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The Burrow of Sound

Let me take as my starting point one of the most striking of all Franz Kafka's stories, "The Burrow." It was written in the winter of 1923–1924, shortly before his death. Not quite the last piece he wrote, but apparently the penultimate (the last one being notoriously "Josephine the Singer"), it was first published in 1931 by Max Brod and Hans Joachim Schoeps in the first collection of Kafka's unpublished stories. Looking at these two stories together, as a strange diptych, we see the astounding and inscrutable fact that Kafka, on the brink of death, took the problem of sound and voice as the last most tenuous and tenacious red thread of his pursuit, something that goes, perhaps, straight to the core of his work, and something that has the value of a testament.

The story has a special status among Kafka's stories, albeit all of them most remarkable, which can be illustrated by two anecdotal indications. Kafka was not Jacques Lacan's author—he practically never referred to him in all of his published work—yet we find a serious engagement in one of the unpublished seminars, "Identification" (1961–1962), where in the session of March 21, 1962, Lacan addresses at some length precisely

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"The Burrow" and turns it into a strange parable (to use Kafka's word) of the relation between the subject and the Other in psychoanalysis. Kafka was not Martin Heidegger's author either, and I am not aware of a single mention in all of his published work. A very young Giorgio Agamben confronted him with this absence in a conversation in the late sixties, whereupon Heidegger responded by a longish improvised monologue on a single story, "The Burrow."[1] No recorder was turned on—one desperately wishes it had been—so this is mere hearsay evidence. With two great thinkers pointing to this particular story, one might surmise that the stakes of this story may be high—that the story might lead us to something like a secret underground thread or hidden burrow in the edifices of theory.

The story describes an animal, usually taken to be a badger, although it is never named in the story itself. It goes around in its elaborate and convoluted underground burrow, its subterranean castle, the underground counterpart of the other Castle and its labyrinths; this citadel is meticulously designed in such a way as to keep all possible enemies at bay. This takes a superb effort of craftsmanship underpinned by a magnificent streak of paranoia. In order to make this underground bastion safe and unassailable, the animal has to carefully scrutinize all possible strategies of all imaginable enemies and devise ways to counteract them. All eventualities have to be considered and seen to, but no matter how scrupulous the efforts, no measures seem to be thorough enough. The more "the badger" exerts itself, the more there remains to be done. Paranoia has the structure of a self-fulfilling prophecy; it is self-propelling, engendering ever more paranoia. The more enemies one imagines, the more they lurk around the corner.

The burrow is a retreat, the secret hideaway most carefully protected against all outer threats. It is the inside that should be clearly separated from the outside. Indeed, there is a topological problem at the heart of this story that Lacan will take as the red thread of his reading: the problem of a division of space, a line of demarcation. Obviously, the biggest and the most immediate problem is that of the entry/exit, the neuralgic spot of transition between the inside and the outside of the burrow that presents the most vulnerable point.[2] The first part of the story deals with this at some length. No matter how much the entry is hidden and overlaid by moss, whenever "the badger" has to emerge from his burrow or go back inside, it involves the moment of greatest danger and requires a series of anguished strategic maneuvers. The moment of transition is always the moment of exposure to risk that cannot be avoided. The first peep outside

has to be accomplished by trusting to luck, and when re-entering one has to examine the surroundings at length to make sure that one is unobserved by the enemy eye. There has to be the point of transition and communication between the inside and the outside, but this is the point of incalculable risk, the moment of the unforeseeable and the uncontrollable.

This vulnerable point of entry/exit/transition is only a condensation to one point of something massively present overall. The burrow as a whole is far from being a safe haven. It is at all points the space of total exposure to the Other. The complex architecture of meandering labyrinths has been entirely dictated by the invisible enemy and its possible stratagems, by its omnipresent invisible threat. Quite literally, the inner safe space of the badger is the space shaped by the Other, by the supposition of the external menacing Other. It is like this supposition turned into space, the inner abode coinciding with the spatialized, supposed Other. The safer it is, the more it is imbued with the Other. The burrow is spatialized paranoia, entirely shaped by the scenario of the Other. It is the literal embodiment of the opposition—and the coincidence in the very opposition—of which Freud was so fond: *heimlich/unheimlich* or homely/uncanny, where the home is at all points haunted by the uncanny and coincides with it. There is no inside that could escape the outside, and the badger occupies the space of the constantly shifting lag between the two: the very principle of spatialization in which it tries to find its abode at the interstice of the inner and the outer. The inside and the outside communicate and there is an overlap, yet the lag is essential. It prevents the smooth transition or simple passage of the one into the other/Other. The outside is the constant crack of the inside that cannot be filled in, healed, and recuperated.

At almost the precise middle of the story (the story is not finished, but probably close enough), there is a shift that brings the problem to a pinnacle and that provides a good entry into our problem of sound:

> *I must have slept for a long time. I was only wakened when I had reached the last light sleep which dissolves of itself, and it must have been very light, for it was an almost inaudible whistling noise [*ein an sich kaum hörbares Zischen*] that wakened me. I recognized what it was immediately; the small fry, whom I had allowed far too much latitude, had burrowed a new channel somewhere during my absence. This channel must have chanced to intersect an older one, the air was caught there, and that*

> *produced the whistling noise [*das zischende Geräusch*]. What an indefatigably busy lot these small fry are, and what a nuisance their diligence can be! First I shall have to listen at the walls of my passages and locate the place of disturbance by experimental excavations, and only then will I be able to get rid of the noise. ("The Burrow" 343)*

So there is a sound, a noise, that appears at the edge, most significantly at the edge of sleep and wakefulness (we will come back to this) and on the edge of the inside and the outside—the intrusion of the outside into the inside. Its first interpretation seems to be easy enough: this must have been caused by some tiny animals ("the small fry," *das Kleinzeug*) that must have dug some channel intersecting with other channels; there was some tiny passage of air that must have caused the whistling noise. It is a nuisance, but it shouldn't be too difficult to locate it and fill it in. "I must have silence in my passages" (343). To be the master is to be the master over sound and its emission. Curiously, it never occurs to the badger that the sound may be a phenomenon of inorganic origin, caused by a draught, a change of pressure, and so on. The assumption is that the sound is always alive, that it comes from an animate being: a rustling movement of life.

