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Kafka

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*Toward a Minor Literature*

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Gilles Deleuze and  
Félix Guattari

Translation by Dana Polan

Foreword by Réda Bensmaïa

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Foreword  
The Kafka Effect  
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Translated by Terry Cochran

Writing is born from and deals with the acknowledged doubt of an explicit division, in sum, of the impossibility of one's own place. It articulates an act that is constantly a beginning: the subject is *never authorized* by a place, it could never install itself in an inalterable *cogito*, it remains a stranger to itself and forever deprived of an ontological ground, and therefore it always comes up short or is in excess, always the debtor of a death, indebted with respect to the disappearance of a genealogical and territorial "substance," linked to a name that cannot be owned.

—Michel de Certeau, *L'Écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 327

In December 1934, the *Jüdische Rundschau* published an important text on Kafka by Walter Benjamin, in which we can read these decisive words: "There are two ways to miss the point of Kafka's works. One is to interpret them naturally, the other is the supernatural interpretation. Both the psychoanalytic and the theological interpretations equally miss the essential points."<sup>1</sup> In 1974, when Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari devoted a book to Kafka's work, they took their point of departure from the same principle: one misses the mark in Kafka either by putting him in the nursery—by oedipalizing and relating him to mother-father narratives—or by trying to limit him to theological-metaphysical speculation to the detriment of all the political, ethical, and ideological dimensions that run through his work and give it a special status in the history of literature. At

the least, this initial convergence between Benjamin's approach and that advanced by Deleuze and Guattari seems worthy of note.

When we read each of the studies carefully, we cannot help being struck by the care taken in each case to avoid what might be called a political-ideological *recuperation* of Kafka or, perhaps, to avoid falling back upon what Deleuze and Guattari call a *hard segment*: the binary machine of social classes, sexes, neurosis, mysticism, and so on. In both cases, we find ourselves face to face with the same attempt to avoid making Kafka just another great *litterateur*. Both pinpoint the need to make way for new philosophical, literary, and even psychological categories to come to terms with this unique work and to lead readers out of the impasse created by so many readings of exegesis.

First, let us read and consider what Benjamin would have us think about Kafka: What is the substance of what he says? What is he attempting to have us experience, and not simply interpret or read? What writing machine—already!—does he want to connect us to? Recall that the study begins with a *political* apologue: Potemkin was having a crisis and was therefore inaccessible, but affairs of state were pending. There was a stack of documents that urgently needed to be signed, and the high officials were at the end of their rope; but a junior clerk named Shuvalkin who was informed of the problem took hold of the documents, impassively marched into Potemkin's bedroom, presented the papers to him, and pressed him to sign them. Without blinking—at least, so it seemed—Potemkin signed all the documents presented to him one after the other. Everyone knows what happened: when the high officials finally had the famous documents in hand, they were stupefied to decipher in each instance the name Shuvalkin. Benjamin continues in a way that is highly significant for us:

This story is like a herald racing two hundred years ahead of Kafka's work. The enigma which beclouds it is Kafka's enigma. The world of offices and registries, of musty, shabby, dark rooms, is Kafka's world. The obliging Shuvalkin, who makes light of everything and is finally left empty-handed, is Kafka's K. (p. 112)

The "reading" that Benjamin proposes for Kafka's work is clear from the outset and is characterized—no less than that of Deleuze and Guattari—by never trying to find archetypes that claim to have "qualified" Kafka's "imaginary" or to interpret his work by moving from the unknown back to the known: the Castle is God, the world of the father, power that cannot be grasped; the cockroach is anxiety, castration, the dreamworld and its multiple metamorphoses, and so forth. But what is still more striking, neither does Benjamin try—he doesn't consider it useful or necessary—to relate Kafka's work to a *structure* with preformed formal oppositions and a signifier of the kind in which "after all is said and done, *x* refers to *y*!" Not at all. The reading of Kafka both in Benjamin and in Deleuze and Guattari is determined by the prominence they give to a *politics* of Kafka;

but, as Deleuze and Guattari go on to articulate, this politics is "neither imaginary nor symbolic."

In characterizing the hordes of messengers, judges, assistants, intermediaries, and lawyers who haunt Kafka's text, Benjamin never takes refuge behind a symbolic, allegorical, or mythical interpretation: he considers Kafka's ancestors to be the Jews and Chinese of ancient or contemporary history, or even the Greeks, rather than considering Kafka to be the descendant of "Atlases" who would carry the globe of the world on the back of his neck. Refuge behind myth, recourse to myth as the last hope, is radically rejected:

Even the world of myth of which we think in this context is incomparably younger than Kafka's world, which has been promised redemption by the myth. But if we can be sure of one thing, it is this: *Kafka did not succumb to its temptation.* (p. 117; my emphasis)

Nor would Benjamin have yielded to the temptation to take refuge behind myth; to do so would be to inject mythical meanings into Kafka's work—to say that Kafka is to modernity what classical myth was to traditional society. Benjamin was one of the first "readers" of Kafka to see and then try to show—to demonstrate—that Kafka's work was, from a certain point of view, to be taken literally: in a word, that it functioned on the surface of its signs and that the issue was not—at least, not *only*—to try to interpret it but, above all, to practice it as an experimental machine, a machine for effects, as in physics. Of course, it is a writing machine or a mass of writing machines that are made of assemblages of nouns and effects, of heterogeneous orders of signs that cannot be reduced to a binary structure, to a dominant or transcendental signifier, or ultimately to some phantasm (originary or not).

Benjamin (who was very well acquainted with Freudian psychoanalysis) was able to avoid at every step the "dreary psychoanalytic interpretations" (Deleuze). When he evoked the well-known texts in which Kafka addresses the father, Benjamin immediately showed how close the link is between what Kafka foregrounds about the relation to the Father and a juridical-political "assemblage" that exceeds and determines the father-son relation since time "immemorial" (as he liked to say):

The father is the one who punishes; guilt attracts him *as it does the court officials*. There is much to indicate that the world of the officials and the world of the fathers *are the same to Kafka.* (p. 113; my emphasis)

Thus, no matter how we approach it—and this is Benjamin's "lesson"—Kafka's work does not lend itself to domestication. It cannot be made into literature in the way one enters into religion. It resists on all levels, and it demands—at every obstacle and disruption that one simultaneously invents and experiences

in its unfolding—not merely a new *rhetoric* or a new mode of *reading* but a genuine “traversal of its writing” (Sollers) from which one does not emerge unscathed. It goes without saying that such a change of perspective—not satisfied with reading, one experiences, travels, concretely transforms oneself—cannot be conceived without a radical change in the very nature of the order of signs that is at work in the text. Benjamin had more than an inkling of this decisive aspect of Kafka’s work when he attempted to account for the economy of his short stories (for example, the “undecidable,” “unfinished” character of his work). Benjamin introduced the important notion of *gesture*. He may have borrowed the notion from Brecht, but for him it referred above all to a space where the subject of the statement and the subject of enunciation can no longer be separated. Benjamin showed that Kafka could well have adopted Montaigne’s phrase: “Mon livre et moi ne faisons qu’un.” It is impossible to separate the tool from the artisan, the reader as *lexeograph* (Barthes) from the scriptor as *subscriptor*: they are together as machine and rhizome, a network, an entangled knot of movements and stops, of impulsions and immobilizations to experience interminably. They constitute what Deleuze and Guattari call a body without organs, to experience and to deploy, according to the procedures, methods that are always new. Concerning the Kafkaesque gesture (in the medieval sense of the word), Benjamin says:

Kafka could understand things only in the form of a *gestus*, and this *gestus* which he did not understand constitutes the cloudy part of the parables. Kafka’s writings [*Dichtung*] emanate from it. (p. 129)

Nevertheless, Benjamin does not hesitate to advance hypotheses about the “origin” of Kafka’s literary “creation” (*Dichtung*). But rather than ascending to some singular—transcendent—figure or signifier, it is a matter of defining a space, a metastable force that does not refer to a subject but designates a *vection*, a movement of translation that belongs to preindividual forces. These forces seem to have already been traversed by an immemorial forgetfulness that makes it impossible to reduce the saying to the said and that refers to an experience for which only a collective enunciation can take responsibility. Recall the passage in which Benjamin brings out that aspect of things:

What has been forgotten—and this insight affords us yet another avenue of access to Kafka’s work—*is never something purely individual*. Everything forgotten mingles with what has been forgotten of the prehistoric world, forms countless, uncertain, changing compounds, yielding a constant flow of new, strange products. Oblivion is the container from which the *inexhaustible intermediate world* in Kafka’s stories presses toward the light. (p. 131; my emphasis)

