nonsensicality of logical tautology, ask people: "Did you know this pen is a pen?" Serres's treatment of this issue can be indirectly tied to Derrida's critique of (phal)logocentric thought,

then, there is *no* communication (no exchange of information). This is because the communication of information depends upon a certain amount of “dark-chaotic” noise to interrupt, in effect to create gaps or spaces between the “bits”—otherwise there *are* no bits, as in “Pleaseclosethedoor,” which could be an ambiguous signal. At this extreme limit we are in a state of self-repetition or hyper-redundancy (A=A=A=A=A), blank (white) noise, blank chaos, the entropic homogeneity or terminal equilibrium of “information death.” It is perhaps, then, when the narrator-mole’s “rational self-reflection” reaches this limit-state of a silent blank chaos that it is interrupted by the noisy, dark-chaotic other; furthermore, this very interruption (“life”’s interruption by “death”) can restore to him (to his silent/noisy “thinking”) order and meaning (sense).

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

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which assumes that a (silent) speech—in which, as with “A=A,” the truth is “immediately self-present”—takes priority over a (noisier?) self-deferred or self-different “writing.” By extension we also have Derrida’s (Levinasian) “violence of metaphysics,” grounded in the “violence of difference” of such first laws (of the Father, of God, of Logos) as “A=A,” and Serres’s attribution in *Hermes* and *The Parasite* (see the following discussion) of redundant hyper-order to totalitarian, high-technology-based (“Microsoft Inc.”) political and economic systems.

<sup>22</sup> For “communicational ‘harmony,’ understood as the consensus achieved between interlocutors who understand each other perfectly, is only ‘an ante-chamber to death.’ Cultural vitality depends on ‘parasitic dissonance’” (*The Parasite* 126). As order comes out of chaos, so sense requires nonsense.

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

Therefore, potentially at least, we can also read this “parasitic dissonance,” this “secret war”<sup>23</sup> between the narrator-mole and his Other in “The Burrow” in a more positive light. Insofar as we see each as a powerful noise which can disrupt, transform, renew any too-rigidified, too-rational, too-hegemonic and totalized form or structure, death’s incursions upon life (death hidden there and silently listening to us breathing), like life’s upon death (life listening for death to show itself so that it can beat it back), may—if only one of the two could, for the moment, overcome the other—be after all something necessary and good. More specifically, the power of death as other to disrupt and “return to chaos” the too-rational thinking of the protagonist-narrator-author might be salutary.<sup>24</sup> In the case of an individual’s death—something Kafka was understandably concerned about—this could imply the possibility of some form not of transcendence but of transformation. Paulson claims in *The Noise of Culture* that works of art and more precisely literary texts can serve as noisy parasites, opening society’s too-rational, too-rigidified cultural forms, its militaristic-fascistic political

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Meaning emerges not as predictable derivative but as stochastic departure from tradition, as *invention*” (White 268). White further expounds: “From a martial perspective successful communication between two interlocutors depends on the exclusion of a third person [...] who threatens constantly to disrupt the transmission of messages (*Hermes* 67). Since the optimum performance of any system depends upon communicative transparency, noise must be eliminated [...But] the exclusion of noise amounts to an exclusion of genuine information. Information, understood in Gregory Bateson’s phrase as the ‘difference that makes a difference,’ is excluded in favor of information-free, wholly redundant messages. The system endlessly reiterates, endlessly ratifies itself. But such a system, however self-coherent or optimally efficient, is nevertheless doomed to entropic degradation. Like any closed system, it can only run down. The achievement of redundancy—when everything that needs to be said has already been said—is analogous to entropic homogeneity when matter-energy settles into terminal equilibrium. In cultural system, then, just as in physical systems, noise or chaos amounts to a force for renewal. Serres thus imagines a ‘parasite’—precisely, static in a communication channel—who intervenes to interrupt normal communications [...and] provoke the production of novelty” (267-68). The “noisy opening” of a (logical or narrative) system is then the opening of possible pathways of wider communication on a “higher level.”

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

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

structures into new forms, new possibilities.<sup>25</sup> This move *via* non-linear dynamics back to the issue of literary culture and art also reminds us of Politzer's interpretation of "The Burrow" as a story about the author's "lifework" which he has stored away as a kind of buried treasure, one almost equivalent to his own life, now about to end. If literary creativity renews (as with Kafka) one's culture long after one's individual death, then the author's burrow as literary archive is not merely a monument to hopelessness; it already embodies, in its amorphous, fragmentary and paranoid totality, its noisy silence, a powerful force for cultural transformation.

