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Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature: The Components of Expression*

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari

A MAJOR or established literature follows a vector which goes from content to expression: a content once given, in a given form, one must find, discover, or see the form of expression suitable to it. What is clear in the mind is then spoken. . . . But a minor or revolutionary literature begins by speaking and only sees and conceives afterward ("I do not see the word at all, I invent it").¹ The expression must shatter the forms, marking the breaking points and the new tributaries. Once a form is shattered, the contents, which will necessarily have broken with the order of things, must be reconstructed. Sweeping along the material, getting ahead of it. "Art is a mirror, which goes 'fast', like a watch—sometimes."²

What are the components of this literary machine, machine for writing or expression in Kafka's case?

I. *The letters*: in what sense do they form an integral part of "the work"? In fact, this is not defined by the intention of publishing: Kafka obviously does not think about publishing his letters, rather

* [Translator's note: This essay is a translation of chapter four of *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (Paris, 1975). In this book, the authors reject the notion of literature, and particularly minority literature, as a refuge. They see such writing as basically political in nature, concerned with the relationship between language and power. The minority writer is part of a collectivity; (s)he speaks from a strategic position within a community. Kafka's politics are the politics of desire: they deal with questions of territory, of shifting borderlines and escape routes. The rhizome or multiple network of the burrow is the model for Kafka's work and for other minority writers. The subversion which Deleuze and Guattari call *minority-becoming* involves the destabilization of the traditional concepts of territory: the use and transformation of a majority language by a minority (for example, German by Jews, American by blacks) is an example of this *detritorialization*.

The authors also reject the traditional view of Kafka's work as a flight into transcendence, guilt, and subjectivity. They see in his writing fear of the frozen and the hierarchical rather than guilt. They see deconstruction of the machinery of power rather than intimism or subjectivity. The role of a minor literature is a continual shifting of position. Only in discontinuity and displacement can there be new potentialities. Freudian terminology is used to undermine itself, just as "minor" literature undermines the literature sanctioned by authority. The resources of the new textual criticism, and specifically the theories of Benvéniste, and after him Foucault, on *énonciation*, are here used to suggest new ideas on intratextual relationships.]

the opposite. He thinks of destroying everything he has written as if it were letters. If the letters are an integral part of the work, it is because they are an indispensable set of gears, a driving part of the literary machine as Kafka conceives it, even if this machine is destined to disappear or to explode just like that of the Penal Colony. Impossible to conceive Kafka's machine without bringing into play the driving force of letter writing. Perhaps it is in relationship to the letters, their demands, their potential, and their insufficiencies that the other parts will be set in place. Kafka is fascinated by the letters of his predecessors (Flaubert, Kleist, Hebbel). But what Kafka lives with and experiments with on his own account is a perverse, diabolical use of the letter. "Devilish in my innocence," says Kafka. The letters posit directly, innocently, the devilish power of the literary machine. Machining letters: it is certainly not a question of sincerity or lack of it, but of function. Letters to such and such a woman, letters to friends, letter to the father—nevertheless, there is always a woman somewhere in view in the letters, it is she to whom they are really sent, she whom the father is considered to have made him lose, she with whom his friends hope that he will make a break, and so forth. Substitution of the love letter for love (?). Deterritorializing love. Substituting, for the greatly feared *wedding contract*, a *diabolical pact*. The letters are inseparable from such a pact, they are the pact itself. How can one "attach girls to oneself by writing" (L, p. 80)? Kafka has just got to know the caretaker's daughter of the Goethe house in Weimar: they take photos, they write one another postcards; Kafka is surprised that the girl writes to him "as he would wish" and yet does not take him seriously, treats him "as of no more importance to her than a pot." Everything is there already, although everything is not yet fully prepared. The reference to Goethe: if Kafka admires Goethe so much, is it as "master" or as the author of Faust's diabolical pact, which will entail the fate of Marguerite? The elements of the literary machine exist already in these letters, even if they are not adequately arrayed and remain ineffective: the stereotyped photo on the postcard, the writing on the back, the running sound that one reads softly, on a single note, the intensity. At his first meeting with Felice, Kafka will show her these photos, these postcards from Weimar, as if he were using them to get a new circuit under way in which things will become more serious.

The letters are a rhizome, a net, a spider's web. There is a vampirism of letters, a literally epistolary vampirism. Dracula, the vegetarian, the faster who sucks the blood of carnivorous humans, has his castle not far away. There is some Dracula in Kafka, a Dracula through letters; the letters are as many bats. He stays awake at night,