The reader of Deleuze and Guattari’s book on Kafka will readily perceive that they took it upon themselves to pick up the analysis of Kafka’s work where Benjamin—not because of a lack of perceptiveness but, perhaps, because of the epistemological anchoring of his text—seemed to have reached an insurmountable barrier, a dead end. Despite his efforts, Benjamin was not always able to avoid the stumbling block that he calls Kafka’s “failure” and that he ultimately characterizes in terms of a shortcoming (thereby being too quick to take literally what was merely one threshold of Kafka’s work):

This document [the testament that orders the destruction of his works upon his death], which no one interested in Kafka can disregard, says that the writings did not satisfy their author, that he regarded his efforts as failures, that he counted himself among those who were bound to fail. He did fail in his grandiose attempt to convert poetry [*Dichtung*] into doctrine, to turn it into a parable and restore it to that stability and unpretentiousness which, in the face of reason, seemed to him to be the only appropriate thing for it. No other writer [*Dichter*] has obeyed the commandment “Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image” so faithfully. (p. 129)

Without reading too much into the text, we can see a hint of nihilism that tilts Kafka’s work—otherwise very positive—in the direction of the literature of failure: not far removed from Camus and his philosophy of the absurd and of the futility of every human work. Too human. But in writing *Kafka*, Deleuze and Guattari propose an experimentation of Kafka that refrains from—even in the name of a solemn *gestus*—referring to any idea of failure, of shortcoming, or of “immemorial” guilt. This book represents a watershed and is invaluable for the modern reader of Kafka: instead of seeking to capture his work in one of the “segments” that constantly draw it toward some black hole, Oedipus, or failure (in short, nihilism), Deleuze and Guattari do their utmost to resist. They successfully show that although the different diabolical machines—letters, novellas, and so-called unfinished novels—that Kafka created throughout his life do derive from a *gestus* that is constantly running the risk of annihilation, destruction, or regression, it is nonetheless wholly impossible to reduce the specific *effects* to the nihilistic figures that we have enumerated in reference to Benjamin. For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka’s work is characterized by the total absence of negation: above all, by a total absence of complacency (even in his journals) and consequently a rejection of every problematic of failure. Those who read this book carefully will perceive that the authors tried to show that Kafka’s work is in no way susceptible to an anthropological or psychological explanation but is essentially the bearer of an affirmation without reserve.

Without seeming to deal with the question at all, Deleuze and Guattari begin

by detaching Kafka from what the academic institution calls "Literature." It quickly becomes obvious that Kafka has been misinterpreted and, from a certain point of view, "misunderstood" only because he has for a long time—too long, according to the authors—been judged to be the embodiment of a concept of literature (and of the Law—of Genre, of Desire) that is totally inapplicable to his work. Deleuze and Guattari do not simply say that Kafka was unconcerned with literature or that he was not a writer by occupation. Instead, they break down the complex mechanism whose operation—because one is driven to "categorize" it—leads precisely to failure: an always excessive reduction of his work.

By proposing the concept of "minor literature"—a concept that opens so many new avenues of research in Europe and the United States—Deleuze and Guattari give the modern reader a means by which to enter into Kafka's work without being weighted down by the old categories of genres, types, modes, and style (in the "linguistic" sense of the term, as Barthes would say). These categories would imply that the reader's task is at bottom to *interpret* Kafka's writing, whether the interpretation take the form of parabolism, negative theology, allegory, symbolism, "correspondences," and so on. The concept of minor literature permits a reversal: instead of Kafka's work being related to some preexistent category or literary genre, it will henceforth serve as a *rallying point* or *model* for certain texts and "bi-lingual"<sup>2</sup> writing practices that, until now, had to pass through a long purgatory before even being read, much less recognized.

Why has it been necessary to introduce this category of minor literature to account for Kafka's work? First, because Kafka, in his *Diaries* and "theoretical" texts, meditated at length on the type of "literature" that he believed himself to be inventing and that he saw certain of his contemporaries practicing. If we reread Kafka's *Diaries* in light of what the authors bring out in this book, it immediately becomes apparent how important it was for Kafka to situate the type of writing and rewriting he was practicing. Commentators have been too quick to label as mystical (neurotic?) or metaphysical meditations that always took the form of a radical questioning of classical or traditional literary writing. Kafka does not read and admire Goethe and Flaubert to imitate them, much less to move beyond (*aufheben*) them according to some teleological schema like that of Hegel, but to determine and appreciate the incommensurable distance that separates him from their ideal of depth or perfection. Writing against the current and from a linguistic space that is radically heterogeneous with respect to his great predecessors, Kafka appears as the initiator of a new literary continent: a continent where reading and writing open up new perspectives, break ground for new avenues of thought, and, above all, wipe out the tracks of an old topography of mind and thought. With Kafka—at least with the Kafka that Deleuze and Guattari think through anew—one has the feeling that literature has been given a new face: it has changed both its addresser and its addressee.

The new category of minor literature is also essential because it allows one to dispense with dualisms and rifts—whether linguistic, generic, or even political—that have ultimately constituted a sort of vulgate (a fortress, if you will) that, although not indisputable, has been at least sufficiently restricting to impede access to what has been characterized as Kafka's "epoch": Einstein and his deterritorialization of the representation of the universe; the twelve-tone Austrians and their deterritorializations of musical representation (Marie's death cry in *Wozzeck* or that of Lulu); expressionist cinema and its double movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the image (Robert Wiene of Czech origin, Fritz Lang born in Vienna, Paul Wegener and his use of themes from Prague); the Copernican revolution of Freud; and finally, the linguistic revolution carried out by the Prague circle. All the elements are brought together for a radical change of *épistémé* that Kafka contrives to transcribe with the most diverse means, the most complex methods. The readers of this book—if they are not in a hurry—will certainly be impressed by the extreme care that Deleuze and Guattari have taken first in describing, and then in analyzing, the variety of those methods. Whether it is a question of the relation of Kafka's texts to the German language or to the economy of writing, the authors emphasize the procedures that Kafka sets to work to produce the effect(s) that are linked to his name today: the Kafka effect.

It will come as no surprise to readers familiar with Deleuze and Guattari's work that the idea of the machine producing effects is not used metaphorically or symbolically but always in the most concrete sense. In his *Dialogues* with Claire Parnet, Deleuze makes it more precise:

"Machine, machinism, *machinic*": it is neither mechanical nor organic. The mechanical is a system of gradual connections between dependent terms. The machine, on the other hand, is a clustered "proximity" between independent terms (topological proximity is itself independent of distance or contiguity). A machinic assemblage is defined by the displacement of a center of gravity onto an abstract line.<sup>3</sup>

From this perspective, we can more easily understand that there will always be a "primary" social machine in relation to human beings and animals (within the limits of what Deleuze calls its *phylum*): a gesture coming from the East will always presuppose an Asiatic machine that without preceding it in time will condition the situations in which it can be concretely effected. But in the same way that every mechanical element presupposes a social machine, the organism in turn presupposes a *body without organs* that, by means of its lines (of flight), its axes of intervention, and its "gradients," will largely exceed the ectodermal limits of the human body as well as the psychological representatives of its identity.

For Deleuze and Guattari, if Kafka still occupies the place granted him in the

history of letters, it has little or nothing to do with the fact that he renewed its “themes” or transformed its style. Instead, they see him as important because he figured out a mode of writing that allows us to account for the different “machines” that condition our actual relation to the world, to the body, to desire, and to the economy of life and death. And even if he has *paredre*—brothers of blood and affection—he has no predecessor. Deleuze and Guattari are especially interested in foregrounding some of the effects produced in relating (“classical”) literature and the *minority machine* in Kafka’s work. It is not only a question of tapping libidinal energy but also one of opening up new registers of thought and action—of speed:

This question of speed is important and very complicated as well. It doesn’t mean to be the first to finish; one might be late by speed. Nor does it mean always changing; one might be invariable and constant by speed. Speed is to be caught in a becoming that is not a development or an evolution. One would have to be like a taxi, a waiting line, a line of flight, a bottleneck, a traffic jam, green and red lights, slight paranoia, difficult relations with the police. Being an abstract and broken line, a zigzag that slips “between.” (*Dialogues*, pp. 40–41)

Thus, Kafka’s work is revolutionary in the way it affects the language in which it is effected. A language that is a “major” language is affected by a strong deterritorialization factor and is subjected to a series of displacements that make it slow down to a crawl in certain texts (contexts) (see, for example, “The Metamorphosis”) or send it into a panic, unfolding at a vertiginous pace (see one of the short texts, like “The Cares of a Family Man”). For Kafka, therefore, it is never a matter of “trafficking” in language or of mishandling it—how many writers and poets have supposedly “subverted” language without ever having caused the slightest ripple in comparison with the language of Kafka, Joyce, or Kleist?—but of essentially proposing a new *way of using* it. This new usage in effect short-circuits the appeal—within and by means of the “paper language” that for Kafka is German—to a higher, dominant reality (transcendent or transcendental) that would function from within as a principle of subjectivization. In Deleuzian terms, that new “language” (of a “logothete,” as Barthes<sup>4</sup> would say) performs an “absolute deterritorialization of the cogito” by the processes that it sets to work.<sup>5</sup> If, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the principal strata that bind and imprison the human being are “the organism, meaningfulness, interpretation, subjectivization, and subjection” (*Mille Plateaux*, p. 167), then “minor” language is the instrument *par excellence* of that destratification.