Yet even if we view the life-death interplay at the end of "*Der Bau*" as a renewal of blank chaos (noise) by dark chaos (noise), or of life by death, we are still after all picturing an interplay between two noises or noise-fields which could as well be viewed as a larger, more encompassing "block of noise," a whole within which one constituent noise transforms into the other—or rather a whole (made up of molecular multiplicities) which simply transforms from X into Y, "becomes-other." This latter model is essentially what is implied by Serres's scenario of "renewal" or "reordering"; it might be further elucidated by turning to the (in certain ways congruent) "transcendental-empirical" metaphysics of Deleuze and Guattari.

### **Deleuze: Deterritorialized Sound**

Beginning with *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari<sup>26</sup> started looking at the world in terms of interconnected desiring-machines. These machines are in effect systems or "assemblages" of self-generating flows and the self-blockages of flows, and in very general terms such a picture is clearly relevant to the mole's labyrinthine underground burrow of Kafka's story and more specifically to the patterns of A-B communication or "discourse" within that burrow. These are after all patterns of flow and blockage, and in the story it is the blockages (leading perhaps to schizophrenic solipsism or, in Serresian terms, the "terminal equilibrium" of hyper-repetition and redundancy) which predominate. If Serresians like Paulson and

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

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



White see cultural (and specifically literary) “noise” as a creative force for renewing a culture whose systems of communication are too rational-efficient, Deleuze sees “writing” (“literature”) as one kind of vast assemblage or machine connected to and also operating within other (socio-cultural) machines; he sees all of Kafka’s writings as a vast, rhizomic writing-machine or “burrow”:

How can we enter into Kafka’s work? This work is a rhizome, a burrow. The castle has multiple entrances [...]. The hotel in *Amerika* has innumerable main doors and side doors [...]. Yet it might seem that the burrow in the story of that name has only one entrance; the most the animal can do is dream of a second entrance that would serve only for surveillance. But this is a trap arranged by the animal and by Kafka himself; the whole description of the burrow functions to trick the enemy.<sup>27</sup> We will enter, then, by any point whatsoever; none matters more than another [...]. We will be trying only to discover what points our entrance connects to, [...] what the map of the rhizome is [...]. Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation. (*Kafka 3*)<sup>28</sup>

Deleuze’s discussion of the writer in *Kafka* is, like any of his analyses of anything, extremely complex and open-ended—that is, containing “many entrances,” each of which is perhaps the inclusive disjunctive equivalent (X or Y or both) of another. The main argument of the book is that in a work of “minor literature” it is as if the interior “minor” writing (a multiplicity, collectivity)<sup>29</sup> vibrates within a perhaps “virtual,” outer and more conventional (canonical, elitist, individualist) literary “text”—in a

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

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

<sup>29</sup> As in traditional societies, folk communities, developing countries, oppressed and displaced (diasporic) peoples—e.g., the German-speaking Jews in pre-World War II, Czech-speaking Prague.

certain way deterritorializing<sup>30</sup> or subverting it (like a sort of parasite perhaps<sup>31</sup>), even threatening to (make) “vibrate” that whole text or indeed “whole system of *langue*” (“He Stuttered” 13). This notion is closely tied, in the prime case of Kafka, to the view that his writings are already in effect parts of a vast “writing machine” which has already deterritorialized language and meaning. Kafka’s famously fragmentary or “incomplete” three novels (*Amerika*, *The Castle*, *The Trial*) are paradoxically the most “complete” of his works, while the stories and letters, though ostensibly more self-contained or complete in themselves, are in fact finally incomplete insofar as they constitute smaller fragments of the larger whole<sup>32</sup>: “Only in novels movement continues *uninterrupted*, lines of flight are connected in specific circuits [...]. The novel (especially *The Trial*) can never be terminated [...]” (*Kafka* 78, my emphasis). Of course, essay-stories like the “Great Wall of China” and stories like “The Burrow” (where at the end “all remained unchanged”) may seem interminable; what Deleuze’s map of the Kafkaesque writing-machine here predicts is that the circuits or lines of flight of a story will be interrupted, precisely the dynamic (the on-going “mutual interruption” of A and B, of noise/silence) we have been exploring *via* Serres.

Another way to think of the writing machine is as a sort of body-without-organs or, again, a “rhizome.” *Rhiza* means “root”; a rhizome is a “creeping stem lying, usually horizontally, at or under the surface of the soil and differing from a [normal] root in [...] bearing leaves or aerial shoots near its tips, and producing roots from its under-surface” (*Webster’s* 1220). The “Introduction” to *A Thousand Plateaus* defines a rhizome as a “horizontal” structure—a maze of contiguous and intertwined, overlapping,<sup>33</sup> half-submerged roots or passageways—which contrasts with the “vertical,” arboreal structure of a tree. The latter’s roots are clearly below ground; above ground is a trunk which then bifurcates into branches, suggesting traditional western “tree-logic,” the forking branches (a strict A or B, not both) of dualistic or dialectical thinking. What then would it mean that Deleuze considers Kafka’s “work” to be a rhizome (and thus a sort of indefinitely expanded “burrow”), a self-enfolded structure

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<sup>30</sup> Extracting but also abstracting it from (out of) its initial, more concrete context or “territory,” that is, placing it within another (more abstract) context.