But this attempt at simple explanation comes to nothing:

> *I don't seem to be getting any nearer to the place where the noise is, it goes on always on the same thin note, with regular pauses, now a sort of whistling, but again like a kind of piping. [. . .] But whether trifling or important, I can find nothing, no matter how hard I search, or it may be that I find too much. [. . .] Sometimes I think that nobody but myself would hear it; it is true, I hear it now more and more distinctly, for my ear has grown keener through practice; though in reality it is exactly the same noise wherever I may hear it, as I have convinced myself by comparing my impressions. (344–45)*

The mysterious noise immediately poses the question of its cause and location, as any sound does. The sound is an enigma. It is structurally mysterious: one hears it—that is, one perceives it by its having made its passage inside, and the moment one hears it, it places one in the position of having to figure out its cause. There is thus an enigma pertaining to causality. The sound, at a minimum, is always a rupture of causality that one has to reestablish and straighten out. And the first step to determine

its cause is to try to pin down its spatial location, and hence its source—that is, to pin it to a point outside and thus solve its riddle. And if hearing a sound pertains to time, it is time that demands its translation into space. The conundrum of sound has a temporality that can only find its solution in spatiality. It requires a partition of space, which is here indicated by the opposition far/close and elsewhere by inside/outside. More than that, it requires a singularization: the singling out of a separate and discrete location within indeterminate and continuous space. But for the poor badger this spot recedes. There are no clues or too many clues, which amount to the same, and the even distribution of clues makes them useless: "[W]herever I listen, high or low, at the roof or the floor, at the entrance or in the corners, everywhere, everywhere, I hear the same noise" (347). The temporal fluidity of the sound calls for the spatial fixation, and there is a movement of subjectivity that is placed in this loop, between time and space, between fluidity and fixation, between the free-floating nonfixity of the sound and its attachment. There is a hermeneutics of cause and space that precedes the hermeneutics of meaning, of making sense of sounds.

Furthermore, there is an eerie quality to sound, this sound, and in a minimal form to all sounds. Can it be that only I can hear it? Does it have an "objective" status at all? Is it in my head or does it come from outside? Its spatial location poses the problem of whether there is a spatial location at all; there is a moment of phantasmagoria when the sound wavers, if ever so minimally, between its reality and unreality. One has to make sound tests to ascertain that this is indeed a sound to be located outside and not a sound imagined or dreamed up. Remember, the badger was just awakening from light slumber, and this may be a strange continuation of a dream that refuses to be dissipated. The sound is a test—of being awake, alert, and conscious, of being in possession of one's senses; but is one ever? The ability to locate the sound is like the test of sanity, for if one cannot do so, one stands on the brink of delusion, of hearing voices, of an incapacity to make sense of the world at large. One stands on the verge of an abyss, where the temporal is suspended and refuses to converge into space. The tiny sound that wouldn't go away and that resists being assigned a place and a cause is like an interminable prolongation of the vacillation inherent in every sound. It is the extension of the enigma that it poses from the outset. As unplaceable, it infests all parts of space.

The interstice of time and space in sound also produces a slippage between the sound and the gaze. The one has the propensity to translate into the other: "I go once more the long road to the Castle Keep,

all my surroundings seem filled with agitation, seem to be looking at me, and then look away again so as not to disturb me, yet cannot refrain the very next moment from trying to read the saving solution from my expression" (357). The sound has the aptitude to return the gaze. It doesn't merely originate from anywhere and everywhere, but also imbues space with exposure to visibility. The impossibility of escape from hearing the sound is transposed into the impossibility of evading the gaze. One is being looked at, with no hiding place, without a hideout in this huge and meticulously designed hideout of the burrow. One cannot close one's ears as one can close one's eyes—always open and available to the sound—but the impossibility of cutting short the influx of sounds comes to equal the impossibility for the omnipresent gaze of closing its eyes. This gaze is always reading me, and yet I cannot read it.

Further, how many sounds are there? What is the number of the sound? Can it be submitted to count? "There still remains the possibility that there are two noises, that up to now I have been listening at a good distance from the two centers, and that while its noise increases, when I draw nearer to one of them, the total result remains approximately the same for the ear in consequence of the lessening volume of sound from the other center" (345). Again there is a structural problem, for even the sound at its minimal presence—a thin whistling noise remaining persistently "the same"—poses the constant question of "one dividing into two" and hence into an ineradicable multiplicity. There is an implicit thesis in this that one could spell out as follows: the sound is never one, it resists oneness by its very nature, it poses a problem of inherent multiplicity by its merely being a sound. And the enigma it presents is not only the enigma of its cause, location, and source, but through all this the attempt to render it one, to submit its multiplicity to oneness. Again, can one ever? And can one ever decompose it into discrete countable traits? There is again a movement of subjectivity caught in the turmoil between the multiple and the one, the imposition of one on something that seems to be by its nature uncountable.[3]

Then there is the question of its intermittency—of the tricks played upon its duration:

> *Simply as a rest and a means to regain my composure I often make this experiment, listen intently and am overjoyed when I hear nothing. But the question still remains, what can have happened? [. . .] Sometimes I fancy that the noise has stopped, for*