We can now better understand what separates Benjamin’s “interpretation” from the “course” taken in Deleuze and Guattari’s book. What in Benjamin gives way in a (blind? asymbolic?) gesture that refers to failure here takes the path of an experimentation of life: the setting into place of a “field of continuous in-

tensities” and of an “emission of sign-particles” that can no longer lead to failure because the security of a subject is no longer necessary. The authors show that referring Kafka’s work to an idea of failure necessarily implies the full-fledged return of literary and philosophical categories that presuppose a logical, even ontological, priority of content over form: “since the content is given in a given form, one has to find, discover, or see the form of expression appropriate to it.” But with Kafka it turns out that this schema and this *vection*, which seem so natural, are radically put into question.

In other words, if Kafka’s watchword was really “Thou shall not make unto thee a graven image,” it was certainly not in the manner of the “Turks” or “Muslims” that Hegel describes in his *Aesthetics*—those people who “forbid the painting or reproduction of the human being or any living creature”<sup>6</sup>—and even less like Plato—who in *The Republic* condemns art as the “greatest danger” or as simulacrum: a simulacrum that leads those who do not possess the antidotes of reason and knowledge (that is, animals, children, and the ignorant, as Kofman reminds us) to lose track of the distinction between the sophist and the philosopher, between truth and illusion.

According to the authors, it was because he liked children, animals, and the “ignorant” that Kafka understood how to effect the strongest challenge to the wall of censure erected by the history of literature. Like the animal that could never really have a thought because it would simultaneously forget what it was on the verge of thinking (a process Nietzsche discussed in his *Untimely Meditations*), “minor” literature as reinvented by Kafka “begins by expressing itself and doesn’t conceptualize until afterward” (p. 28). With Kafka we are no longer confronted by a “dialectic” or a “structural” correspondence between two kinds of “forms”—forms of content, on the one hand, and ready-made forms of expression, on the other—but, in the authors’ words, by a *machine of expression* that is capable of disorganizing its own forms, of disorganizing the forms of content, so as to free up an intense material of expression that is then made of pure content that can no longer be separated from its expression:

Expression must break forms, encourage ruptures and new sproutings. When a form is broken, one must reconstruct the content that will necessarily be part of a rupture in the order of things. To take over, to anticipate, the material. (p. 28)

Thus, the art (*modern* art in this sense) that Kafka tried to introduce is effectively no longer an art that proposes to “express” (a meaning), to “represent” (a thing, a being), or to “imitate” (a nature). It is rather a method (of writing)—of picking up, even of stealing: of “double stealing” as Deleuze sometimes says, which is both “stealing” and “stealing away”—that consists in propelling the most diverse contents on the basis of (nonsignifying) ruptures and intertwinings of the most heterogeneous orders of signs and powers. The familial triangle, for exam-



ple, is connected to other triangles (such as commercial, economic, bureaucratic, and juridical ones), and thus the “individual concern” finds itself linked directly to the political. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the second principal characteristic of minor literature is that it is always political, not only in the sense in which one speaks of politics, but specifically in the sense in which further activity is no longer related to a unified instance, to an autonomous subjective substance that would be the *origin* of the choices we make, of the tastes we have, and of the life we lead.

In that sense, each and every gesture takes on a quasi-cosmic dimension. Benjamin says it well:

Kafka does not grow tired of representing the *gestus* in this fashion, but he invariably does so with astonishment. . . . Experiments have proved that a man does not recognize his own walk on the screen or his own voice on the phonograph. The situation of the subject in such experiments is Kafka's situation; this is what directs him to learning, where he may encounter fragments of his own existence, fragments that are still within the context of the role. (p. 137)

But it is with regard to the apparently “fragmentary” character of Kafkaesque exegeses that Deleuze and Guattari once again differ from Benjamin. Although Benjamin never tried to relate Kafka's work to a previous text or record that would allow one to “explain” it, his text does remain tacitly saturated with considerations that refer more or less directly to Jewish theology. Did Benjamin not write to Scholem in 1939 that “anybody who could see the comic sides of Jewish theology would at the same time have in hand the *key* to Kafka”?<sup>7</sup>

In fact, at the end of his dense study of Kafka, when it is a matter of accounting for the “law” of the work and bringing to light the internal principle that Kafka himself followed, Benjamin refers to the loss of the Holy Writ. Kafka's work somehow remains enigmatic, his life and attitude incomprehensible and mysterious: “Kafka, however, has found the law of his journey—at least on one occasion he succeeded in bringing its breathtaking speed in line with the slow narrative pace that he presumably sought all his life” (p. 139).

Seen from a certain angle, Deleuze and Guattari's book on Kafka represents the annulment of such a question because—as they do their best to show—if there is one thing that should be avoided besides the natural (psychoanalytic) explanation and the supernatural (theological) one, it is the temptation to draw Kafka toward the “individual concern,” the tragic (that is, toward personal psychology, neurosis, or an author's individual tastes). Neither allegory, metaphor, nor theology will sum up a work that has explored them all without letting itself be taken over by any single one. But, above all, neither the transcendence of the law, the internalization of guilt, nor the subjectivity of the enunciation can ever give an adequate account of the intrinsic force of Kafka's work.

Far from relating this work to an interior drama, an intimate tribunal, or something else drawn from the same old grab bag, Deleuze and Guattari ask us to be attentive to the labor of the “dismantling” or demolition of forms and categories that determine the “great literature” in Kafka. A calm dismantling—one would be tempted to say “pacific”—that first takes the form of an “a priori elimination of every idea of guilt”: there are certainly many “guilty” characters in Kafka, and with an extremely strong and deleterious guilt, but Kafka never takes that guilt for granted. On the contrary, it appears at each moment as the effect of an assemblage, of a machine if you will, that indirectly takes up lawyers, judges, *and* the victims in the same movement. As Deleuze and Guattari write: “Culpability is never anything but the superficial movement whereby judges and even lawyers confine you in order to prevent you from engaging in a real movement—that is, from taking care of your own affairs” (p. 45). So much for culpability.

The dismantling mentioned above has a second aspect, and this one is decisive in confronting the reading proposed by Deleuze and Guattari with that of Benjamin: “even if the law remains unrecognizable, this is not because it is hidden by its transcendence, but simply because it is always denuded of any interiority: it is always in the office next door, or behind the door, on to infinity” (p. 45). It is very easy to see the implications that such a hypothesis entails in regard to theology (whether Jewish or another). The law is not stated in accord with its (“sham”) transcendence, but the opposite occurs: “it is the statement, the enunciation, that constructs the law in the name of an immanent power of the one who enounces it—the law is confused with that which the guardian utters, and the writings precede the law, rather than being the necessary and derived expression of it” (p. 45). Transcendence of the law, the interiority of guilt, and the subjectivity of enunciation are the three “themes” that, according to Deleuze and Guattari, have misled readers and made access to Kafka's work difficult if not impossible, for it becomes inevitably a matter of relating the complexity to his “genius,” to the “mystery” of his existence, as in the relationship of the Haggadah to the Halaka, which Benjamin mentions in his text on Kafka.<sup>8</sup> In delving into the “methods” and the processes that Kafka uses to revoke the law's mystery and relate it to the places of its enunciation, and in describing them with precision, Deleuze and Guattari make way for—perhaps for the first time—a “joyous” reading of Kafka: a *Gaya Scienza* of Kafka's work.