and by day shuts himself up in his office-coffin: "The night is not dark enough. . . ." When he imagines a kiss, it is that of Gregor who climbs up to his sister's bare neck, or that which K gives Miss Bürstner, like that of "some thirsty animal lapping greedily at a spring of long-sought fresh water" (T, p. 38). To Felice, Kafka describes himself without shame or joking as extraordinarily thin, needing blood (my heart "is so weak that it can't manage to drive the blood the whole length of my legs"). Kafka-Dracula has his escape route in his room, on his bed, and his distant source of strength in what the letters will bring him. He fears only two things, the cross of the family and the garlic of marriage (*conjugalité*). The letters must bring him blood, and the blood give him the force to create. He definitely does not seek feminine inspiration, nor maternal protection, but a physical strength to write. Of literary creation, he says that it is "wages for serving the devil." Kafka did not see his thin, anorexic body as shameful, he is pretending. He sees it as the means of crossing thresholds and becomings from the bed in his room, each organ being "placed under special observation"—provided he is given a little blood. A flow of letters in exchange for a flow of blood. Immediately after the first meeting with Felice, the vegetarian Kafka is attracted by her muscular arms, rich in blood, frightened by her big meat-eating teeth; Felice feels the danger, since she assures him that she is a small eater. But from this contemplation, Kafka draws the decision to write, to write a great deal to Felice.³ The *Letters to Milena* will be something else again. It is a more "courtly" love, with the husband on the horizon. Kafka has learnt a lot, experimented a lot. There is in Milena an Angel of Death, as he suggests himself. More an accomplice than an addressee. Kafka explains to her the damnation of letters, their necessary relationship with a phantom *who drinks en route the kisses that are confided to them*. "Dislocation of souls." And Kafka distinguishes two series of technical inventions: those which tend to restore "natural communication" by triumphing over distance and bringing men closer together (train, car, airplane), and those which represent the vampirelike revenge of the phantom or reintroduce "the ghostly element between people" (post, telegraph, telephone, wireless).⁴

But how do the letters function? Probably as a result of their genre they keep the duality of two subjects: for the moment, let us make a summary distinction between a speaking subject (*sujet d'énonciation*) as the form of expression which writes the letter, and a spoken subject (*sujet d'énoncé*) as the form of content of which the letter speaks (even if I speak of *me*. . .). It is this duality which Kafka will use in a perverse or diabolical way. Instead of the speaking subject using the letter to announce his own arrival, it is the spoken subject who will take on a

sort of movement which has become fictional or illusory. It is the sending of the letter, the movement of the letter, the ride and the gestures of the postman which replace coming (hence the importance of the postman or the messenger, who forms his own double, like the two messengers of the Castle, with clothes clinging like paper). An example of a truly Kafkaesque love: a man falls in love with a woman whom he has only seen once; tons of letters; he can never "come"; he never leaves the letters, which are in a trunk; and the day after the break is made, after the last letter, coming home at night in the country, he runs over the postman. The correspondence with Felice is filled with this impossibility of coming. It is the flow of letters which replaces seeing and coming. Kafka never stops writing to Felice when he has only seen her once. With all his strength he wants to force her into a pact: that she should write twice a day. That is the diabolical pact. The Faustian diabolical pact is derived from a distant source of strength, as opposed to the closeness of the marriage contract. *First make a statement*, and only see one another later or in a dream: Kafka *sees* in a dream "the whole staircase littered from top to bottom with the loosely heaped pages I had read. . . . That was a real wish-dream!" (F, p. 47). A mad desire to drag letters from the addressee. So the desire for letters consists of this, as its first characteristic: it transfers movement to the spoken subject, it confers on the spoken subject an apparent movement, a paper movement, which spares the speaking subject all real movement. As in "The Preparations," he can remain on his mean bed, like an insect, since he sends his double all dressed up in the letter, with the letter. This exchange, or this reversal, of the duality of the two subjects, the spoken subject assuming the real movement which normally belongs to the speaking subject, produces a *doubling*. And it is this doubling which is already diabolical, the Devil is this very doubling. There is found here one of the origins of the double in Kafka: "The Man Who Was Never Seen Again," a first draft of *Amerika*, presented us with two brothers, "one of whom went to America while the other remained in an European prison" (D1, p. 43). And "The Judgment," which revolves entirely around the theme of letters, shows us the speaking subject who remains in his father's shop, and the friend in Russia, not only as addressee, but also as a potential spoken subject *who perhaps has no existence outside the letters*.

The letter as minor genre, letters as desire, the desire for letters have a second characteristic. The thing which is most profoundly dreaded by the speaking subject will be presented as an exterior obstacle which the spoken subject, entrusted to the letter, will endeavor to vanquish at any cost, even if he must perish in the attempt. That is called "Description of a Struggle." Kafka's dread of any form of

marriage. The prodigious operation by which he translates this dread into a *topography of obstacles* (Where should one go? How can one come? Prague, Vienna, Berlin?). The surveyor. And also that other operation by which he enumerates a numbered *list of conditions* which the spoken subject considers possibly capable of dissipating the dread, while all the time it is this very dread in the speaking subject which inspires them (Program or Plan of Life, in the manner of Kleist). Really tortuous, humor personified. A double black reversal, of the *carte du Tendre*, and of the marriage list. This method has several advantages: it allows one to posit the innocence of the speaking subject, since he cannot do anything about it and has not done anything; the innocence too of the spoken subject, since he has done everything possible; and then even the innocence of the third party, of the addressee (even you, Felice, you are innocent); and finally this method makes things even worse than if one of the people involved, or everybody, were guilty. It is the method which triumphs in the *Letter to His Father*—everyone is innocent, that is the worst thing: the *Letter to His Father* is the exorcising of Oedipus⁵ and of the family by the typewriter, as the *Letters to Felice* are the exorcising of marriage. *Make a map of Thebes instead of putting on Sophocles, make a topography of obstacles instead of fighting against fate* (substitute an addressee for destiny). There is no need to ask if the letters do or do not form a part of the work, or if they are a source for certain themes of the work; they form an integral part of the writing or expressing machine. It is in this way that one must consider the letters in general as fully belonging to the writing, *hors-oeuvre* or not, and also understand why certain genres such as the novel have naturally taken advantage of the epistolary form.