> *it makes long pauses; sometimes such a faint whistling escapes one, one's own blood is pounding all too loudly in one's ears; then two pauses come one after another, and for a while one thinks that the whistling has stopped forever. I listen no longer, I jump up, all life is transfigured; it is as if the fountains from which flows the silence of the burrow were unsealed. (347–50)*

The sound is essentially temporal, but its temporality is punctuated. In order for there to be a sound, it has to be intermittent. There has to be the possibility of there being a nonsound, a silence against the backdrop of which the sound can emerge at all. But the demarcation line between the two is uncertain. Can one ever be sure of hearing nothing? Of perceiving pure silence, the absence of any sound? For silence itself is always populated by infinitesimal sounds: there is the heart and the pounding of blood, there is the sounding presence of one's own body whose limits stretch into the ambiance, if ever so little, and this produces the incapacity to be fully assured and confident. Silence is not the absence of sounds, but quite the opposite, the state of the greatest alertness in which subsounds emerge: the minimal thumps of both one's body and the ambient surroundings, slightly overlapping on the verge. Silence is the condition of sound, the punctuation of its flow, its frame, but also an elusive line of division that has to be drawn by an uncertain decision. Just as the sudden emergence of the sound had the power to transform the already nightmarish life of the badger into a far worse nightmare, so silence has the capacity to transfigure it instantly into bliss, albeit short-lived.[4] "I listen, but the most perfunctory listening shows at once that I was shamefully deceived: away there in the distance the whistling still remains unshaken" (351). The intermittency of the duration of sound, shaping its rhythm, overlapping with the elusive boundary between sound and silence, translates into the oscillation between nightmare and bliss. The excitation on the elusive line pushes into two extremes, the movement of subjectivity being caught in the exchange between the two. One's damnation and salvation depend on figuring out the sound and its treacherous absence.

The opposition between the threatening outside and the safe inside can be reversed: "I push my way up and listen. Deep stillness; how lovely it is here, outside there nobody troubles about my burrow, everybody has his own affairs, which have no connection with me; how have I managed to achieve this? [. . .] A complete reversal of things in the burrow; what was once the place of danger has become a place of tranquility" (352).

The home, this tentative safe haven achieved by so much effort, has been de-homed (if I can venture this expression) by the mere presence of the sound, embodying all threats, condensing them under a single heading. The external space of constant threats can now turn into the refuge from the refuge: the asylum from the contaminated asylum, the outer threat offering a relief from the unfathomable inner peril. Thus the oscillation introduced by the sound can further translate into a reversal of inside/outside and of refuge/danger. Under these circumstances, where can one find a proper place of safety?

There is also the question of volume.

> *The noise seems to have become louder, not much louder, of course—here it is always a matter of the subtlest shades—but all the same sufficiently louder for the ear to recognize it clearly. And this growing-louder is like a coming-nearer; still more distinctly than you hear the increasing loudness of the noise, you can literally see the step that brings it closer to you. You leap back from the wall, you try to grasp at once all the possible consequences that this discovery will bring with it. (351)*

What makes the sound different? Is it ever the same? Its volume is constantly subject to fluctuation once one concentrates on it. The volume is the subtle difference of volume: it increases/decreases, if ever so slightly; it can only remain "the same" if one doesn't pay attention to it. The moment one isolates the single sound and fully concentrates on it, its mode can only be crescendo. And in the strange loop that binds together time and space in sound, it comes ever nearer. The sound is getting you, it is gaining ground on you, it is winning. You feel your defenses crumbling; all your weapons are of no avail. The sound, by remaining "the same," seems to be getting louder and nearer, closer to the bone. And one never hears merely with the ears: the bones are involved, starting with the tiny ones in the ear.

The attempt to squeeze the inherent multiplicity of the sound into the mold of One leads to a further expansion that might be called a crescendo of oneness:

> *But what avail all exhortations to be calm; my imagination will not rest, and I have actually come to believe—it is useless to deny it to myself—that the whistling is made by some beast [*ein Tier*], and moreover not by a great many small ones, but by a single big one. [. . .] it has a plan in view whose purpose I cannot decipher; I merely assume that the beast—and I make no claim*

> *whatever that it knows of my existence—is encircling me; it has probably made several circles around my burrow already since I began to observe it. (353–54)*

If there is to be a common denominator to this intriguing and vacillating multiple sound, then it must have a single cause, one should be able to account for it by a single big creature as its unitary origin. The sound is the sound of a beast. It is a beastly sound. There is something in its nature, or its counternature, its supernature and unnature, that implies a beast. The beast not as a part of the natural animal kingdom, but its excrescence, an excess of animality, animality turned monstrous, the specter of Animal as such. If there is a search for cause and spatial location necessarily called for by every sound, then this is the next stage, seemingly impossible to avoid: imputing the cause to a ghost. The assumption of a beast as a single cause and meaning behind the mysterious sound has a spectral existence. The impossibility of pinning down the cause to a locus and of unraveling its source, of discerning the indiscernible, offers a crack where fantasy comes in. If the sound cannot be quite counted for one, then fantasy can take the relay of oneness and give it a spectral existence. There is a beast in the machine. And the beast is encircling me—despite its being One, the unitary agent pulling the multiple strings of sound, it is also all around, everywhere, unplaceable, encompassing. Being is a beast. It is a creature of assumption and imagination—these are Kafka's words—yet overwhelming. Its purpose cannot be deciphered, and this is what makes it intractable and inscrutable. It is the supposed One that is all over, ubiquitous, the monstrous underside of the Parmenidean assertion of ontological unity *hen kai pan*, one and all.