<sup>31</sup> This metaphor, suggesting of course Serres, also raises the problem as to which (parasite or host) is finally merely “virtual” and which is “real.” Or are they not (as more obviously in the case of computer viruses) both “virtual,” one virtuality feeding upon another? Here we must remember that the narrator-mole listens to a purely “virtual” noise, composed only of air/space, no subject or object.

<sup>32</sup> As the narrator-mole says, “[...] they may be quite tiny creatures [...]; it is only the noise they make that is greater” (348).

<sup>33</sup> A and B where the two become indistinguishable, so that we could as well say “A or B.”

or house with “multiple entrances”?<sup>34</sup> For one thing it means that Kafka is always, like an animal, feeling trapped and so looking for a “way out” or “line of flight.”<sup>35</sup> Writing his self-complete yet ultimately incomplete stories he is in “a very particular intermediary situation, since he himself exists between still being an animal and already being an assemblage” (*Kafka* 37):

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

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<sup>34</sup> And thus, we assume, also a body-without-organs (BwO) and a machine, at least the sort of machine and BwO (in effect “non-human” body or body deterritorialized from the human point of view) that a “story” can be—that is, “complete in itself” but ultimately “incomplete,” part of a larger whole.

<sup>35</sup> The grounding text here is the ape-become-man's statement in “A Report to an Academy”: “No, freedom was not what I wanted. Only a way out; right or left, in any direction; I made no demand. [...] Only not to stay [in a small cage ...]. I repeat: there was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out [...]. I managed to reach the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, but it is something as it has helped me out of my cage and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity [...]. There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice” (253-58). See also note 3.

Perhaps we should first note here that “The Burrow” seems to contain (or is readable in terms of) both alternatives.<sup>36</sup> It ends in an impasse, an interminable suspension (“But all remained unchanged”) and yet “the animals” also, we might say, “give way to molecular multiplicities” and perhaps even (given the larger burrow with its “virtual noise” of wind/space lacking subject and object) to “machinic assemblages.” But Deleuze’s key point here is twofold: first, “becomings-animal” and/or “the animal stories” (this may be another inclusive disjunction) “show a way out” (to the animal protagonist/narrator/author), which the “becoming-animal” (and/or animal itself) “is incapable of following”; second, “that which enabled them [with its multiple reference] to show the way out was something different that acted inside them.” This something-different is the potential move, more fully actualized in the novels, from (the more wholistic) “becoming-animal” to “molecular multiplicities and machinic assemblages.” Perhaps because “The Burrow” itself functions in an “intermediary situation” between these two stages, we have the two readings of the ending: impasse (no way out for A and B) and the “mutual” (A and B) transformation into an encompassing “noise” which would break through the logical boundaries of any clearly defined burrow or structure (*Bau*). Our interpretation may depend on which way we read the “becoming-Other” (becoming-A or becoming-B by “eating” A or B): as a mere “becoming-animal” or as a more molecular and inorganic “becoming-noise.” Perhaps we could say the story “embodies” this “something different that acted inside them” in the form of noise. The multi-entranced burrow is itself a sort of large animal, a Beast; it may finally be *this* Beast (as B), in its rhizomic, porous non-totality, which the narrator-mole “listens” to; the sound/silence (A/B) rhythm is merely the virtual noise of empty tunnels/blowing wind.

The point I wish to foreground here, then, by way of developing my Deleuzian

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<sup>36</sup> Deleuze’s notion of “exclusive disjunction” (e.g., a mouth is used for two seemingly unrelated functions, eating and speaking) combines:

[...] faraway and contiguous [...]. The essential text in this respect would be the short aphorism where Kafka says that the contiguous village is at the same time so faraway that it would take a lifetime to reach it. [... T]he offices [in *The Trial* ] are very far from each other because of the length of the hallway that separates them [...], but they are contiguous because of the back doors that connect them along the same line [...]. [...T]he bureaucratic Other is always contiguous—contiguous and faraway. (*Kafka* 77)

One might compare to this “contiguous village” passage the final line in the madman’s Death of God speech: “This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves” (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 182).