Free of the “three most tiresome themes” of the interpretation of the law, Deleuze and Guattari are led to propose a conception of the relation of law to desire that allows them to call into question all the ambiguities and semiobscurities that weigh down all the commentaries on Kafka's work. For them, since the law that is constantly referred to in Kafka no longer lends itself to an anthropological or theological explanation, the entire economy of that strange “work,” and in particular its relation to desire (of writing, reading, and loving), has to

be reinterpreted. And not only has the nature of the law been “misinterpreted,” but the status and role of desire in Kafka’s work have not fared any better. Deleuze and Guattari are the first to underscore the importance and force of desire in Kafka. As they reveal, this desire cannot be placed in a relation (of dependence) with a lack or even with the law in general, with a localized natural reality (the substantial “object” of my desire), or with worldly pleasure (above all the “carnavalesque”). As Deleuze and Guattari say in an essential passage in this book: “*where one believed there was the law, there is in fact desire and desire alone. Justice is desire and not law*” (p. 49).

One can guess the consequences they will draw from such premises: since desire is the effective “operator” of an assemblage where everybody—officials, judges, lawyers, artists, men, women, and so forth—is held, it becomes obvious why neither a lack nor a privation (of a transcendent meaning, for example) gives or causes desire; on the contrary, one can *lack* something only in relation to an assemblage from which one is excluded, but one *desires* only as a function of an assemblage where one is included: if only, as Deleuze says, in an “association of banditry or revolt” (*Dialogues*, p. 25).

Thus, we can better understand what was lacking in Benjamin’s attempt to reach an interpretation by means of gesture or the Talmud: by making law into a substance and desire (for justice) into an exigency that, if not transcendent, is external to the assemblage where every subject is only one piece of a complex montage, he has to hypostatize a nature of justice and of the law. He also has to derive desire from a lack or a law that transcends the subject or, if you will, from a law that the subject has “forgotten” and that is waiting to reemerge into the light.<sup>9</sup> According to Deleuze and Guattari, conversely, if justice doesn’t lend itself to representation, it is not because justice is inaccessible or mysteriously hidden, but because it is desire:

Desire could never be on a stage where it would sometimes appear like a party opposed to another party (desire against the law), sometimes like the presence of the two sides under the effect of a superior law that would govern their distribution and their combination. (p. 50)

Thus, the following conclusion is drawn:

If everything, everyone, is part of justice, if everyone is an auxiliary of justice, from the priest to the little girls, this is not because of the transcendence of the law but because of the immanence of desire. (p.50)

This last version—very Kafkaesque—of the avatars and metamorphoses of desire reveals that for Kafka there is never any need for a representative to intercede between him and his desire, just as there is no need for an intermediary between the “work” of the text and the reader. Because it is *immanent*, the desire

that traverses Kafka’s work doesn’t even require what Benjamin, in referring to Father Malebranche (!), claims for Kafka himself: for instance, the possession of *attentiveness*, “the natural prayer of the soul.” On the contrary, Kafka knew that to find justice—the justice that he was seeking, that traversed him—it was necessary to move, to go from one room to another, from office to office, from language to language, and from country to country, always following his desire.

To find the “key” to Kafka’s work, Deleuze and Guattari haven’t sought to interpret it; they didn’t seek to relate it to some single, transcendent law. Like K., the man of the immanent quest following the line of infinite flight, they have tried to grapple with the extraordinary machine of expression that Kafka set to work and have taken up the task of rewriting the quest to infinity, interminably. In reading this short but very dense book, we find, in place of infinite *exegesis*, a reading of Kafka’s work that is *practical*: “continuum of desire, with shifting limits that are always displaced” (p. 51). It is this procedure in action, this continuous process, and this field of immanence that Deleuze and Guattari have tried to help us traverse with a Kafka freed from his interpreters.



## Chapter 3

# What Is a Minor Literature?

So far we have dealt with little more than contents and their forms: bent head—straightened head, triangles—lines of escape. And it is true that in the realm of expression, the bent head connects to the photo, and the erect head to sound. But as long as the form and the deformation or expression are not considered for themselves, there can be no real way out, even at the level of contents. Only expression gives us the *method*. The problem of expression is staked out by Kafka not in an abstract and universal fashion but in relation to those literatures that are considered minor, for example, the Jewish literature of Warsaw and Prague. A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization. In this sense, Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible—the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise.<sup>1</sup> The impossibility of not writing because national consciousness, uncertain or oppressed, necessarily exists by means of literature (“The literary struggle has its real justification at the highest possible levels”). The impossibility of writing other than in German is for the Prague Jews the feeling of an irreducible distance from their primitive Czech territoriality. And the impossibility of writing in German is the deterritorialization of the German population itself, an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses, like a “paper language” or an artificial language; this is all the more true for the Jews who are simultaneously a part of this

minority and excluded from it, like “gypsies who have stolen a German child from its crib.” In short, Prague German is a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses. (This can be compared in another context to what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language.)

The second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political. In major literatures, in contrast, the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with other no less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as a mere environment or a background; this is so much the case that none of these Oedipal intrigues are specifically indispensable or absolutely necessary but all become as one in a large space. Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it. In this way, the family triangle connects to other triangles—commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical—that determine its values. When Kafka indicates that one of the goals of a minor literature is the “purification of the conflict that opposes father and son and the possibility of discussing that conflict,” it isn't a question of an Oedipal phantasm but of a political program. “Even though something is often thought through calmly, one still does not reach the boundary where it connects up with similar things, one reaches the boundary soonest in politics, indeed, one even strives to see it before it is there, and often sees this limiting boundary everywhere. . . . What in great literature goes on down below, constituting a not indispensable cellar of the structure, here takes place in the full light of day, what is there a matter of passing interest for a few, here absorbs everyone no less than as a matter of life and death.”<sup>2</sup>

The third characteristic of minor literature is that in it everything takes on a collective value. Indeed, precisely because talent isn't abundant in a minor literature, there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that “master” and that could be separated from a collective enunciation. Indeed, scarcity of talent is in fact beneficial and allows the conception of something other than a literature of masters; what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement. The political domain has contaminated every statement (*énoncé*). But above all else, because collective or national consciousness is “often inactive in external life and always in the process of break-down,” literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation. It is literature that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility; just as the dog of “Investigations” calls out in his solitude to *another science*. The literary

machine thus becomes the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come, not at all for ideological reasons but because the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking elsewhere in this milieu: *literature is the people's concern*.<sup>3</sup> It is certainly in these terms that Kafka sees the problem. The message doesn't refer back to an enunciating subject who would be its cause, no more than to a subject of the statement (*sujet d'énoncé*) who would be its effect. Undoubtedly, for a while, Kafka thought according to these traditional categories of the two subjects, the author and the hero, the narrator and the character, the dreamer and the one dreamed of.<sup>4</sup> But he will quickly reject the role of the narrator, just as he will refuse an author's or master's literature, despite his admiration for Goethe. Josephine the mouse renounces the individual act of singing in order to melt into the collective enunciation of "the immense crowd of the heroes of [her] people." A movement from the individuated animal to the pack or to a collective multiplicity—seven canine musicians. In "The Investigations of a Dog," the expressions of the solitary researcher tend toward the assemblage (*agencement*) of a collective enunciation of the canine species even if this collectivity is no longer or not yet given. There isn't a subject; *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation*, and literature expresses these acts insofar as they're not imposed from without and insofar as they exist only as diabolical powers to come or revolutionary forces to be constructed. Kafka's solitude opens him up to everything going on in history today. The letter K no longer designates a narrator or a character but an assemblage that becomes all the more machine-like, an agent that becomes all the more collective because an individual is locked into it in his or her solitude (it is only in connection to a subject that something individual would be separable from the collective and would lead its own life).

The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature. Even he who has the misfortune of being born in the country of a great literature must write in its language, just as a Czech Jew writes in German, or an Ouzbekian writes in Russian. Writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow. And to do that, finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own *patois*, his own third world, his own desert. There has been much discussion of the questions "What is a marginal literature?" and "What is a popular literature, a proletarian literature?" The criteria are obviously difficult to establish if one doesn't start with a more objective concept—that of minor literature. Only the possibility of setting up a minor practice of major language from within allows one to define popular literature, marginal literature, and so on.<sup>5</sup> Only in this way can literature really become a collective machine of expression and really be

able to treat and develop its contents. Kafka emphatically declares that a minor literature is much more able to work over its material.<sup>6</sup> Why this machine of expression, and what is it? We know that it is in a relation of multiple deterritorializations with language; it is the situation of the Jews who have dropped the Czech language at the same time as the rural environment, but it is also the situation of the German language as a "paper language." Well, one can go even farther; one can push this movement of deterritorialization of expression even farther. But there are only two ways to do this. One way is to artificially enrich this German, to swell it up through all the resources of symbolism, of oneirism, of esoteric sense, of a hidden signifier. This is the approach of the Prague school, Gustav Meyrink and many others, including Max Brod.<sup>7</sup> But this attempt implies a desperate attempt at symbolic reterritorialization, based in archetypes, Kabbala, and alchemy, that accentuates its break from the people and will find its political result only in Zionism and such things as the "dream of Zion." Kafka will quickly choose the other way, or, rather, he will invent another way. He will opt for the German language of Prague as it is and in its very poverty. Go always farther in the direction of deterritorialization, to the point of sobriety. Since the language is arid, make it vibrate with a new intensity. Oppose a purely intensive usage of language to all symbolic or even significant or simply signifying usages of it. Arrive at a perfect and unformed expression, a materially intense expression. (For these two possible paths, couldn't we find the same alternatives, under other conditions, in Joyce and Beckett? As Irishmen, both of them live within the genial conditions of a minor literature. That is the glory of this sort of minor literature—to be the revolutionary force for all literature. The utilization of English and of every language in Joyce. The utilization of English and French in Beckett. But the former never stops operating by exhilaration and overdetermination and brings about all sorts of worldwide reterritorializations. The other proceeds by dryness and sobriety, a willed poverty, pushing deterritorialization to such an extreme that nothing remains but intensities.)