If the hermeneutics of cause and location necessarily precedes the hermeneutics of meaning, there is a gap between the two where fantasy sneaks in. Isolating the source of the sound is like a deflation of meaning: So this is where it has been coming from. This is what has been producing it. There is nothing to worry about and nothing further to interpret. The sound would thus be put in place, neatly allocated. And the possibility of doing this at least roughly and for practical purposes is no doubt what keeps us from the paranoia lurking implicitly in every sound. It is only when the sound quavers and lingers in suspense for some moments, or minutes or agonizing hours, unplaceable and unfathomable, that one is suddenly aware of the tiny gap that divorces the sound from its source, the lag that prevents it from ever being simply collapsed on its source, the fissure that

thwarts the proper placement of its time into a spatial slot and makes it irreducible to it. This gap is the entry point of fantasy that necessarily gets hold of meaning once this gap is kept open for any length of time.[5] The meaning of a sound, the assumption one necessarily makes, is placed in the very impossibility of its univocal placement, deracinating, if slightly, its firm roots. The spatial anchorage would make it univocal or *una voce*: with a single voice. If there is a meaning to be sought and figured out, this stems from a dislocation of natural causality, the failed allotment of sound to a spatial point. Fantasy equally intervenes in the gap between multiplicity and oneness, in the irreducibility of sound to one, and it proposes an assumed specter of One as the solution of this predicament. One as the One of the beast. There is something ghostly and beastly in making sense of sound, that is, in making sense *tout court*. In the pursuit of sense there is always a beastly moment; the elusive beast that intervenes doesn't quite vanish in sense but rather conditions it. Making sense requires bringing multiplicity to unity and pinning the elusive to a name—but can this be done without relying on fantasy at a certain point, a point usually reduced and exorcized? Kafka's story gives this point a latitude to the point of invading the whole space of meaning.

The beast behind the sound is all powerful, but its omnipotence only gives shape and substance to what is overpowering and invasive in the sound itself. It gathers in its bosom the eeriness, the mystery, the intrusive force of the sound. It draws its strength from sound and provides it with strength in return. It unifies the absent cause of sounds into a single beastly creature. Once the beast is given life by the assumption one makes in this predicament, then all sounds become manifestations of the hidden beast. And if the beast seems to have suddenly appeared as lurking behind them, then it can only follow that it had been there all the time without our noticing: "Now I could not have foreseen such an opponent. But apart altogether from the beast's peculiar characteristics, what is happening now is only something which I should really have feared all the time, something against which I should have been constantly prepared: the fact that someone would come" (354). The sound implies the beast that can jeopardize the whole of life, and retrospectively the whole of life has been a long wait for this jeopardy. It is not that it has suddenly emerged from nowhere. Rather, one was foolish and naive not to have anticipated its coming. One has been deluding oneself. The peaceful life without the beast was based on blindness, or rather deafness—actually both. The whistling sound was a surprise, totally unexpected, but it was bound to come, it had

a destination to fulfill by its coming out, it was secretly lurking behind all sounds and waiting for its moment. Its sudden emergence was just a materialization of its virtuality in every sound, in the crack involved in the world of sounds.

Can one come to terms with the beast? Can one reach an understanding with it?

> *If it should really break through to the burrow I shall give it some of my stores and it will go on its way again. It will go its way again, a fine story! Lying in my heap of earth I can naturally dream of all sorts of things, even of an understanding with the beast, though I know well enough that no such thing can happen, and that at the instant when we see each other, more, at the moment when we merely guess at each other's presence, we shall both blindly bare our claws and teeth, neither of us a second before or after the other. (358)*

The world is not big enough for the badger and the beast. There is no room for a friendly coexistence, for a division of space and goods. It's an either-or, a life and death struggle. The beast grew out of the tiniest of sounds, a mere whistling, and it grew to spectacular proportions, out of all proportion, taking over Being at large. It has imbued being with an excessive presence, a presence too much, the *too-muchness of presence*—to use an excellent expression proposed by Eric Santner (*Psychotheology* 8)—yet pinned to a mere sound. The beast of being has come too close by merely emitting a sound, but this pertains to the very nature of the sound: the hazard of its coming too close, the impossibility of keeping it at bay. What would be the proper distance of the sound, between its closeness and remoteness? Can it ever be at an appropriate distance? Not too far, not too close? Can one ever keep being at a proper distance? The beast of being, a mere creature of sound, the slightest and the most immaterial of substances, is nevertheless endowed with claws and teeth. It can rip one apart should it appear in flesh. Yet despite its unbearable closeness—the unbearable closeness of being—it pertains to its nature that it keeps in retreat, a retreat within the retreat, never stepping into the full brightness of noon, in line with the nature of the sound that immediately imposes itself, piercing all protection, but at the same time never quite discloses its source and location. It dwells in the dislocation. The sound is an advent of presence, compellingly inflicting itself, but simultaneously a truncated presence, resisting its revelation, posing an enigma, a retreat in its very disclosure.

Lacan, in his reading of this story in Seminar 9, curiously never mentions the sound that antagonizes the badger. His interest is limited to the topology of the burrow, which is spectacular enough. This is at an early stage of his interest in topology, which would eventually become overbearing and more often than not inaccessible and off-putting. It presents a number of problems and paradoxes that I cannot discuss here. I can just briefly hint at the following: topology, with its progressively more and more mind-boggling objects, from the Möbius strip, the Klein bottle, and the torus to cross-cap, the Borromean knot, and the whole theory of knots, takes off from Lacan's early and ample use of schemata and graphs. It would seem that the topological objects were meant to serve the purpose of giving an "illustration" or a spatial demonstration of his theoretical propositions. This purpose immediately entailed a reversal, I suppose not unintended, for what was designed to facilitate understanding (or was it ever?) was far more difficult to grasp than the thing it was supposed to render intelligible and, rather, served as an impediment, itself in need of explanation. Gradually the topological objects and paradoxes, and particularly the knots, lost their status of illustrating something and became the thing itself, the focus of interest and elaboration in itself, the very way that theory should proceed, embodying something that cannot be rendered in any other way.[6] For better or for worse.