reading as an extension of the Serresian one, is that this “becoming-mole(ular)”<sup>37</sup> is in Deleuze often associated with, or expressed by, deterritorialized (“asignifying”<sup>38</sup>) sound, that is, noise. For in the first place “each language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue and the teeth” (*Kafka* 19), described by Bogue as “a detachment of certain oral activities from such animal functions as eating, drinking, howling, humming, and so on. Sounds, once detached from their animal function, are reterritorialized in sense (*sens*: sense, meaning) [...]” (104). A passage near the end of “The Burrow” that we have already discussed *via* Serres, and which I here quote again for the sake of convenience, gives us a partial picture of just such a deterritorialization:

I can explain the whistling only in this way: that the beast’s chief means of burrowing is not its claws, which it probably employs only as a secondary resource, but its snout or its muzzle, which [...] must also be fairly sharp at the point. It probably bores its snout into the earth with one mighty push and tears out a great lump; while it is doing that 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, [...] I hear then as a faint whistling. (354)

Here the digging snout<sup>39</sup>—the projecting nose and jaws, or muzzle, of an animal, that is, the nose and *adjacent* mouth—has a double function, digging and breathing, but it can’t perform both functions at the same time; the creature can only breathe when it is not thrusting its nose forward into the earth in front of it. This is the kind of exclusive disjunction which for Deleuze helps define the “body without organs,” and which is in a sense the “opposite” of redundancy. While the mouth’s capacity for breathing may be redundant (thus in effect “useless”) given that we already have a nose for breathing (and also smelling, which the mouth cannot really do), a mouth’s disjunctive functions are eating, breathing and/or speaking; normally of course we won’t use it for two (and

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<sup>37</sup> “(Mole)cular” being a convenient way to formulate, perhaps, the disjunctive proximity of the animal-molecule “series.” See previous note.

<sup>38</sup> Or at least now “signifying” in a completely new context so that we would have no way of “understanding” it. See note 30.

<sup>39</sup> German *die Schnauze*, like the English “snout,” is related to Indo-European *sneu*, “to drip fluid,” “wetness” and to Latin *natare*, “swim” and *nutrire*, “to nurse.” Thus this “snout” already suggests both “flow” and “nurturing,” “feeding”—perhaps the very life-force itself.

*a fortiori* for all three) of these functions at the same time. In this “snout” passage there is a sort of metonymic slide from nose to adjacent mouth: we think of the mole as “eating” the dirt, especially as this fits in with the pervasive theme of (parasitic, noisy) *eating* in the story, just as such eating is tied (as noise) to *thinking* (at least on our Serresian reading). In *Kafka*, Deleuze also brings (the author’s own) “writing” into play as part of this series:

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

The beast of the “Burrow” cannot both push its snout forward to dig (“eat”) and pull it back to breathe (“indrawal of breath”) at the same time: perhaps on a Deleuzian reading we could take breathing as more contiguous or adjacent, as in an inclusive disjunction, to speaking (it is the indrawal of breath that makes the beast’s “whistling” noise), and by extension to writing, than to eating. (Kafka has after all written a story that literally “whistles” through its multiple holes and passageways.) And yet here (on the Serresian reading) it is the Other’s noise (whistling) that not only disrupts but threatens to “devour” the private thinking-noise of the protagonist, forcing him to be silent and listen (where silence is perhaps a “fasting of speech”).

Already in the earlier *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze gives us an anthropological analysis of the human mouth’s evolution, from the most primitive functions of eating and (redundantly) breathing—shared with many lower animal forms—to the more highly evolved and specialized function of speaking,<sup>40</sup> which Deleuze then ties “by further extension” to the more specifically human function of (rational) *thinking*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> A question of interest to Bataille and Kristeva as well as Deleuze would be, where do we place the mouth’s function of “laughing” on this scale—closer to breathing or to speaking?

<sup>41</sup> Piaget also showed that children of a certain age think that they think with their mouths.

The interpretive framework in which this “disjunctive series of the mouth” is presented is that of a biogenetic-evolutionary theory of language. Here we are given four “stages of development” of the body, tied by Deleuze in various ways to schizophrenia and other abnormal psychological states and also to the emergence of sound and speech out of noise.<sup>42</sup> Reduced to the simplest terms, Deleuze claims here that the “inner noise of the body” (where, as in “The Burrow,” this inner noise could be both animal and proto-human), as the first level of a still primordial and chaotic “pre-language,” is projected further “outward” (but still within the body) to become (human) “voice”; voice is projected further outward to become “speech” (and thus more properly “language”), which is then projected onto the “metaphysical surface” of the body as the disjunctive “infinitive Verb” (e.g., “to go,” which has the linguistic force of a horizontal “opening out” in all directions). Corresponding to these biogenetic stages then are the evolutionary stages of the mouth: at the “earliest” stage, where it is closely allied to the anus at the other end of the alimentary tract, the mouth is for eating but also breathing (both of which are “noisy”); with both voice and speech we correlate the mouth’s function of speaking (which thus has evolutionary “levels”); the metaphysical surface of the Verb is correlated explicitly with “thinking” and indeed thinking on the most abstract level.<sup>43</sup>