But, third characteristic, this use or this function of letters does not at first sight prevent a return of guilt. An oedipal return of guilt linked with the family or marriage: Am I capable of loving my father? Am I capable of marrying? Am I a monster? “Devilish in my innocence,” one may be innocent and nevertheless diabolical; it is the theme of “The Judgment,” and it is Kafka’s constant feeling in his relationship with loved women.⁶ He knows that he is Dracula, he knows that he is vampire, the spider and its web. Only more than ever before one must distinguish the notions: the duality of the two subjects, their exchange or their doubling, *seem* the base for a feeling of guilt. But, there again, at a pinch, the guilty one is the spoken subject. Guilt itself is only the apparent, displayed movement, which hides a secret laughter. (How many regrettable things have been written on Kafka and “guilt,” Kafka and “law,” and so forth?) Judaism, a paper envelope: Dracula cannot feel guilty, Kafka cannot feel guilty,

Faust is not guilty, and not through hypocrisy but because their Case is elsewhere. We fail to understand the diabolical pact, the pact with the devil, if we believe that it can inspire guilt in the one who signs it, that is to say who initiates it or writes the letter. Guilt is only the expression of a judgment which comes from outside, and which only takes hold on, only bites into a weak soul. Weakness, oh my weakness, my fault, is only the apparent movement of Kafka as spoken subject. Contrast his strength as speaking subject in the wilderness. But that does not fix things up, one is not so easily saved. For if guilt is only the apparent movement, it is obviously flaunted as indicating a quite different danger—the other case. The real cause of panic is that the typewriter which writes the letters might turn against the typist. See “In the Penal Colony.” The danger of the diabolical pact, of devilish innocence, is not at all guilt, it is the trap, the dead end in the rhizome, the closing of every exit, the burrow stopped up everywhere. *Fear*. The devil is caught himself in the trap. One gets drawn into Oedipus again, not by guilt but by tiredness, by lack of inventiveness, by carelessness about what one has unleashed, by photos, by the police—the diabolical powers of distance. Then innocence is no longer of any use. The formula of innocent diabolism saves you from guilt, but it does not save you from the photocopy of the pact and the condemnation which results from it. The danger is not the feeling of guilt as neurosis, as state, but the judgment of guilt as *Trial*. And this is the inevitable outcome of the letters: the letter to the father is a trial which is already closing on Kafka; the letters to Felice turn into a “trial in the hotel,” with a whole tribunal—family, friends, defense, prosecution. Kafka foretells this from the first, since he writes “The Judgment” at the same time as he begins his letters to Felice. Now “The Judgment” is the great fear that a letter machine will catch the author in a trap: the father begins by denying that the addressee, the friend in Russia, exists; then he recognizes his existence, but to reveal that the friend has never stopped writing to him, the father, to denounce the treachery of the son (the flow of letters changes direction, turns against). “Your nasty little letters. . . .” The “nasty letter” of the bureaucrat Sortini, in *The Castle*. . . . To exorcise the new danger, Kafka never stops muddling the tracks; he sends yet another letter, which reworks or denies the one he has just sent, so that Felice will always be behind in her replies. But nothing can prevent the fated reversal: from the break with Felice, Kafka emerges not guilty, but shattered. He to whom the letters were an indispensable part of, and a positive (not negative) instigation to, writing fully, finds himself without any desire to write, all his limbs broken by the trap which nearly closed. The formula “devilish in my innocence” was not sufficient.

[These three intensive elements show why Kafka was fascinated by letters. For them one needs a special sensitivity. We should like to compare them with the letters of another diabolic, Proust. He too, by means of letters, makes the pact at a distance with the devil or the ghost, to break with the proximity of the marriage contract. He too opposes writing to marrying. Two thin, anorexic vampires who only feed on blood as they send their bat-letters. The broad principles are the same: every letter is a love letter, apparent or real; the love letters may be attractive, repulsive, reproaching, compromising, proposing, without this changing anything of their true nature; they are part of a pact with the devil, which exorcises the contract with God, with the family, or with the loved being. But more precisely, the first characteristic of letters, exchange or doubling of the two subjects, appears completely in Proust, the spoken subject taking on all the movement while the speaking subject stays in bed, in the corner of his web like a spider (the spider-becoming of Proust). In the second place, the topographies of obstacles and the lists of conditions are set very high by Proust. They are functions of the letter, to such an extent that the addressee no longer understands if the author desires his coming, never desired it, drives him away to attract him or vice versa: the letter escapes from all recognition, such as is inherent in memory, dream, or photo, becoming a strict map of paths to take or avoid, a tightly conditioned plan of life (Proust too is the tortuous surveyor of a path which stops getting nearer without however getting further away, as in *The Castle*).⁷ Finally, guilt with Proust no less than Kafka is only superficial, and accompanies the demonstration or apparent movement of the spoken subject; but under this mock guilt there is a much deeper panic in "The Recumbent," fear of having said too much, fear that the letter machine will turn against him, will throw him into the very thing that it was supposed to exorcise, anguish that the little multiple messages or the nasty little letters will close in on him—the unbelievable blackmail letter to Albertine, which he sends her when he does not know that she is dead, comes back to him in the shape of a telegram from Gilberte, whom he takes for Albertine, telling him of her marriage. He too emerges broken. But granted their equality in vampirism, their equality in jealousy, the differences are great between Proust and Kafka, and are not only the result of the worldly-diplomatic style of the one, the juridical-systematic style of the other. For both it is a matter of avoiding, by means of letters, the specific proximity which characterizes the marriage bond, and which constitutes the situation of seeing and being seen (compare Kafka's terror when Felice tells him that she would like to be near him while he works). In this respect it matters little whether the "marriage" be official or not, whether it be heterosexual or homosexual.