Nonetheless, it is easy enough to see why and how Lacan was trying to use topology in reading this particular story. The burrow is a division of space into an inside and an outside, but as we have seen, this division is impossible; the outside not only communicates with the inside but contaminates it and shapes it. Lacan tries to transpose this spatial constellation into the problem of the relation between the subject and the Other, converting this relation into topological terms: a relation between two toruses, the torus of the subject, its construction of an inner space, and the torus of the Other pertaining to the exterior. The early Lacan never tired of repeating that "the desire of the subject is the desire of the Other," the dictum that places the subject's desire into an immediate engagement with the Other's desire, so that the former cannot emerge without a dependence on the latter and, even more, without a point of overlapping and coincidence of the two. Now he proposes an irreducible analogy, "which cannot be excluded from what [for the subject] is called the inside and the outside, so that the one passes into the other and the one regulates the other" (Le séminaire, livre IX).[7] The subject's desire is always caught in an internal-external connection with the Other: they are

both drastically separate and linked (as the infant and the mother, usually the first representative of the Other), so the two topological spaces, two toruses, communicate by a passage or a short circuit that both links them and keeps them apart. He uses the surgical term *anastomosis*, the intercommunication of two vessels in the body,[8] a bypass, so to speak, a shortcut cutting across two detached spaces. This doesn't simply create a single space, but a torsion of the space, its curvature not merely the externality of the outside world and the burrow, but the placement of subjectivity in this spatial torsion in the noncoincidence and anastomosis.

Now it is true that there is an equation in the story between the badger and its burrow: "But simply by virtue of being owner of this great vulnerable edifice I am obviously defenseless against any serious attack. The joy of possessing it has spoiled me, the vulnerability of the burrow has made me vulnerable; any wound to it hurts me as if I myself were hit" (355). It is as if the burrow would immediately present an extension of the animal's being; it is inseparable from it. The badger inhabits the burrow; the burrow inhabits the badger. It is not just a question of a complicated architecture of labyrinths and passages; it may well concern "something in the most intimate interior of organisms," an intimate tie between the organism and its milieu, its life environment. And the life environment of the subject is the Other—so this would ultimately be a parable of a topological model linking the organism and the Other, the one passing into the other—that is, the Other that reaches into organic intimacy, inhabiting it as its external kernel. In the last instance, this could serve as the parable of a topological link between "nature" and "culture," the paradox of their link in terms of spatial torsion, the one stretching into the other. Ultimately the human being is "the animal of the torus, the animal of the burrow (*l'animal du terrier*)," its "animal" organic nature linked by a torsion to the symbolic. In this passage of the one into the other/Other, one can neither set them apart in a simple opposition nor collapse them into a common and unitary space.

But the crucial point is oddly missing in this account of Lacan's. This is the point where the sound comes in: the very presentation of the topological torsion being pinned to a singular occurrence, the object epitomizing the topological paradox, the torsion turned into object—the object that is by its nature precisely unplaceable, since the whole problem is that it cannot be attached to a spatial location, and hence presents a constant topological conundrum. Kafka's story is neatly divided into two parts of equal length: first, the topological convolution of the burrow; second, the

emergence of the object sound. There is something of a link of logical implication between the two: topology requires a consequence to follow, the consequence utterly dismantling the shaky attempts of security in the first part by presenting an object that brings the initial setting to a climax. The agony of the first part was bad enough, but nothing compares to the agony of the second part. Lacan curiously dwells only on the first part and draws his topological parable from there, disregarding what offers itself as a royal way to the theory of the object in psychoanalysis. If there is indeed the Other at stake, then this Other can function only if it "manifests" itself as this trivial and irrepressible object, a sheer nothingness of the sound, the topology made sound. The implication also works in reverse: the topological paradox, the spatial torsion, is conditioned by the emergence of this singular object; it is pinned to this trivial occurrence that "causes"—in the peculiar Lacanian sense of cause—its curvature. The sound is both unpredictable in its nature and at the same time relentlessly persistent, both vacillating and adamantly constant, erratic and inflexible, fickle and obdurate—just like the Other. There is no Other without a quirk, and it is the quirk that makes the Other other.

The sound is an entity of the edge. Before coming to some tentative conclusions, let me briefly dwell on the particular edge that is crucial for Kafka: the blurred line between sleep and wakefulness, the edge of awakening. *The Trial* begins with an awakening. Josef K. wakes up in his room, with two strangers at his bedside, in the space of his homely intimacy. The two intruders will proceed to eat his breakfast, seize his undergarments, and present him with the indictment. In the first scene, at the edge of waking up, the home is "de-homed," the concept of *unheimlich* is quite literally staged. Awakening is a threshold between sleep and wakefulness, like coming back from a foreign country, but the threshold is a risk, for does one ever come simply back home from some distant oneiric place? There is a crack in between, and the uncanny moment is precisely the moment of not being able to find the homely again, if only for a moment. In a passage that he eventually crossed out, Kafka put it brilliantly:

> *[I]t is really remarkable that when you wake up in the morning you nearly always find everything in exactly the same place as the evening before. For when asleep and dreaming you are, apparently at least, in an essentially different state from that of wakefulness; and therefore [. . .] it requires enormous presence*

> *of mind or rather quickness of wit, when opening your eyes to seize hold as it were of everything in the room at exactly the same place where you had let it go on the previous evening. (*The Trial *279)*[9]

There is a thin line: on the one hand, the dislocation of dreams; on the other hand, the elusively escaping familiar, the impossibility of placing it. One needs vigilance to catch it, to prevent it from sliding away, for its dislocation coincides with everything being seemingly in the same place. The dislocated world has to be relocated, that is, moved in order to be in the same place. If awakening is a threshold, then it is a threshold where for a moment the relation between subject and the world wavers. "[T]he moment of waking up was the riskiest moment of the day. Once that was well over without deflecting you from your orbit, you could take heart of grace for the rest of the day" (*The Trial* 279–80). Josef K. faltered on this brink, and he would never be able to take heart again. He will be stuck in between, no longer asleep but not yet awake, and the whole novel will unfold on this edge. His protracted wakefulness, with which he will struggle throughout the novel, to the point of utmost exhaustion, coincides with a protracted dream, or rather with what emerged at the edge of awakening.