This sort of structural-anthropological view of mouth and mind might be used to further develop, along more vertical-evolutionary lines, a Serresian reading of “The Burrow,” in which a key point is the interruption of A’s noisy thinking or self-

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<sup>42</sup> This latter form of emergence strongly suggests Serres’s later theory (e.g., in *Genesis*) that all sounds/meanings/languages can be seen as a kind of “tuning in” out of (chaotic) background noise. Strangely Saussure is not so far from this notion when he describes the signifier (sound-image) “cat” as a random slice out of the background flow of possible human sounds, just as its corresponding signified (concept), “cat,” is such a random slice out the background flow of possible meanings.

<sup>43</sup> Language is rendered possible by that which distinguishes it. What separates sounds from bodies makes sounds into the elements of a language. What separates speaking from eating renders speech possible. [...] The surface and that which takes place at the surface is what “renders possible” [...]. It is a question of a dynamic genesis which leads directly [...] *from depth to the production of surfaces* [...]. [...] We posit eating and speaking by right as two series already separated at the surface. They are separated and articulated by the event which is the result of one of them [...]. Henceforth, everything takes place in the depth, beneath the realm of sense, between two nonsenses of pure noise—the nonsense of the body and of the splintered word, and the nonsense of the block of bodies or of inarticulate words[...]. And then the first stage of the dynamic genesis appears. The depth is clamorous [...]. [...] The shattered sounds of internal objects, and also the *inarticulate howls-breaths of the body without organs* which respond to them—all of this forms a sonorous system bearing witness to the oral-anal voracity [...]. [...] Speaking will be fashioned out of eating and shitting, language and its univocity will be sculpted out of shit [...]. (*The Logic of Sense* 186-93; my emphasis)

reflection by the parasitic devouring-noise (and too devouring-silence) of B.<sup>44</sup> For it is as if the primordial “mouth-noise” (eating noise) of the beast (the narrator’s other) intrudes upon, interrupts, eats the civilized “mouth-noise” (now projected into thinking-noise) of the narrator. Or perhaps the Mouth eats itself. Perhaps the primitive mouth-noise of the other (or other-as-burrow) eats (and/or drowns out in its noise) *itself* at a higher level of development or civilization—the story’s author being in effect a human thinking-narrating mouth which must then exist at a still higher level of development than the thinking-narrating mouth of the narrator-mole. But if the primitive beast-mouth disrupts/eats the civilized mind-mouth<sup>45</sup>, in what sense might the latter also disrupt and mentally eat the former?<sup>46</sup> A closely related problem is this: if the war-game between the narrator and his other (beast and/or burrow) is really a question of becoming-other as (becoming-animal as becoming-molecular as) becoming-noise, we still have not fully accounted for the role of silence—the silence of listening and that of death—in its interplay with noise.

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

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<sup>44</sup> It is as if the whole burrow would now be a “mouth” devouring itself.

<sup>45</sup> Which clearly may have more than merely Freudian implications.

<sup>46</sup> Through high-tech rationality, and/or by telling its story. (The Burrow as a vast intertextual Library.)



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

This correlation of (an abstract-rational-linguistic) Verb with silence and death—which fits with Deleuze’s correlation of the more primordial and pre-human (pre-rational), inner-body noises and voices with a “sonorous” (noisy) Eros and with (off-Freudian) “oral-anal voracity”<sup>47</sup>—might then let us picture the hyper-rational (self-conscious, A-A self-reflexive) mole-narrator-author as himself “eating” the approaching beast through the encompassing “disjunctive infinity” of his rational speech and/or (the same thing finally) the encompassing silence of his own “death.” For once he is dead the beast cannot kill him, once his mind encompasses all possible “meanings” (horizontal openness of the infinitive) the beast-noise cannot chaotically disturb him, drown him out in meaninglessness. But rather than pursue such a reading any further here, I will briefly return to the context of Deleuze’s explicitly post-Freudian *A Thousand Plateaus* and *Kafka*—a context which can perhaps be best delineated by or as an abstract projection onto metaphysical surfaces now seen as geometrical surfaces, “diagrams”—and to the notion of “becoming-animal” (or “becoming-molecular”) analyzed in terms of deterritorialized *sound*:

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 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

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<sup>47</sup> See notes 43, 44, 45.