How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of a minor literature, but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language? Kafka answers: steal the baby from its crib, walk the tightrope.

Rich or poor, each language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth. 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 that form of food *par excellence*, in other words, the animal or meat—an obsession with the mouth and with teeth and with large, unhealthy, or gold-capped teeth.<sup>8</sup> This is one of Kafka's main problems with Felice. Fasting is also a constant theme in Kafka's writings. His writings are a long history of fasts. The Hunger Artist, surveyed by butchers, ends his career next to beasts who eat their meat raw, placing the visitors before an irritating alternative. The dogs try to take over the mouth of the investigating hound by filling it with food so that he'll stop asking questions, and there too there is an irritating alternative: "[T]hey would have done better to drive me away and refuse to listen to my questions. No, they did not want to do that; they did not indeed want to listen to my questions, but it was because I asked these questions that they did not want to drive me away." The investigating hound oscillates between two sciences, that of food—a science of the Earth and of the bent head ("Whence does the Earth procure this food?")—and that of music which is a science of the air and of the straightened head, as the seven musical dogs of the beginning and the singing dog of the end well demonstrate. But between the two there is something in common, since food can come from high up and the science of food can only develop through fasting, just as the music is strangely silent.

Ordinarily, in fact, language compensates for its deterritorialization by a reterritorialization in sense. Ceasing to be the organ of one of the senses, it becomes an instrument of Sense. And it is sense, as a correct sense, that presides over the designation of sounds (the thing or the state of things that the word designates) and, as figurative sense, over the affectation of images and metaphors (those other things that words designate under certain situations or conditions). Thus, there is not only a spiritual reterritorialization of sense, but also a physical one. Similarly, language exists only through the distinction and the complementarity of a subject of enunciation, who is in connection with sense, and a subject of the statement, who is in connection, directly or metaphorically, with the designated thing. This sort of ordinary use of language can be called extensive or representative—the reterritorializing function of language (thus, the singing dog at the end of the "Investigations" forces the hero to abandon his fast, a sort of re-Oedipalization).

Now something happens: the situation of the German language in Czechoslovakia, as a fluid language intermixed with Czech and Yiddish, will allow Kafka the possibility of invention. Since things are as they are ("it is as it is, it is as it is," a formula dear to Kafka, marker of a state of facts), he will abandon

sense, render it no more than implicit; he will retain only the skeleton of sense, or a paper cutout.

Since articulated sound was a deterritorialized noise but one that will be reterritorialized in sense, it is now sound itself that will be deterritorialized irrevocably, absolutely. The sound or the word that traverses this new deterritorialization no longer belongs to a language of sense, even though it derives from it, nor is it an organized music or song, even though it might appear to be. We noted Gregor's warbling and the ways it blurred words, the whistling of the mouse, the cough of the ape, the pianist who doesn't play, the singer who doesn't sing and gives birth to her song out of her nonsinging, the musical dogs who are musicians in the very depths of their bodies since they don't emit any music. Everywhere, organized music is traversed by a line of abolition—just as a language of sense is traversed by a line of escape—in order to liberate a living and expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form.<sup>9</sup> This language torn from sense, conquering sense, bringing about an active neutralization of sense, no longer finds its value in anything but an accenting of the word, an inflection: "I live only here or there in a small word in whose vowel. . . . I lose my useless head for a moment. The first and last letters are the beginning and end of my fishlike emotion."<sup>10</sup> Children are well skilled in the exercise of repeating a word, the sense of which is only vaguely felt, in order to make it vibrate around itself (at the beginning of *The Castle*, the schoolchildren are speaking so fast that one cannot understand what they are saying). Kafka tells how, as a child, he repeated one of his father's expressions in order to make it take flight on a line of non-sense: "end of the month, end of the month"<sup>11</sup> The proper name, which has no sense in itself, is particularly propitious for this sort of exercise. *Milena*, with an accent on the *i*, begins by evoking "a Greek or a Roman gone astray in Bohemia, violated by Czech, cheated of its accent," and then, by a more delicate approximation, it evokes "a woman whom one carries in one's arms out of the world, out of the fire," the accent marking here an always possible fall or, on the contrary, "the lucky leap which you yourself make with your burden."<sup>12</sup>

It seems to us that there is a certain difference, even if relative and highly nuanced, between the two evocations of the name Milena: one still attaches itself to an extensive, figurative scene of the fantasmatic sort; the second is already much more intensive, marking a fall or a leap as a threshold of intensity contained within the name itself. In fact, we have here what happens when sense is actively neutralized. As Wagenbach says, "The word is master; it directly gives birth to the image." But how can we define this procedure? Of sense there remains only enough to direct the lines of escape. There is no longer a designation of something by means of a proper name, nor an assignation of metaphors by means of a figurative sense. But *like* images, the thing no longer forms anything but a sequence of intensive states, a ladder or a circuit for intensities that

one can make race around in one sense or another, from high to low, or from low to high. The image is this very race itself; it has become becoming—the becoming-dog of the man and the becoming-man of the dog, the becoming-ape or the becoming-beetle of the man and vice versa. We are no longer in the situation of an ordinary, rich language where the word dog, for example, would directly designate an animal and would apply metaphorically to other things (so that one could say “like a dog”).<sup>13</sup> *Diaries*, 1921: “Metaphors are one of the things that makes me despair of literature.” Kafka deliberately kills all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation. Metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor. There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word. The thing and other things are no longer anything but intensities overrun by deterritorialized sound or words that are following their line of escape. It is no longer a question of a resemblance between the comportment of an animal and that of a man; it is even less a question of a simple wordplay. There is no longer man or animal, since each deterritorializes the other, in a conjunction of flux, in a continuum of reversible intensities. Instead, it is now a question of a becoming that includes the maximum of difference as a difference of intensity, the crossing of a barrier, a rising or a falling, a bending or an erecting, an accent on the word. The animal does not speak “like” a man but pulls from the language tonalities lacking in signification; the words themselves are not “like” the animals but in their own way climb about, bark and roam around, being properly linguistic dogs, insects, or mice.<sup>14</sup> To make the sequences vibrate, to open the word onto unexpected internal intensities—in short, an asignifying *intensive utilization* of language. Furthermore, there is no longer a subject of the enunciation, nor a subject of the statement. It is no longer the subject of the statement who is a dog, with the subject of the enunciation remaining “like” a man; it is no longer the subject of enunciation who is “like” a beetle, the subject of the statement remaining a man. Rather, there is a circuit of states that forms a mutual becoming, in the heart of a necessarily multiple or collective assemblage.