But to exorcise proximity, Kafka maintains and encourages spatial distance, the faraway position of the loved one: thus it is he who sets himself up as *prisoner* (prisoner of his body, of his room, of his family, of his work) and multiplies the obstacles which prevent him seeing or meeting the loved one.⁸ With Proust, on the contrary, the same exorcism is performed in the opposite direction: the imperceptible, the invisible will be attained by exaggerating proximity, by turning it into a prisonlike proximity. Proust's solution is the strangest: to move beyond the conjugal conditions of presence and sight . . . by excessive closeness. The closer one is, the less one will see. And so it is Proust who is the *jailer*, while the loved one is in an adjoining prison. The ideal of Proust's letters thus consists in little notes slipped under the door.]

II. *The stories*: they are essentially depictions of animals, even though there are not animals in all the stories. This is because the animal coincides with the object par excellence of the story according to Kafka: to try to find a way out, to mark out an escape route.⁹ The letters are not enough; for the devil, the pact with the devil, does not offer an escape route, and on the contrary threatens to fall into the trap and to push us with it. Kafka writes stories like "The Judgment" or "The Metamorphosis" at the same time as he begins the correspondence with Felice, either to give himself an idea of danger or to exorcise it: he prefers stories, closed off and mortal, to the infinite flow of letters. The letters are perhaps the motivating force which, through the blood they bring, sets the whole machine in motion; however, it is a matter of writing something else but letters and so of creating. This other thing is foreshadowed by the letters (animal nature of the victim, that is to say of Felice; vampirical use of the letters themselves) but may only be realized in an autonomous element, even if it stays forever unfinished. What Kafka does in his room is to become animal, and this is the essential object of the story. The first creation is the metamorphosis. Above all, the eye of a wife should never see that, nor indeed the eye of a father or of a mother. We say that, for Kafka, animal essence is the way out, the escape route, even in one place or in a cage. *A way out, and not liberty. A living escape route and not an attack.* In "Jackals and Arabs," the jackals say: "We're not proposing to kill them. . . . Why, the mere sight of their living flesh makes us turn tail and flee into cleaner air, into the desert, which for that very reason is our home" (W, p. 130). If Bachelard is very unfair to Kafka when he compares him to Lautréamont, it is because he sees principally that dynamic animal essence is liberty and aggression: the animal-becomings of Maldoror are attacks, and the crueller for being free and gratuitous. This is not the case with Kafka, it is

even the opposite, and we are entitled to think that his idea is more right from the point of view of Nature herself. Bachelard's postulate ends by opposing the speed of Lautréamont and the slowness of Kafka.¹⁰ Let us remember, however, a certain number of elements of the animal stories: (1) there is no reason to distinguish the cases where an animal is considered in itself from the cases where a metamorphosis takes place; everything in the animal is metamorphosis, and the metamorphosis is, in a same circuit, man-becoming of the animal, and animal-becoming of the man; (2) the metamorphosis is, as it were, the meeting place of two deterritorializations, that which man imposes on the animal by forcing it to flee or by taming it, but also that which the animal suggests to man, by pointing out to him the exits or the means of flight which man would never have thought of by himself (schizo flight); each of the two deterritorializations is inherent in the other, precipitates the other, and makes it cross a threshold; (3) thus, what counts is not at all the relative slowness of animal-becoming; for no matter how slow it is, and indeed the slower it is, it nevertheless constitutes an *absolute deterritorialization* of man, opposed to the relative deterritorializations which man achieves in himself by displacement, by travel; animal-becoming is a motionless trip on the spot, which cannot be lived or understood except in intensity (crossing thresholds of intensity).¹¹

Animal-becoming has nothing metaphorical about it. No symbolism, no allegory. Neither is it the result of a fault or a curse, the effect of guilt. As Melville said about the whale-becoming of Captain Ahab, it is a "panorama," not a "gospel." It is a map of intensities. It is a set of states, each distinct one from the other, grafted onto man insofar as he seeks a way out. It is a creative escape route which means nothing else but itself. Differing from the letters, animal-becoming allows nothing to subsist of the duality of a speaking subject and of a spoken subject, but constitutes a single identical process, a single identical procedure which replaces subjectivity. However, if animal-becoming is the object par excellence of the story, one must ask questions about the inadequacies of the stories in this respect. It seems that they are caught in an alternative which condemns them to failure on both sides, from the point of view of Kafka's project, no matter how great their literary splendor may be. In fact, in some cases, the story will be perfect and finished, but it will close in on itself. In others, it will open up but open up on something else which could only be developed in a novel, in itself unfinishable. In the case of the first hypothesis, the story faces a danger different from that of the letters, but analogous in a certain way. The letters were threatened by a reverse flow directed against the speaking subject; as for the