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 104-05)

Clearly such an “analysis” could only be used to interpret any work of art (and most easily a musical work) or literature on the most abstract level, even going one step beyond the level we arrived at with the projection of the verb onto the metaphysical surface of the body-mind-burrow. For when trying to think what it might mean for “The Burrow”’s narrator to become-animal and/or become-molecular in *these* terms it seems we are left only with the most abstract sort of “musical diagram” of the Burrow itself.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, that physical chaos theory or non-linear dynamics which

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<sup>48</sup> Which we would need to set in relation to at least two other “musical diagrams” in Deleuze. First we have the diagram of a “musical score” at the beginning of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Chapter 1, “Introduction: Rhizome”: here the traditional notation of notes becomes an abstract drawing whose roughly

influences Serres takes some of its famous “images”—e.g., the butterfly-wing-shaped “strange attractor” diagram—from second- or third-level “abstractions” of (second- or third-level equations used to explain) the immediately perceived phenomenon (e.g., flow-patterns in rivers or in the earth’s atmosphere). What we really have now is a humming, vibrating burrow, a burrow that has “become mole(ular),” seen as totality in the way a physicist might try to see the universe as totality. We thus can note two crucial points in Deleuze’s view of this becoming-animal as a “sonic” phenomenon: first, the centrality of the notion of the molecular multiplicity of things (which if nothing else makes it clearer than before that we could not distinguish self/other/burrow), and second the notion of “sound” itself as a physical force which physics has seen ambivalently as waves/particles. Deleuze seems to want to keep both “wave” and “particle” interpretations of sound in his analysis of the noise/voice/speech of animals/humans<sup>49</sup>:

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“rhizomic” (and also perhaps insect- and bird-like) lines/diagrams overflow(s) the spatial limits of the “score proper” (3). Then we have, bearing in mind that Kafka died in 1924, Paul Klee’s 1922 painting “Twittering Machine” at the opening of “Chapter 11: 1837: Of the Refrain” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 310): in this “musical assemblage” four little birds stand in/on a line within a sort of abstract diagram/machine, perhaps again an abstractly-portrayed musical score in which case the birds replace four distorted (elongated) musical notes.

<sup>49</sup> For the first step in attempting to elucidate the connection of becoming with noise is to see that “becoming mole(ular)” is not essentially a transformation or metamorphosis of/in “form”:

Becoming animal is only one becoming among others. [...] In a way, we must start at the end: all becomings are already molecular. That is because becoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is it to proportion formal relations. [...] Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. This principle of proximity or approximation is entirely particular and reintroduces no analogy whatsoever. It indicates as rigorously as possible a *zone of proximity* or *copresence* of a particle, the movement into which any particle that enters the zone is drawn. [...] Becoming is to emit particles that take on certain relations of movement and rest because they enter a certain zone of proximity. [...] That is the essential point for us: you become-animal only if, by whatever means or elements, you emit corpuscles that enter the relation of movement and rest of the animal particles, or what amounts to the same thing, that enter the zone of proximity of the animal molecule. You become animal only molecularly. You do not become a barking molar dog, but by barking, if it is done with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition, you emit a molecular dog. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 272-75)

At the end of this passage we already get the shift from the first step—the molecular rather than molar (see note 14) nature of these becomings, to the second, the priority Deleuze gives to sound in this context. It is not that we become-animal by learning to make the animal’s sounds, but rather sound itself is the “model” for (or “projection” of) this dynamic “emitting of particles (molecules)” in the becoming-animal: “Instrumentation and orchestration are permeated by becomings-animal, above all becomings-bird [...]. The lapping, wailing of molecular discordances have always been present [...]: the

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.” (Bogue 104)

In fact here Deleuze seems to be abstracting the common “essence” of words, ideas, meanings (all functions of human language now reduced to the force of sound or noise) and of humans-animals, also reduced to noise-sound-voice: the human-animal continuum is itself reduced to a sound continuum, to sonic vibrations, waves/particles. We begin from a trans-human (or animal, or Other) perspective, from which a human word such as “cup” or “dog” is just a meaningless sound, at a level of “meaninglessness” (nonsense, blank noise) which goes beyond that at which we think a foreign word (in a language we can’t understand) is “nonsense.” “Words and things can no longer be differentiated” because they both—the idea or metaphor of becoming a mole and an actual mole (or molecular structure)—are “pure intensities,” “molecular multiplicities,” that is, states or blocks of sound-energy. Thus when the image becomes becoming—that is, becomes a flow of intensities *most nearly captured or expressed by the flow of sound itself*—“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 105). And jumping to the dimension or perspective of “human civilization” (language, literature) in a way that ties it directly back to animals through the voice, Deleuze also asks: “(What if one becomes animal or plant *through* literature, which certainly does not mean literarily? Is it not first through the voice that one becomes animal?)” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 6).<sup>50</sup>

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sound-molecule, relations of speed and slowness between particles. Becomings-animal plunge into becomings-molecular” (272). Another way to put this is that Deleuze’s becomings are not changes from state A to state B but in each case a single “block” (including A and B, the whole “AB” rather than the A-B dyad), which can be disjunctively described as a “block of sound” in which the “sound” has become “deterritorialized sense” as *force*.