How does the situation of the German language in Prague—a withered vocabulary, an incorrect syntax—contribute to such a utilization? Generally, we might call the linguistic elements, however varied they may be, that express the “internal tensions of a language” *intensives* or *tensors*. It is in this sense that the linguist Vidal Sephiha terms intensive “any linguistic tool that allows a move toward the limit of a notion or a surpassing of it,” marking a movement of language toward its extremes, toward a reversible beyond or before.<sup>15</sup> Sephiha well shows the variety of such elements which can be all sorts of master-words, verbs, or prepositions that assume all sorts of senses; pronominal or purely intensive verbs as in Hebrew; conjunctions, exclamations, adverbs; and *terms that connote pain*.<sup>16</sup> One could equally cite the accents that are interior to words, their discordant function. And it would seem that the language of a minor litera-

ture particularly develops these tensors or these intensives. In the lovely pages where he analyzes the Prague German that was influenced by Czech, Wagenbach cites as the characteristics of this form of German the incorrect use of prepositions; the abuse of the pronominal; the employment of malleable verbs (such as *Giben*, which is used for the series “put, sit, place, take away” and which thereby becomes intensive); the multiplication and succession of adverbs; the use of pain-filled connotations; the importance of the accent as a tension internal to the word; and the distribution of consonants and vowels as part of an internal discordance. Wagenbach insists on this point: all these marks of the poverty of a language show up in Kafka but have been taken over by a creative utilization for the purposes of a new sobriety, a new expressivity, a new flexibility, a new intensity.<sup>17</sup> “Almost every word I write jars up against the next, I hear the consonants rub leadenly against each other and the vowels sing an accompaniment like Negroes in a minstrel show.”<sup>18</sup> *Language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits*. The connotation of pain accompanies this metamorphosis, as in the words that become a painful warbling with Gregor, or in Franz’s cry “single and irrevocable.” Think about the utilization of French as a spoken language in the films of Godard. There too is an accumulation of stereotypical adverbs and conjunctions that form the base of all the phrases—a strange poverty that makes French a minor language within French; a creative process that directly links the word to the image; a technique that surges up at the end of sequences in connection with the intensity of the limit “that’s enough, enough, he’s had enough,” and a generalized intensification, coinciding with a panning shot where the camera pivots and sweeps around without leaving the spot, making the image vibrate.

Perhaps the comparative study of images would be less interesting than the study of the functions of language that can work in the same group across different languages—bilingualism or even multilingualism. Because the study of the functions in distinct languages alone can account for social factors, relations of force, diverse centers of power, it escapes from the “informational” myth in order to evaluate the hierarchic and imperative system of language as a transmission of orders, an exercise of power or of resistance to this exercise. Using the research of Ferguson and Gumperz, Henri Gobard has proposed a tetralinguistic model: vernacular, maternal, or territorial language, used in rural communities or rural in its origins; a vehicular, urban, governmental, even worldwide language, a language of businesses, commercial exchange, bureaucratic transmission, and so on, a language of the first sort of deterritorialization; referential language, language of sense and of culture, entailing a cultural reterritorialization; mythic language, on the horizon of cultures, caught up a spiritual or religious reterritorialization. The spatiotemporal categories of these languages differ sharply: vernacular language is *here*; vehicular language is *everywhere*; referential language is *over there*; mythic language is *beyond*. But above all else, the



distribution of these languages varies from one group to the next and, in a single group, from one epoch to the next (for a long time in Europe, Latin was a vehicular language before becoming referential, then mythic; English has become the worldwide vehicular language for today's world).<sup>19</sup> What can be said in one language cannot be said in another, and the totality of what can and can't be said varies necessarily with each language and with the connections between these languages.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, all these factors can have ambiguous edges, changing borders, that differ for this or that material. One language can fill a certain function for one material and another function for another material. Each function of a language divides up in turn and carries with it multiple centers of power. A blur of languages, and not at all a system of languages. We can understand the indignation of integrationists who cry when Mass is said in French, since Latin is being robbed of its mythic function. But the classicists are even more behind the times and cry because Latin has even been robbed of its referential cultural function. They express regret in this way for the religious or educational forms of powers that this language exercised and that have now been replaced by other forms. There are even more serious examples that cross over between groups. The revival of regionalisms, with a reterritorialization through dialect or patois, a vernacular language—how does that serve a worldwide or transnational technocracy? How can that contribute to revolutionary movements, since they are also filled with archaisms that they are trying to impart a contemporary sense to? From Servan-Schreiber to the Breton bard to the Canadian singer. And that's not really how the borders divide up, since the Canadian singer can also bring about the most reactionary, the most Oedipal of reterritorializations, oh mama, oh my native land, my cabin, olé, olé. We would call this a blur, a mixed-up history, a political situation, but linguists don't know about this, don't want to know about this, since, as linguists, they are "apolitical," pure scientists. Even Chomsky compensated for his scientific apoliticism only by his courageous struggle against the war in Vietnam.

Let's return to the situation in the Hapsburg empire. The breakdown and fall of the empire increases the crisis, accentuates everywhere movements of deterritorialization, and invites all sorts of complex reterritorializations—archaic, mythic, or symbolist. At random, we can cite the following among Kafka's contemporaries: Einstein and his deterritorialization of the representation of the universe (Einstein teaches in Prague, and the physicist Philipp Frank gives conferences there with Kafka in attendance); the Austrian dodecaphonists and their deterritorialization of musical representation (the cry that is Marie's death in *Wozzeck*, or Lulu's, or the echoed *si* that seems to us to follow a musical path similar in certain ways to what Kafka is doing); the expressionist cinema and its double movement of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the image (Robert Wiene, who has Czech background; Fritz Lang, born in Vienna; Paul Wegener and his utilization of Prague themes). Of course, we should mention

Viennese psychoanalysis and Prague school linguistics.<sup>21</sup> What is the specific situation of the Prague Jews in relation to the "four languages?" The vernacular language for these Jews who have come from a rural milieu is Czech, but the Czech language tends to be forgotten and repressed; as for Yiddish, it is often disdained or viewed with suspicion—it *frightens*, as Kafka tells us. German is the vehicular language of the towns, a bureaucratic language of the state, a commercial language of exchange (but English has already started to become indispensable for this purpose). The German language—but this time, Goethe's German—has a cultural and referential function (as does French to a lesser degree). As a mythic language, Hebrew is connected with the start of Zionism and still possesses the quality of an active dream. For each of these languages, we need to evaluate the degrees of territoriality, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization. Kafka's own situation: he is one of the few Jewish writers in Prague to understand and speak Czech (and this language will have a great importance in his relationship with Milena). German plays precisely the double role of vehicular and cultural language, with Goethe always on the horizon (Kafka also knows French, Italian, and probably a bit of English). He will not learn Hebrew until later. What is complicated is Kafka's relation to Yiddish; he sees it less as a sort of linguistic territoriality for the Jews than as a nomadic movement of deterritorialization that reworks German language. What fascinates him in Yiddish is less a language of a religious community than that of a popular theater (he will become patron and impresario for the travelling theater of Isak Lowy).<sup>22</sup> The manner in which Kafka, in a public meeting, presented Yiddish to a rather hostile Jewish bourgeois audience is completely remarkable: Yiddish is a language that frightens more than it invites disdain, "dread mingled with a certain fundamental distaste"; it is a language that is lacking a grammar and that is filled with vocables that are fleeting, mobilized, emigrating, and turned into nomads that interiorize "relations of force." It is a language that is grafted onto Middle-High German and that so reworks the German language from within that one cannot translate it into German without destroying it; one can understand Yiddish only by "feeling it" in the heart. In short, it is a language where minor utilizations will carry you away: "Then you will come to feel the true unity of Yiddish and so strongly that it will frighten you, yet it will no longer be fear of Yiddish but of yourselves. Enjoy this self-confidence as much as you can!"<sup>23</sup>

Kafka does not opt for a reterritorialization through the Czech language. Nor toward a hypercultural usage of German with all sorts of oneiric or symbolic or mythic flights (even Hebrew-ifying ones), as was the case with the Prague school. Nor toward an oral, popular Yiddish. Instead, using the path that Yiddish opens up to him, he takes it in such a way as to convert it into a unique and solitary form of writing. Since Prague German is deterritorialized to several degrees, he will always take it farther, to a greater degree of intensity, but in the direction of a new sobriety, a new and unexpected modification, a pitiless

rectification, a straightening of the head. Schizo politeness, a drunkenness caused by water.<sup>24</sup> He will make the German language take flight on a line of escape. He will feed himself on abstinence; he will tear out of Prague German all the qualities of underdevelopment that it has tried to hide; he will make it cry with an extremely sober and rigorous cry. He will pull from it the barking of the dog, the cough of the ape, and the bustling of the beetle. He will turn syntax into a cry that will embrace the rigid syntax of this dried-up German. He will push it toward a deterritorialization that will no longer be saved by culture or by myth, that will be an absolute deterritorialization, even if it is slow, sticky, coagulated. To bring language slowly and progressively to the desert. To use syntax in order to cry, to give a syntax to the cry.