stories, they come up against a no exit of the animal exit, a dead end in the escape route (indeed, it is for this reason that they finish when they do). Certainly, animal-becoming has nothing in common with a merely apparent movement like that of the letters: no matter how slow it may be, deterritorialization is absolute in them; the escape route is well programmed, the exit is clearly dug out. But this is only one side of a polarity. Just as the egg in its potentiality has two real poles, animal-becoming is a potentiality endowed with two poles which are just as real, a pole which is literally animal and a pole which is familial. We have seen how the animal in fact oscillates between its own human-becoming and a too human familiarization: thus the dog of the "Investigations" is deterritorialized by the musician dogs at the beginning, but reterritorialized, re-oedipalized by the singing dog at the end, and remains oscillating between two "sciences," reduced to invoking the coming of a third science which would solve his problems (but precisely this third science would no longer be the object of a simple story and would demand a whole novel. . .). We see too how Gregor's metamorphosis is the story of a re-oedipalization which takes him to his death, which turns his animal-becoming into a death-becoming. Not only the dog, but all the other animals oscillate between a schizo Eros and an oedipal Thanatos. It is only from this point of view that metaphor, with all its anthropocentric retinue, threatens a reappearance. In short, the animal stories are part of the machine of expression, distinct from the letters, since they do not work within the apparent movement, nor by drawing a distinction between the two subjects; but grasping reality, being written in reality itself, they are nevertheless caught in the tension between two poles, or two opposable realities. Animal-becoming effectively shows a way out, effectively marks out an escape route, but one it is unable to follow or to pursue itself (all the more reason for "The Judgment" to remain an oedipal story, which Kafka presents as such, the son going to his death without even becoming an animal, and without being able to make the most of his opening toward Russia).

So one must consider the other hypothesis: not only do the animal stories show a way out which they are incapable of taking themselves, but one must realize that what made them capable of showing the way out was something else acting within them. And this something else can only be truly expressed in novels, in sketches of novels, as the third component of the machine of expression. For it is at the same time as Kafka is beginning novels (or trying to develop a story into a novel) that he abandons animal-becomings to substitute a more complex organization¹² for them. So the stories, and their animal-becomings, had to be as it were inspired by the subterranean orga-

nization, but had also to be incapable of making it work directly, had not even to be capable of bringing it out into the open. As if animality were still too near, too perceptible, too visible, too individuated, too territorialized, animal-becoming at first tends toward a *molecular-becoming*: Josephine, the mouse, swamped by her people and "the innumerable crowd of the heroes of her people"; the dog at a loss before the aimless movement of the seven dog-musicians; the animal of "The Burrow" uncertain when confronted by the thousand animal noises, probably of smaller animals, which greet him from every side; the hero of "Memory of the Kalda Railway," come to hunt bear and wolf, will only have to cope with swarms of rats, which he kills with a knife as he watches them gesturing with their little paws (and in "Astride a Coal Bucket," "on the thick snow which doesn't give way an inch, I walk in the tracks of little arctic dogs, my ride has lost any meaning"). Kafka is fascinated by everything small. If he does not like children, it is because they are caught in an irreversible becoming-bigger; the animal kingdom on the contrary is close to littleness and imperceptibility. But even more, in Kafka, molecular multiplicity tends itself to be integrated with or to give way to a machine, or rather to a *machinelike organization* of which the parts are independent of each other, and which nevertheless functions. The complex of the musical dogs is already described as such an immensely minute organization. Even when the animal is unique, its burrow is not, it is a multiplicity and an organization. The story "Blumfeld" shows us a bachelor who first asks if he should acquire a little dog; but ready to take over from the dog is a strange molecular or machinelike system, "two little celluloid balls, white with blue stripes, which go up and down side by side on the floor"; Blumfeld finally is persecuted by two trainees acting as parts of a bureaucratic machine. Perhaps there exists in Kafka a very particular situation for the horse, inasmuch as it is itself intermediary, still an animal and yet at the same time an organization. In any case, animals, such as they are or become in the stories, are caught in this alternative: either they are reduced, shut up in a dead end, and the story stops; or else they open up and multiply, opening up exits everywhere, but give way in their turn to molecular multiplicities and machinelike organizations which are no longer animals, and which could only be given a proper treatment in novels.

III. *The novels*: it is a fact that the novels scarcely show us any animals, except in a secondary position, and no animal-becoming. It is as if the negative pole of animality had been neutralized, and the positive pole had emigrated elsewhere, toward the machine and organizations. As if animal-becoming were insufficiently rich in limbs

and tributaries. Let us suppose that Kafka had written a novel on the bureaucratic world of ants, or on the castle of termites: he would have been a sort of Capek (a compatriot and contemporary of Kafka). He would have written a science fiction novel. Or else a black novel, a realist novel, an idealist novel, a coded novel, as one found all these genres in the school of Prague. He would have described more or less directly, more or less symbolically, the modern world, the sorrows or the harshness of this world, the mis-deeds of mechanization and bureaucracy. None of these things belongs to Kafka's project as a writer. If he had written on the justice of ants or the castle of termites, the whole business of metaphors would return, realist or symbolist. He would never have grasped the full impact of the violence of a bureaucratic Eros, law-enforcing, judicial, economic, or political.