<sup>50</sup> These questions are parenthetically placed within a reflection on writing-machines: “A book itself is a little machine. [...] But when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine is plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work [...]. Literature is an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 6). Is animal-human “Life” then contained within

## The Pit of Babel

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

In the *Genesis* story God confused or fragmented the common language of mankind into a chaotic multiplicity, babble or “noise” of many languages, so that men could no longer communicate with one another and thus could no longer build a tower which, God thought, would be a transgression into his own divine domain, a challenge to his divine authority. If this Biblical Babel is associated with a great tower pointing up to Heaven yet never reaching it and thus, nostalgically, with a (lost) transcendence,

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the Machine? Within Death?

then the burrow as “pit of Babel” suggests linguistic chaos at the other end of the spectrum, that is, the more radically immanent and imminent end. In his essay-story “The Great Wall of China,” in some respects a companion-piece to both *The Castle*<sup>51</sup> and “The Burrow,” Kafka says: “the Tower of Babel failed to reach its goal [...] because of the weakness of the foundation. [...]he Great Wall alone would provide for the first time in the history of mankind a secure foundation for a new Tower of Babel. First the wall, therefore, and then the tower” (238-39). It is clear that Kafka, in associating his “Burrow” with the “pit,” also associated it with the broken-down (porous, mole-eaten) underground foundations of such a Great Wall that might have supported a Tower to God. It is in this context that we need to think about the famous parable of the Imperial Messenger, embedded within the (story of the) Great Wall, with its infinite delay of the king’s message, his imperial-divine command that the wall should be built:

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

This imperial-divine command to build a Wall which would keep out the “people of

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<sup>51</sup> It is not quite clear how far “up” the hierarchical levels or “orders” of the Castle will reach, but in any case the protagonist K can never even get to the first step, which is to *enter* it. Politzer points out that in “The Burrow,” “at last Kafka allows himself to enter the Castle, which now turns out to be both his work and his grave. [...] Moreover, the animal [...] has also created it” (322). Perhaps here it is as if Kafka were telling the story of the impregnable Castle *from the inside*, so that the approaching Beast heard by the narrator could now be Kafka (the author, perhaps the already-dead author) himself. (But in “The Great Wall of China,” that reflection on a great wall whose historical purpose was to keep out the barbarian hordes, the author-narrator is clearly trapped “inside.”)

the north,” the enemy, the Other—death of course, but perhaps also *the future?*<sup>52</sup>—“has existed from all eternity, and the decision to build the wall likewise” (238). Yet—like the imperial message that never got beyond even the first of an infinite number of enclosing concentric circles or walls, horizontal burrow-walls—it never actually reached the people of China, who therefore never quite understood what the wall meant, why it was being built or even perhaps if it *was* being or to be built. Here we may take the Tower supported by the Wall as a vertical striving upward toward God or at least toward knowing if there *is* a God, a vertical seeking of final understanding about life and death, noise and silence. But the Emperor’s message to “you, the humble subject” (and you the reader “at your window”), that message which would explain why the Wall was being built—to support a tower that would reach to God, or support a seeking to know or understand the meaning of things?—or even (if the Emperor is already God) give us the ultimate Answer, the final Truth, is infinitely delayed so that you will never receive it.

How then might we see this infinite delay in the context of A-B communication? Is this Zeno-like, regressive infinity of obstacles, multiplicity of physical and bureaucratic walls which delay the messenger, itself a sort of noise which disrupts communication between A and B? Perhaps we might see it this way, just as in “The Burrow” the noisy beast continuously yet interminably (as if by infinitesimal regress) approaches the silent, listening narrator—as perhaps the narrator simultaneously approaches the beast—so that the other’s noise is then a continuous and interminable disruption of the listener’s own thinking. There is never an attempt at “real” communication between A and B in “The Burrow,” any more (arguably) than in “The Imperial Messenger”: both games continue indefinitely, their endings infinitely suspended. Perhaps then the only message that could ever have been delivered to “you the reader” by beast, emperor, God or Death is mere noise, and/or (its virtual equivalent) mere silence. For perhaps the approaching beast (as absolute Other) is after all trying to send its message, the message of its continually approaching noise, to a listener whom it can never reach, not only because he cannot make sense of it but because he cannot “hear” it.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kafka on building the Tower of Babel in “The City Coat of Arms”: “It is far more likely that the next generation with their perfected knowledge will find the work of their predecessors bad, and tear down what has been built so as to begin anew. Such thoughts paralyzed people’s powers [...]” (433).