Kafka's guideline could be stated in these terms: "[D]on't give up on the edge," on the impossible in between where the dreamlike real infringes upon the familiar reality. It all seems like a slip, a tiny lack of vigilance. K. says to his landlady:

> *I was taken by surprise, that was all. If immediately on waking I had got up without troubling my head about Anna's absence and had come to you without regarding anyone who tried to bar my way, I could have breakfasted in the kitchen for a change and could have got you to bring me my clothes from my room; in short, if I had behaved sensibly, nothing further would have happened, all this would have been nipped in the bud. Everything that wanted to come into being [*was werden wollte*] would have been stifled. (*The Trial *21–22, trans. mod.)*

He was caught off guard in a reckless moment. He should have reasonably ignored the crack into which the two guards had slipped. Something wanted to come into being, and it could have been stifled if he reacted in good time, but he didn't. It was a momentary deficiency that enabled the impossible edge to invade everything else. "But one is so unprepared," he

says, in an echo to Hamlet. "In the Bank, for instance, I am always prepared, nothing of the kind could possibly happen to me there" (*The Trial* 22). When he is awake and occupying his social post, he is well equipped and can fend off any such intrusion. The tiny lack of vigilance, on Josef K.'s part, is the tiny opening of Kafka's relentless vigilance, on which he will not give way, persevering on the edge to the terrible end. Awakening is the riskiest moment [*der riskanteste Augenblick*], says Kafka, and if one lets one's vigilance slip, even stranger things can happen. One might wake up as an insect. Gregor Samsa missed for a moment the quickness of wit to catch everything in the same place. He didn't find his own body. He mislaid it for a moment. Awakening is metamorphosis. Similarly, on the first page of *The Castle* the land surveyor K. arrives at the village at the foot of the castle in the late evening. He calls at the inn to spend the night, and since there is no room they put him up in a bank, whereupon he instantly falls asleep. He is soon awoken by a young man claiming that one needs permission from the castle authorities if one wants to spend the night there. And everything else follows: everything starts by an awakening, after two paragraphs, and K. wakes up caught in the middle between wakefulness and sleep.

It is worth briefly noting that at the time when Kafka was writing *The Trial*, Marcel Proust, in another part of Europe, was preparing the publication of the first novel of the grand edifice *In Search of Lost Time*. The first volume, *Swann's Way* (1913), famously starts on the same threshold between wakefulness and sleep. But Proust, on this first page, is crossing the threshold in the opposite direction: from wakefulness into gradually falling asleep, sinking into a slumber, losing consciousness, but not quite. What he tries to hold on to is precisely a region at the boundary, neither the one nor the other, and it is on this edge, when the conscious controls have given way but before sleep has taken over, between the familiar and the dream world, that memories start flooding in: a vast tapestry of memories that one hasn't invited nor tried to recall. These memories are intruders at the interstice, or what he will call *la mémoire involontaire*, involuntary memory, beyond the reach of conscious intentions and precisely for that reason the harbingers of another kind of truth. Everything else will follow from that threshold, and it will take seven bulky volumes to spin out what comes sneaking in on the first page: the whole immense edifice is made of this stuff. A neat opposition can be made: Josef K. awakes early in the morning, but not quite; Proust's narrator is sinking into sleep late at night, but not quite. If there is a common denominator they share, then it is the

injunction not to give up on the threshold.[10] One might even speak of the birth of the modern novel from the spirit of the threshold—from the spirit of the crack between two worlds.

Lacan, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, dwells for a moment on this strange temporality of awakening. He takes up the most Kafkaesque of all the dreams Freud ever interpreted, where a father, falling asleep during the wake for his dead child,[11] is woken up in terror by his child appearing in the dream, grabbing his hand and saying: "Father, don't you see that I am burning?" And indeed the burning candles have produced a fire "in reality," redoubled in the dream fire (Freud 509). Throughout his book on dreams, Freud maintains that one crucial function of the dream is to be the guardian of sleep. Any external disturbance that might wake us is integrated into the dream in order to keep us asleep. The dream protects the sleeper from the intrusion of reality. One eventually wakes up when the external disturbance becomes too intrusive for the dream to tackle. On the other hand, the dream itself has the capacity of producing a real that is more overpowering than any external disturbance from which one tries to escape by taking refuge in waking reality. The dream's own logic of wish fulfillment tends to run amok, producing something more traumatic than reality can be, so one is forced to wake up in order to escape it. Simplifying to the utmost, Lacan's point would be: we wake up in order to be able to continue to sleep, in order to escape the excess produced by the dream in its endeavor to protect our sleep. So there is a threshold in the awakening, an edge between the real of the dream and the reality into which one wakes, an "interface" where, for a moment, the one infringes upon the other:

> *Thus the encounter, forever missed, has occurred between dream and awakening, between the person who is still asleep and whose dream we will not know and the person who has dreamt merely in order not to wake up. [. . .] If Freud, amazed, sees in this the confirmation of his theory of desire, it is certainly a sign that the dream is not a fantasy fulfilling a wish. (*Four Fundamental *59)*

The missed encounter occurs in the gap between two fantasies: the one that sustains the dream and the one that sustains waking life.[12] The encounter of the two is impossible, and it emerges for only a fleeting moment when everything vacillates. Josef K. wakes up in this temporal modality. This is also what happens to Gregor Samsa, and this is what happens to the badger waking up to hear the sound—the sound of this edge

that will turn everything into a nightmare. There is something like an "ontological opening" at this edge where the usual assumptions are shaken for just a moment, and this opening—or so I propose—is something that largely conditioned the advent both of a vast strand of modern literature and of psychoanalysis. There was a historical turn that one could describe as "the moment of awakening," though not to reality, but to something that gets lost in the reality once constituted and made ontologically consistent. There is a real that emerges on the very verge, and holding on to it has largely been a red thread for both theory and artistic practices pertaining to modernity.

Michel Chion opens his magisterial book on sound exactly on this edge, but uses a topos of classical literature.[13] *Iphigénie*, a classical tragedy by Jean Racine (1674), opens with these words: "Oui, c'est Agamemnon, c'est ton roi qui t'éveille; / Viens, reconnais la voix qui frappe ton oreille" [Yes, this is Agamemnon, your king who is waking you up; / Recognize the voice that is pounding into your ear] (1.1.1–2). As the curtain goes up, it is dawn and Agamemnon is waking his servant Arcas. Chion comments: "The sound of this voice seems to be coming from Arcas's dream, while at the same time it is pulling him out of it" (*Le son* 5). The curtain rises in the middle of waking up, the audience is awoken along with the sleeper, the king's voice is already a sequel to the voice in the dreams. The beginning is missed and only recuperated from the other side of the edge: "So it is in the nature of the sound to be frequently associated with something lost, missed and at the same time captured, still being there" (*Le son* 5). This opening—of the book on sound, of Racine's play, of Kafka's novels—with the tiny brink between sleep and wakefulness is something that has a tenacious and internal link to the question of the nature of the sound. Why does one wake up? Quite trivially and commonly, one is awoken by a sound, by a noise, by a voice, something that has become too loud and disturbing. The sound intrusion was first integrated into the dream, this guardian of sleep, but once it got too noisy, one had to wake up. It could no longer be contained. Thus there is something that inherently brings together, in most common experience, the line separating sleep and wakefulness and the very nature of the sound. The sound has been going on for some length of time during the sleep. It provokes the break and then continues after waking. It is the first thing one is aware of when coming to one's senses and the first thing one has to figure out. The sound displays its nature, in a particularly telling way, precisely on this line of demarcation, and this paradoxically blurred line is epitomized, in

a most telling way, by the nature of the sound. It belongs to two worlds; it embodies the break between the two, and in that break something comes up for a moment that doesn't belong to either and that flickers for only a moment. It takes a supreme alertness and mastery to hold on to it, to prolong it, to make literature out of it, to turn it into an object of theoretical pursuit. The historical advent of modernism is profoundly linked to it.[14]

The sound is an entity of the edge. The edge between the self-present consciousness and the inscrutable realm of sleep is just one of the edges on which the sound has to be scrutinized, and I have given it more attention because of the far-reaching strategic value it holds for Kafka. I have attempted to read Kafka's story as a sound laboratory, and the burrow indeed mimics the "soundproof" laboratory situation. It isolates a single sound and systematically examines all that is at stake in it. It exhaustively lists the attitudes of the subject in relation to the sound, and it closely investigates its "ontological" stature. What kind of object is it, if it is one at all? By isolating a single sound and focusing entirely on it, the story shows that the sound cannot be isolated for a moment, for everything is at stake in hearing a sound. It cannot help raising a vast array of crucial philosophical questions, the vital ones for modern theory.

There are numerous edges at stake, and let me now attempt to list them systematically. I will not insist any further on the *first* one: the edge between wakefulness/consciousness and sleep, the very edge of self-presence and awareness. The *second* one is the massive edge between the inside and the outside, in two senses: First, in the sense that the sound is the intrusion of an outside into the inside; it presupposes a division of space into a part that is supposed to be isolated, close, and intimate, a home, and a part that is external and hence threatening. The sound is premised on this spatial partition—the burrow presents a colossal effort to establish and maintain it, a bastion to fend off sound—and it testifies to its permeability, its crack. The sound is the sound of this crack. And second, in the sense of inside/outside one's head: the sound presents a moment of vacillation of this divide, the most dramatic of all divides, a moment of uncertainty about whether there is an outside source at all. What, where, and how does one hear? The sound pierces inside, immediately and unstoppably, and directly poses the question of an outside and its status, entailing a structural moment of indecision. This structural moment of indecision stands at the very edge of the physical and the psychical as the paramount inside/outside divide. The assumption of a reality of an outside

discriminates between sanity and insanity, and it places the sound into a zone of a possible delusion.

Third, the sound presents an edge in causality. It poses the immediate question of its cause, a search for its source, and a moment of wavering as to whether the experience of the sound can be reduced to its source, covered by it and explained away by it. There is something in sound that, if ever so slightly, disrupts the idea of a straightforward causality, of a one-to-one relationship of a cause and its sound effect. There is something in sound that evokes Lacan's adage on causality: "[T]here is a cause only in something that doesn't work" [il n'y a de cause que de ce qui cloche], literally in something that limps (*Four Fundamental* 22). Only a glitch in causality brings forth the problem of cause, and the sound is persistently the sound of a limping cause.