It will perhaps be said that the break which we are establishing between the stories and the novels does not exist, since many of the stories are essay banks, disjointed bricks for possible novels which have been abandoned, and the novels in their turn are interminable, unfinished stories. But *that* is not the question. Which is: what makes Kafka plan a novel? and, when he gives up the idea, what makes him abandon it or try to bring it to a close as a story? or else, on the contrary, think that a story may be the starting point for a novel, with the possibility of abandoning that too? We might propose a sort of law (it is true that it is not always applicable, only in certain cases): (1) when a text is essentially concerned with an animal-becoming, it cannot be developed into a novel; (2) a text which is concerned with animal-becomings cannot be considered able to develop into a novel unless it also contains sufficient mechanical indices which exceed the animal and are, for this very reason, the seeds of a novel; (3) a text which could be the seed of a novel is abandoned if Kafka dreams up an animal exit which allows him to get rid of it; (4) a novel only becomes a novel, even if it is not finished, even and especially if it is unfinishable, if the mechanical indices mesh into a true organization consistent in itself; (5) on the other hand, a text which contains an explicit machine still does not develop if it does not succeed in switching into certain concrete social-political organizations (for a pure machine is only a working sketch, which forms neither a story nor a novel). So Kafka has multiple reasons for abandoning a text, either because it tapers off or because it is unfinishable; but Kafka's criteria are entirely new, and only valid for him, with lines of communication from one type of text to another, reinvestments, exchanges, and so forth, in such a way as to constitute a rhizome, a burrow, a map of transformations. Each failure in this work is a masterpiece, a stem in the rhizome.

The first case would be that of "The Metamorphosis," which is why many critics say that it is Kafka's most finished (?) work. Gregor, given over to his animal-becoming, finds himself re-oedipalized by the family and led to his death. The family stifles even the potentialities of a bureaucratic machine (consider the three evicted tenants). And so the story closes in a state of mortuary perfection. The second case could concern the "Investigations of a Dog": Kafka saw in it his own *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (D2, p. 115). But the seeds of development effectively present are inseparable from the mechanical indices which orchestrate the object of the "Investigations": the musical indices in the organization of the seven dogs, the scientific indices in the organization of the three spheres of knowledge. But as these indices remain caught in animal-becoming, they are aborted. Kafka does not succeed in writing his *Bouvard et Pécuchet* because the dogs put him on the track of something else *which he could only grasp using other material*. The third case may be illustrated by "In the Penal Colony": there too there is the seed of a novel, and this time appearing as an explicit machine. But this machine, too mechanical, still related to excessively oedipal coordinates (old commander-officer = father-son), is not developed either. And Kafka can imagine an animal conclusion to this text which reverts to the story state: in one version of "In the Penal Colony," the traveler finally becomes a dog and starts to dash about on all fours, jumping and hurrying to get back to his post (in another version a lady-snake intervenes) (D2, p. 179). It is the opposite of the "Investigations of a Dog": instead of mechanical indices not succeeding in emerging from animal-becoming, the machine reverts to animal-regression. The fourth case, the only really positive one, is that of the three great novels, the three great unfinishable works: in fact, the machine is no longer mechanical and reified but is incarnated in very complex social organizations which enable one to obtain, with a human personnel, with human parts and gears, inhuman effects of violence and desire infinitely stronger than those obtainable using animals or using isolated mechanisms. That is why it is important to observe how at the same time (for example when writing *The Trial*) Kafka goes on describing animal-becomings which do not develop into a novel, and conceives a novel which never stops developing its organizations. The fifth and last case would be as it were a control text: there is "failure" as a novel, not only when the animal-becoming goes on predominating, but also when the machine does not succeed in being incarnated in the living social-political organizations which make up the animate matter of the novel. Thus the machine remains a working draft which cannot develop any further, no matter what its strength or beauty. This was already the case with

"In the Penal Colony," with its machine which was still too transcendent, too isolated and reified, too abstract. It is the case with the remarkable two-page text, "Odradek," which describes an unusual and useless machine: a flat, star-shaped spool surrounded by disparate ends of thread, crossed by "a little transverse pivot to which another piece of wood is added at right angles," so that the machine may stand upright. It is the case in "Blumfeld," where the two ping-pong balls certainly form a pure machine, the two perverse and idiot trainees certainly form a bureaucratic organization, but these themes still remain disjointed, one leaps from one to the other without any diffusion or any penetration.