<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche says that we ourselves have “killed God,” and yet “This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. [...] the light of stars requires time [...]. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves

Or again, perhaps the reader/listener could have heard, and made sense of, this noisy message if his own thinking, his own reflection, his own constant *wondering* about what (ironically) the truth he is waiting to hear might be, were not already too noisy. It is just when he is relentlessly pushing forward snout-first into the unknown—digging “a wide and carefully constructed trench in the direction of the noise and not [ceasing] from digging until, independent of all theories, I find the real cause of the noise [... and] know the truth” (348)—that the narrator-mole cannot hear the noise of the Other, who is at this moment sitting still as a statue and listening to him. (Even when he pauses for breath he can only hear the whistling sound of his own breathing.) Yet at the end of the (unfinished) story he seems more or less content with the idea that “all remained unchanged,” as if resigning himself to the need for a state of equilibrium, perhaps knowing that he lacked the power not only to eradicate the noise but even to know what it meant. Similarly, at the end of “The Great Wall” the narrator reflects on his people’s basic weakness, a lack of curiosity, imagination, self-reflection: yet “this very weakness [is] one of the greatest unifying influences among our people; indeed [...] the very ground on which we live. To set about establishing a fundamental defect here would be undermining [...] our feet. And for that reason I shall not proceed any further at this stage with my inquiry into these questions” (247-48).

Perhaps this sort of equilibrium state is what we finally arrive at when, like ancient and war-weary lands, we see the futility of violence; or perhaps we come to this state when we see, like Kafka’s Ulysses, that “the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence” (431).<sup>54</sup> And this brings us back to Deleuze, who like Nietzsche looks at the world as a violent force-field, a purely contingent interplay of forces and then goes one step further, abstracting it as a diagram of rhythmic and chaotic flows. The Machine (writing-machine, body-machine, war-machine, world-machine) is now on the “outside,” encompassing even an organic Life/Death which could itself be nothing but assemblages of molecules and projected lines of force. The infinite series of concentric walls in the parable of the Imperial Messenger, like the endless labyrinthine tunnels and rhizomic roots of the mole’s burrow—while they might suggest that we are forever enclosed within a mechanical universe, a non-human world that dwells both within and without us—need not mean an infinite delay of meaning and truth. For there was no “message” in the first place; all is transformed into molecules, an abstract diagram of forces, intensities, noise:

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(*The Gay Science* 182; see also note 36).

<sup>54</sup> Upon which Benjamin comments: “Kafka’s Sirens are silent” (118).



Forces of chaos, terrestrial forces, cosmic forces: all of these confront each other and converge in the territorial refrain. [...] From chaos, *Milieus* and *Rhythms* are born. [...] The milieus are open to chaos, which threatens them with exhaustion or intrusion. Rhythm is the milieus' answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between. [...] Chaos is not the opposite of rhythm, but the milieu of all milieus. There is rhythm whenever there is a *transcoded passage* from one milieu to another, a *communication* of milieus [...]. ([...] The cosmos as an immense deterritorialized refrain). (*A Thousand Plateaus* 313, 327; my emphasis)

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The standard Kafka consumer has a built-in metric to track MaxLag, however, it has several flaws: The MaxLag sensor that the consumer provides is only valid as long as the consumer is active. This could be somehow addressed by monitoring other sensors, such as the MinFetchRate, however combining multiple metrics can be cumbersome and still only monitors the partition that is furthest behind. Burrow automatically monitors all consumers and every partition that they consume. It does it by consuming the special internal Kafka topic to which consumer offsets are written. Burrow then provides consumer information as a centralized service that is separate from any single consumer. In a healthy Kafka cluster, all producers are pushing messages into topics and all consumers are pulling those messages at the other end of the topics. Things start to go wrong when a consumer cannot keep up with the producer or hangs for some reason. When this happens messages don't get through and quickly pile up in the topic. pp. 1-18 Laura Stahman, "Franz Kafka's 'The Burrow' as Model of Ipseity in Levinasian Theory", *Mosaic* 37:3 (2004), 19-32 Frank W. Stephenson, "Becoming Mole(ular), Becoming Noise: Serres and Deleuze in Kafka's 'Burrow'", *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 30:1 (2004), 3-36. [Sign in](#)|[Recent Site Activity](#)|[Report Abuse](#)|[Print Page](#)|[Powered By Google Sites](#).