There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor. To hate all languages of masters. Kafka's fascination for servants and employees (the same thing in Proust in relation to servants, to their language). What interests him even more is the possibility of making of his own language—assuming that it is unique, that it is a major language or has been—a minor utilization. To be a sort of stranger *within* his own language; this is the situation of Kafka's Great Swimmer.<sup>25</sup> Even when it is unique, a language remains a mixture, a schizophrenic mélange, a Harlequin costume in which very different functions of language and distinct centers of power are played out, blurring what can be said and what can't be said; one function will be played off against the other, all the degrees of territoriality and relative deterritorialization will be played out. Even when major, a language is open to an intensive utilization that makes it take flight along creative lines of escape which, no matter how slowly, no matter how cautiously, can now form an absolute deterritorialization. All this inventiveness, not only lexically, since the lexical matters little, but sober syntactical invention, simply to write like a dog (but a dog can't write—exactly, exactly). It's what Artaud did with French—cries, gasps; what Celine did with French, following another line, one that was exclamatory to the highest degree. Celine's syntactic evolution went from *Voyage* to *Death on the Credit Plan*, then from *Death on the Credit Plan* to *Guignol's Band*. (After that, Celine had nothing more to talk about except his own misfortunes; in other words, he had no longer any desire to write, only the need to make money. And it always ends like that, language's lines of escape: silence, the interrupted, the interminable, or even worse. But until that point, what a crazy creation, what a writing machine! Celine was so applauded for *Voyage* that he went even further in *Death on the Credit Plan* and then in the prodigious *Guignol's Band* where language is nothing more than intensities. He spoke with a kind of "minor music." Kafka, too, is a minor music, a different one, but always made up of deterritorialized sounds, a language that moves head over heels and away.) These are the true minor authors. An escape for language, for music, for writing. What we call pop—pop music, pop philosophy, pop writing—Worterflucht. To make use of the polylingualism of one's own lan-

guage, to make a minor or intensive use of it, to oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape, an animal enters into things, an assemblage comes into play. How many styles or genres or literary movements, even very small ones, have only one single dream: to assume a major function in language, to offer themselves as a sort of state language, an official language (for example, psychoanalysis today, which would like to be a master of the signifier, of metaphor, of wordplay). Create the opposite dream: know how to create a becoming-minor. (Is there a hope for philosophy, which for a long time has been an official, referential genre? Let us profit from this moment in which antiphilosophy is trying to be a language of power.)



# Notes

## FOREWORD. THE KAFKA EFFECT

1. Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 127. The following passages from Benjamin's essay will be taken from this edition; page references will appear in the text.

2. I am referring here to the concept that the Marrocan writer Abdelkebir Khatibi introduces in his book, *Amour Bilingue* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1984).

3. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (Paris: Flammarion, Collection Dialogues, 1977), pp. 125-26; see also the important chapter entitled "De la supériorité de la littérature anglaise-américaine," pp. 47-63.

4. See Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).

5. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), p. 166.

6. I am referring to the excellent book by Sarah Kofman, *Mélancolie de l'art* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1985), pp. 26-27.

7. In a letter cited in the very fine article that Irving Wohlfarth devoted to Benjamin in the *Revue d'Esthétique*, new series, no. 1 (Paris: Ed. Privat, 1981). The article is entitled "Sur quelques motifs juifs chez Benjamin." The extract from the letter that I am using here is found in note 18, p. 161. Wohlfarth recalls that Gershom Scholem recommended to Benjamin that he "begin every study on Kafka with the book of Job or at least with a discussion about the possibility of divine judgment": Scholem considered divine judgment to be the "only subject of Kafka's work!"

8. See p. 122. Maurice de Gandillac, in his translation of Benjamin's text on Kafka ("Kafka," in *Poésie et Révolution*, 2 [Paris: Editions Denoël]), tells us that in the Talmudic tradition the Halakah is an oral law of which not a single word can be changed; the Haggadah is a free interpretation.

9. For further reference to these problems, see Wohlfarth's text that I mentioned in note 7, and the following articles that appear in the same issue of the *Revue d'Esthétique*: Jürgen Habermas, "L'actualité de Walter Benjamin. La critique: prise de conscience ou préservation," pp. 107-31, and Yves Kobry, "Benjamin et le langage," pp. 171-79.

## CHAPTER 1. CONTENT AND EXPRESSION

1. The naked or covered female neck has as much importance as the bent or straightened male head: "the neck encircled by black velour," "the collar in silk lace," "the collar of fine white silk," and so on.
2. Already, we can find it in a 20 December 1902 letter to a childhood friend, Oskar Pollak: "[W]hen Shamefaced Lucky stood up from his stool his big angular head went right through the ceiling, and without his particularly wanting to he had to look down on the thatched roofs" (Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston [New York: Schocken Books, 1977], 6). And in a diary entry for 1913: "To be pulled in through the ground-floor window of a house by a rope tied around one's neck" (*The Diaries of Franz Kafka*, trans. Joseph Kresh [New York: Schocken Books, 1948], 1:191).
3. "Description of a Struggle," in Franz Kafka, *Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 39. (The first part of "Description of a Struggle" continually develops this double movement of bent head—straightened head and the connections of the latter to sounds.)
4. Multiple apparitions of the cry in Kafka's work: crying in order to be heard crying—the death cry of a man enclosed in a room—"I screamed aloud, to hear only my own scream which met no answer nor anything that could draw its force away, so that it rose up without check and could not stop even when it ceased being audible" ("Unhappiness," in Kafka, *Complete Stories*, 390–91).
5. For example, Marthe Robert doesn't simply propose a psychoanalytic Oedipal interpretation of Kafka; she wants the portraits and the photos to serve as *trompe-l'oeil* images, the sense of which can be painfully deciphered. She also wants bent heads to signify impossibles quests. (*Oeuvres complètes*, Cercle du livre précieux, 3:380).
6. "A Report to an Academy," in Kafka, *Complete Stories*, 259.

## CHAPTER 2. AN EXAGGERATED OEDIPUS

1. Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography* (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), 20: "Kafka knew these [Freudian] theories very well and considered them always as a very rough and ready explanation which didn't do justice to detail, or rather to the real heartbeat of the conflict." (Nonetheless, Brod seems to think that the Oedipal experience does apply to the child and only later finds itself reworked as a function of the experience of God; pp. 32–33). In a letter to Brod (Kafka, *Letters*, November 1917, 167), Kafka says about a particular book of psychoanalysis that, "[I]t shares the quality of other psychoanalytic works that in the first moments its thesis seems remarkably satisfying, but very soon after one feels the same old hunger."
2. Gustave Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1971), 68.
3. Kafka, *Diaries*, 24 January 1922, 210.
4. Theodore Herzl, quoted by Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka, Années de jeunesse* (Paris: Mercure, 1967), 69.
5. Letter to Brod, in Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka*, 156: "Diabolical powers, whatever their message might be, brush up against the doors and rejoice already from the fact that they will arrive soon."
6. Note, for example, Kafka's enduring disdain for Zionism (as a spiritual and physical reterritorialization): Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka*, 164–67.
7. Kafka, *Diaries*, 29 January 1922, trans. Martin Greenberg (New York: Schocken Books, 1949), 2:215.
8. There is another version of the same text where it is a question of a sanitarium: compare, the ape's cough.