Here then are the three elements of the machine of writing or expression, insofar as they can be defined by interior criteria and not at all by any plan for publication. The letters and the diabolical pact; the stories and the animal-becomings; the novels and the machinelike organizations. Between these three elements, we know that there are constantly transverse lines of communication, in both directions. Felice, as she appears in the letters, is not only animal, inasmuch as by her sanguine nature she is a natural prey for the vampire; she is animal too because there is in her a whole bitch-becoming which fascinates Kafka. And *The Trial* as modern mechanical organization itself refers back to reactivated archaic sources—trial of the animal-becoming, which involves Gregor's condemnation, trial of the vampire for its diabolical pact, which Kafka really experienced at the time of his first break with Felice, as a trial in a hotel, where he appeared before a sort of tribunal. Nevertheless, one should never believe that a single line moves from the lived experience of the letters to the written experience of the stories and novels. The opposite movement exists just as strongly, and there is no less written and no less lived on one side or on the other. So it is the trial seen as a juridical, social, political organization which enables Kafka to grasp his animal-becomings, in their turn, as matter for a trial, and his epistolary relationship with Felice as requiring judgment by a formal trial. In the same way, the path does not only lead from the diabolical pact of the letters to the animal-becoming of the stories, and from the animal-becoming to the machinelike organization of the novels. It also moves in the opposite direction; the animal-becomings are only valid because of the organizations which inspire them, in which the animals function like the parts of a musical machine, or a scientific machine, or a bureaucracy, and so forth, and the letters are already a part of a mechanical organization where the movements are interchangeable, and where the postman plays the erotic part of an indispensable gear, of a bureaucratic transmission without which the epistolary pact

would not function (when the postman in the dream brings letters from Felice, "he delivered them to me, one in each hand, his arms moving in perfect precision, like the jerking of piston rods in a steam engine" [LF, p. 47]). There is a continual to and fro between the components of expression. And the three components have the property of being interrupted, each in its own mode, but also of passing from one to another. Letters stopped because a reversal blocks them, a trial; stories which stop because they cannot develop into novels, torn between two directions which block the exit, another form of trial; novels which Kafka stops himself because they are unfinishable and literally unlimited, infinite, third form of trial. Never has so complete a work been made with movements, all aborted, but all intercommunicating. Everywhere a single identical passion for writing—but not the same. Each time the writing crosses a threshold, and there is no higher or lower threshold. They are thresholds of intensities which are only higher or lower according to the direction from which one approaches them.

That is why it is so regrettable, so grotesque, to oppose life and writing in Kafka, to suppose that he takes refuge in literature through lack, weakness, impotence before life. A rhizome, a burrow, yes, but not an ivory tower. An escape route, yes, but certainly not a refuge. The creative escape route involves the whole of politics, the whole of economics, the whole of bureaucracy and of justice: it sucks them, like a vampire, to make them produce sounds which are still unknown and which belong to the near future—fascism, Stalinism, Americanism, *the diabolical powers which are knocking at the door*. For the expression precedes the contents and is their precondition (provided of course it has no signification): living and writing, art and life, are only in opposition from the point of view of a major literature. Kafka even on his deathbed is traversed by an invincible flow of life, which also arises from his letters, his stories, his novels, and from their mutual state of noncompletion, for different reasons which remain intercommunicating and exchangeable. Conditions of a minor literature. A single thing grieves Kafka and angers him, makes him indignant: that he should be considered an intimist writer, finding refuge in literature, an author of solitude, of guilt, of intimate unhappiness. And yet it is his own fault, because he flaunted all that . . . to outwit the trap, and humorously. There is laughter in Kafka, very happy laughter, which is badly understood for the same reasons. It is for the same stupid reasons that people have claimed to see a refuge far from life in the literature of Kafka, and also an anguish, the mark of impotence and guilt, the sign of a sad interior tragedy. Two guidelines only are needed to follow Kafka: he is an

author who laughs, deeply joyful, with a joie de vivre, in spite of and with his clownish declarations, which he uses as a trap or as a circus. From end to end he is a political author, a prophet of the future world, because he has as it were two poles which he will be able to unite in a completely new organization: far from being a writer withdrawn in his room, his room is the site of a double flow, that of a bureaucrat with great prospects switched in to real organizations in the making; and that of a nomad taking flight in the most realistic way, who switches in to socialism, anarchism, social movements.¹³ Kafka's writing, the primacy of writing means only one thing: not literature, but the fact that speech (*énonciation*) is one with desire, above laws, states, governments. Yet speech is always historical in itself, political and social. A micropolitics, a politics of desire, which questions all proceedings. Never has there been an author more comic and joyful in the aspect of desire; never an author more political and social in the aspect of the spoken.¹⁴ Everything is laughter, beginning with *The Trial*. Everything is political, beginning with the letters to Felice.

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LA BORDE CLINIC

(Translated by Marie Maclean)

NOTES

1 *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1910–1913*, ed. Max Brod, tr. Joseph Kresh (London, 1948), p. 33, hereafter cited in text as D1. Also cited are *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston (New York, 1977), hereafter cited as L; *The Trial*, tr. Willa and Edwin Muir (London, 1948), hereafter cited as T; *Letters to Felice*, ed. Erich Heller and Jürgen Born, tr. James Stern and Elisabeth Duckworth (London, 1974), hereafter cited as LF; *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories*, tr. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Harmondsworth, 1982), hereafter cited as W; *The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1914–1923*, ed. Max Brod, tr. Martin Greenberg with Hannah Arendt (London, 1948), hereafter cited as D2.

2 Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka* (London, 1953), p. 85 (and p. 88: "The form is not the expression of the content, but only its attraction").

3 We are using an unpublished study by Claire Parnet on *Le Vampire et les lettres*, where the Kafka/Dracula relationship is precisely analyzed. See all the texts which Elias Canetti quotes in his *The Other Trial: Letters of Kafka to Felice* (New York, 1969); but in spite of these texts, Canetti does not seem to see this vampirelike procedure and speaks of Kafka's shame for his body, of humiliation, distress, and the need for protection.

4 This remarkable text is in *Letters to Milena*, ed. Willi Haas, tr. Tania and James Stern (New York, 1953), p. 229. Talking or writing machines fascinate Kafka in every way, bureaucratically, commercially, erotically. Felice worked in a "parlograph" business of which she became manager. Kafka feverishly and compulsively gives advice and suggestions to put parlographs in hotels, post offices, trains, boats, and zeppelins, and to combine them with typewriters, with "mutoscopes," with telephones. . . . Kafka is obviously delighted, he thinks that in this way he will console Felice who wants to

cry: "I sacrifice myself to your business, answer me in detail . . ." (LF, pp. 166–68). With great commercial and technical enthusiasm, Kafka wants to introduce the series of diabolical inventions into the good series of beneficent inventions.

5 [Oedipus is used with a wide range of connotations, mainly psychoanalytic. Tr.]

6 "Devilish in my innocence": see D1, p. 65. And in "The Judgment," the father says: "An innocent child, yes, that you were, truly, but still more truly have you been a devilish human being! And therefore take note: I sentence you now to death by drowning!" (W, p. 117).

7 Proust's letters are above all topographies of obstacles—social, psychic, physical, and geographical—and the obstacles are the greater the nearer the correspondent. It is obvious in the letters to Mme Strauss, who has, like Milena, a whole side of the Angel of Death. But even more, in Proust's letters to his young friends, there are numerous topographical obstacles concerning places and also concerning times, means, states of mind, conditions, changes. For example, to a young man whose arrival Proust apparently no longer desires at Cabourg: "You are free to decide what you want, and if it is to come, don't write to me, but telegraph me that you're coming immediately, and if possible, by a train arriving about 6 o'clock in the evening, or at any rate, near the end of the afternoon, or after dinner but not too late, and not before 2 o'clock in the afternoon, because I would like to see you before you have seen anybody. But I explain all that to you in case you come . . .," and so forth.

8 On prison, see D1, p. 43.

9 [*Ligne de fuite* also implies line of least resistance, point of leakage, diverging line. Tr.]

10 Gaston Bachelard, *Lautréamont* (Paris, 1956). On pure action, speed, and attack as characteristics of the animal according to Lautréamont, and on the slowness of Kafka understood as exhaustion of "the will to live," see the first chapter.

11 Kafka often opposes two sorts of journey, the one extensive and organized, the other intense and through debris, shipwreck, or fragments. This second journey may be on the spot, in "his room," and the more intense because of it: "Now you lie against this, now against that wall, so that the window keeps moving around you. . . . I must just take my walks and that must be sufficient, but in compensation there is no place in all the world where I could not take my walks" (D1, pp. 27–28). An intensive America, map of intensities.

12 [*Organization* is used throughout for *agencement*, which actually implies an interlocking system or arrangement basic to both organism and organization. Tr.]

13 Kafka's anger when he is treated as an intimist writer: thus, from the very beginning of the letters to Felice, his violent reaction against readers or critics who talk principally of interior life. In France itself, the first success of Kafka was founded on this misunderstanding: Kafka at once intimate and symbolist, allegorical and absurd. Refer to the excellent text of Marthe Robert on the conditions of reading Kafka in France, "Citoyen de l'utopie" (reproduced in *Les Critiques de notre temps et Kafka*, ed. Claudine Raboin [Paris, 1973]). The real beginning of Kafka studies was when Czech and German critics put the emphasis both on his belonging to a strong bureaucracy (insurance companies, social insurance) and on his attraction toward socialist and anarchist movements in Prague (which he often hides from Max Brod). The two books of Wagenbach are essential for all these questions.

The other aspect is comedy and joy in Kafka. But it is the same aspect: the politics of statement and the joy of desire. Even if Kafka is sick or dying, even if he flaunts guilt as his private circus to get rid of what bores him. It is not by accident that any interpretation which thinks in terms of neurosis insists at once on the tragic or anguished side, and on the nonpolitical side. Kafka's merriness or the merriness of what Kafka writes is not less important than his reality and his political leanings. The finest

page of Max Brod's book on Kafka is when Brod tells how listeners laughed at the reading of the first chapter of *The Trial* "with irresistible laughter" (*Franz Kafka: eine Biographie* [Prague, 1937]). We cannot imagine other criteria of genius: the political stance which runs through the writing, and the joy which it communicates. We would call low or neurotic interpretation any reading which turns genius to anguish, to tragedy, to "private matters." For example, Nietzsche, Kafka, Beckett, no matter: those who read them without much involuntary laughter, and political quivers, deform everything.

In these components of Kafka's work—letters, stories, novels—we have not taken into consideration two elements: on the one hand, very short texts, dark aphorisms, and relatively pious parables—thus in the break in 1918 with Felice, where Kafka is really sad, tired, and so incapable and without any desire to write. On the other hand, we have not taken into consideration the *Diaries*, for a different reason. It is because the *Diaries* run through everything: the *Diaries* are the rhizome itself. They are not *an* element in the sense of an aspect of the work, but the element (in the sense of environment) which Kafka, like a fish, does not want to leave. This is because this element intercommunicates with the whole outside world and spreads the desire of the letters, the desire of the stories, the desire of the novels.

14 [Speech and its derivatives are used for *énonciation* throughout, although this comprises speech, text, and statement. Tr.]