## CHAPTER 3. WHAT IS A MINOR LITERATURE?

1. See letter to Brod, Kafka, *Letters*, June 1921, 289, and commentaries in Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka*, 84.
2. Kafka, *Diaries*, 25 December 1911, 194.
3. *Ibid.*, 193: "[L]iterature is less a concern of literary history, than of the people."
4. See "Wedding Preparations in the Country", in Kafka, *Complete Stories*: "And so long as you say 'one' instead of 'I,' there's nothing in it" (p. 53). And the two subjects appear several pages later: "I don't even need to go to the country myself, it isn't necessary. I'll send my clothed body," while the narrator stays in bed like a bug or a beetle (p. 55). No doubt, this is one of the origins of Gregor's becoming-beetle in "The Metamorphosis" (in the same way, Kafka will give up going to meet Felice and will prefer to stay in bed). But in "The Metamorphosis," the animal takes on all the value of a true becoming and no longer has any of the stagnancy of a subject of enunciation.
5. See Michel Ragon, *Histoire de la littérature prolétarienne en France* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1974) on the difficulty of criteria and on the need to use a concept of a "secondary zone literature."
6. Kafka, *Diaries*, 25 December 1911, 193: "A small nation's memory is not smaller than the memory of a large one and so can digest the existing material more thoroughly."
7. See the excellent chapter "Prague at the turn of the century," in Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka*, on the situation of the German language in Czechoslovakia and on the Prague school.
8. Constancy of the theme of teeth in Kafka. A grandfather-butcher; a streetwise education at the butcher-shop; Felice's jaws; the refusal to eat meat except when he sleeps with Felice in Marienbad. See Michel Cournot's article, "Toi qui as de si grandes dents," *Nouvel Observateur*, April 17, 1972. This is one of the most beautiful texts on Kafka. One can find a similar opposition between eating and speaking in Lewis Carroll, and a comparable escape into non-sense.
9. Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1956): "[H]e noticed that they were talking to him, but he could not make out what they were saying, he heard nothing but the din that filled the whole place, through which a shrill unchanging note like that of a siren seemed to sing."
10. Kafka, *Diaries* 20 August 1911, 61–62.
11. Kafka, *Diaries*: "Without gaining a sense, the phrase 'end of the month' held a terrible secret for me" especially since it was repeated every month—Kafka himself suggests that if this expression remained shorn of sense, this was due to laziness and "weakened curiosity." A negative explication invoking lack or powerlessness, as taken by Wagenbach. It is well-known that Kafka makes this sort of negative suggestion to present or to hide the objects of his passion.
12. Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 58. Kafka's fascination with proper names, beginning with those that he invented: see Kafka, *Diaries*, 11 February 1913 (à propos of the names in *The Verdict*).
13. Kafka commentators are at their worst in their interpretations in this respect when they regulate everything through metaphors: thus, Marthe Robert reminds us that the Jews are like dogs or, to take another example, that "since the artist is treated as someone starving to death Kafka makes him into a hunger artist; or since he is treated as a parasite, Kafka makes him into an enormous insect" (*Oeuvres complètes*, Cercle du livre précieux, 5:311). It seems to us that this is a simplistic conception of the literary machine—Robbe-Grillet has insisted on the destruction of all metaphors in Kafka.
14. See, for example, the letter to Pollak in Kafka, *Letters*, 4 February 1902, 1–2.
15. See H. Vidal Sephiha, "Introduction à l'étude de l'intensif," in *Langages* 18 (June 1970): 104–20. We take the term *tensor* from J.-F. Lyotard who uses it to indicate the connection of intensity and libido.

16. Sephiha, "Introduction," 107 ("We can imagine that any phrase conveying a negative notion of pain, evil, fear, violence can cast off the notion in order to retain no more than its limit-value—that is, its intensive value": for example, the German word *sehr*, which comes from the Middle High German word, *Ser* meaning "painful").

17. Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka*, 78–88 (especially 78, 81, 88).

18. Kafka, *Diaries*, 15 December 1910, 33.

19. Henri Gobard, "De la vehicularité de la langue anglaise," *Langues modernes* (January 1972) (and *L'Alienation linguistique: analyse tetraglossique*, [Paris: Flammarion, 1976]).

20. Michel Foucault insists on the importance of the distribution between what can be said in a language at a certain moment and what cannot be said (even if it can be *done*). Georges Devereux (cited by H. Gobard) analyzes the case of the young Mohave Indians who speak about sexuality with great ease in their vernacular language but who are incapable of doing so in that vehicular language that English constitutes for them; and this is so not only because the English instructor exercises a repressive function, but also because there is a problem of languages (see *Essais d'ethnopsychiatrie générale* [Paris: Gallimard, 1970], 125–26).

21. On the Prague Circle and its role in linguistics, see *Change*, No. 3 (1969) and 10 (1972). (It is true that the Prague circle was only formed in 1925. But in 1920, Jakobson came to Prague where there was already a Czech movement directed by Mathesius and connected with Anton Marty who had taught in the German university system. From 1902 to 1905, Kafka followed the courses given by Marty, a disciple of Brentano, and participated in Brentanoist meetings.)

22. On Kafka's connections to Lowy and Yiddish theater, see Brod, *Franz Kafka*, 110–16, and Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka*, 163–67. In this mime theater, there must have been many bent heads and straightened heads.

23. "An Introductory Talk on the Yiddish Language," trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins in Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father* (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), 381–86.

24. A magazine editor will declare that Kafka's prose has "the air of the cleanliness of a child who takes care of himself" (see Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka*, 82).

25. "The Great Swimmer" is undoubtedly one of the most Beckett-like of Kafka's texts: "I have to well admit that I am in my own country and that, in spite of all my efforts, I don't understand a word of the language that you are speaking."

#### CHAPTER 4. THE COMPONENTS OF EXPRESSION

1. Kafka, *Diaries*, 15 December 1910, 33.

2. Gustave Janouch, *Conversations*, 143 (and p. 158: "Form is not the expression of the content but only its power of attraction").

3. Letter to Brod, Kafka, *Letters*, 13 July 1912, 80.

4. We are making use here of an unpublished study by Claire Parnet on *The Vampire and Letters* where the Kafka-Dracula connection is specifically analyzed. See also all the texts that Elias Canetti cites in *The Other Trial: Kafka's Letters to Felice* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); but in spite of these texts, Canetti doesn't seem to notice this vampirish activity and speaks instead about Kafka's shame over his body, his humiliation, his distress, and his need for protection.

5. See the admirable text in Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, 228–31. Dictating or typing machines fascinated Kafka in every possible way—bureaucratically, commercially, erotically. Felice worked in a business that sold "parlographs" and she became the firm's manager. Kafka was seized by a fever of advice and propositions about ways to get parlographs into hotels, post offices, trains, ships, and zeppelins and to combine them with typewriters, with "praxinoscopes," with the telephone. Kafka was obviously enchanted and thought that in this way he could console Felice who wanted to cry: "I sacrifice my nights to your business. Answer me in detail." Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, 166–68. With

a great commercial and technical elan, Kafka wants to introduce the series of diabolical inventions into the nice series of beneficial inventions.

6. Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, 17 November, 1912, 47.

7. Kafka, *Diaries*, 19 January 1911, 43.

8. "Devilish in my innocence": see Kafka, *Diaries*, 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!"

9. Proust's letters are above all else topographies of social, psychical, physical and geographic obstacles; and the obstacles are much larger the closer the correspondent is to them. This is obvious in the letters to Madame Strauss, which, like the letters to Milena, have a certain Angel of Death quality to them. In Proust's letters to young men, there are even more topographical obstacles relating to space and time, means, states of the soul, conditions, changes. For example, in a letter to a young man, where it seems that Proust no longer wants him to come to Cabourg, "You are free to decide what you want, and if you decide to come, don't write, but telegraph me right away when you arrive and, if possible take a train that arrives around 6 in the evening, or at least toward the end of the afternoon or after dinner but not too late and not before two in the afternoon, since I would like to see you before you've seen anyone. But I'll explain all of that if you come."

10. On the prison, see Kafka *Diaries*, 19 January 1911, 43.

11. Bachelard, *Lautreamont* (Paris: Editions Corti, 1956); for discussion of pure action, speed, and attack as characteristics of Lautreamont and the slowness of Kafka understood as a wearing down of "the will to live," see Bachelard's first chapter.

12. Kafka often contrasts two types of voyage, an extensive and organized one, and one that is intense, in pieces, a sinking or fragmentation. This second voyage takes place in a single place, in "one's bedroom," and is all the more intense for that: "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." (Kafka, *Diaries*, 19 July 1910, 27–28.) An intensive America, a map of intensities.

13. Kafka, *Diaries*, 9 February 1915, 2:115.

14. Kafka, *Diaries*, 8 August 1917, 2:179.

15. Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, 17 November 1912, 47.

16. The anger of Kafka when he is treated as a writer of intimacy: hence, from the start of his letters to Felice, his violent reaction against readers or critics who speak above all else of his interior life. In France, indeed, the initial success of Kafka was based on this misunderstanding—a Kafka who is simultaneously intimate and symbolical, allegorical and absurd. This is discussed in Marthe Robert's excellent study on the conditions of the reading of Kafka in France, "Citoyen de l'utopie" in *Les Critiques de notre temps et Kafka* (Paris: Garnier 1973). We can say that Kafka studies really began when German and Czech critics noted the importance of his belonging to a strong bureaucracy (insurance company, social security) and his attraction to the socialist and anarchist movements in Prague (something he often hid from Max Brod). Wagenbach's two books translated into French, *Kafka par lui-même* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968) and *Franz Kafka, Années de jeunesse*, are essential references for all these questions.

Another aspect is the role of the comic and the joyful in Kafka. But this is the same thing: the politics of the statement (*énoncé*) and the joy of desire. Even if Kafka is sick or dying, even if he brandishes guilt as his own private circus, to repel whatever bores him. It is not coincidental that every interpreter fascinated by neurosis insists simultaneously on a tragic or anguished side of Kafka and on an apolitical side. Kafka's gaiety, or the gaiety of what he wrote, is no less important than its political reality and its political scope. The best part of Max Brod's book on Kafka is when Brod tells how listeners laughed at the reading of the first chapter of *The Trial* "quite immoderately" (p. 178). We don't see any other criteria for genius than the following: the politics that runs through