Fourth, the uncertainty as to its cause entails the edge of location/dislocation of the sound, of its attachment and detachment. For finding its cause means tracking down and circumscribing the singular spot in space from where it presumably emanates, thus unraveling the nature of its source. There is always a disparity between the floating nature of the sound and its fixation. This is where the whole discussion about the acousmatic voice comes in. *Acousmatic* is the term that Pierre Schaeffer, in his seminal book on sound,[15] has borrowed from the name given to Pythagoras's pupils, who were for many years of their apprenticeship limited to hearing the master's voice behind a curtain delivering his doctrine, without being able to see him (184). There is something acousmatic in every sound, not merely in the sense that more often than not one doesn't see its spatial source and merely makes assumptions about it (to say nothing about acousmatic media, that is, all modern media, which are premised on impossibility of seeing the sound source). But every sound is also acousmatic in a more emphatic sense: even when one does see the source and location, the discrepancy between this source and its sound effect still persists: there is always more in the sound than meets the eye. There is a moment of disappointment or surprise or wandering: how could this sound stem from this banal origin? There must be some trickery or magic at work.

Fifth, there is the edge of the strange loop between time and space, the temporality of sound being forced to find its spatial translation, and the sound is always caught in the gap between the two. The sound implies a missing link of time and space at the point of their overlapping. This is the point from which it sounds. This also entails a curious

transposition between the two worlds of hearing and seeing, the acoustic and the visual, "sight and sound": hearing a mysterious sound converts into the sound returning the gaze, as it were, its ubiquitous impossible location looking back at the subject who cannot hide from it. The very notion of an acousmatic sound or voice presupposes the realm of visibility as the backdrop against which to gauge all sound phenomena; it places the sound at the point of their never-matching encounter.

Sixth, there is the edge between the one and the multiple: the heterogeneous multiplicity inherent in the sound has to be accounted for in terms of one, hence made countable, enabling the sound to count for one and/or disentangling its discrete countable components. And even the simplest of sounds, isolated by this story, turns out to be more than one; there is a mixture in it, an ineradicable hybridity. Thus, listening is the necessary and sustained attempt to impose on sound the realm of one and the countable—an attempt that is never quite successful.[16] Still, we should nevertheless not too hastily assume that there is an originary multiplicity and heterogeneity in the sound that then in the next step one tries in vain to squeeze into the straitjacket of one, the operation of "one" (thus extorting the representation out of the presentation of sound, as Alain Badiou might put it). Perhaps this constellation should be considered in reverse, the imposition of one having the retroactive effect of opening multiplicity. Is there a multiplicity prior to and independent of "one"? Is the alternative between the one and the multiple an exhaustive alternative? Perhaps the sound is something that can serve as its pivotal point, not to be too quickly placed on either side, a point obfuscated by espousing either the one or the multiplicity.

Seventh, the sound implies the edge of duration and intermittency. It comes and it goes, it is fickle and quirky by its nature, and hence it poses the question of nonsound, of silence as its backdrop and its internal other interrupting it. The sound is not sound, to make a quick pun. But "the sound of silence" is never quite an absence of sound. It endows sound with its essential inner difference and rhythm. Sound, by its temporal nature, is always on the edge of fading away, but also in the impossibility of ever quite dying (hence the paradoxes of its wavering volume). One could make the simple opposition between existence and insistence of the sound: one can never be quite certain about the sound's existence, of its soundness; it is always on the move, fading in and out, between the lawless and the lawlike, between duration, repetition, and unpredictability, yet through its very capriciousness it adamantly and implacably insists, giving no respite,

not by its steady permanence, but by the unpredictable intermittency of its permanence. It is the glitch of durability that is durable and enduring.

Eighth, the sound is the edge in the relation of the subject and the Other. This is the point that Lacan tries to develop in his reading. This brings together a topological problem—the separation and connection of the inner and the outer space, a torsion linking the two—with the "object sound" emerging as a "symptom" of this torsion, as it were, the point of extimacy, to use Lacan's excellent neologism. It brings together the Other of the spatial outside, the Other of alterity, and the Other of demand/desire. There is something in the sound that produces an immediate effect of interpellation: one is interpellated into a posture of listening, interpreting, figuring out the meaning, seeking, sieving, maximum alertness. Ultimately, this entails the posture of not being up to the mark—the mark of sound—of failing to measure up to it. But it is in this way that this interpellation yields the subject: not by recognition in the call of the Other (which is the Althusserian mark of interpellation) but by its impossibility, by the failure of recognition, by its backfiring. The Other of sound agitates the subject in his/her intimacy as an alien body that one cannot be rid of, that one cannot dispose of, and that cannot be allocated to a proper place. Lacan's topological angle further brings together the relation of an organism to its environment, the human organism to its "cultural environment," ultimately the relation between nature and culture, the Other being precisely the environment wrapping the natural organism into a cultural mold, with the simultaneous topological link and cut, the way in which "the human animal," as "the animal of the burrow," inhabits culture.

Ninth, there is the edge between reality and fantasy. The impossibility of finding a univocal location of the sound in reality opens up a crack where fantasy comes flooding in, with the capacity to contaminate the whole—and one can here appositely use the homonymy of whole/hole. By virtue of its dis-location, the sound has the structural propensity of leading to the assumption of the beast. Only the beast can straighten out its crooked causality and provide it with being, location, oneness, stability, duration, meaning—all those things that one was incapable of achieving. With the mere supposition of the beast, by a single stroke, it all makes sense, if beastly sense. It displays the beastly part of making sense—the part where the sense fills in the crack, underpinned by fantasy. It makes a whole out of its hole. And fantasy, in one of Lacan's famous adages, is what fills in the lack of the Other and establishes a relation between the nonrelated (precisely subject and object, in his minimal formula, but the

barred subject and the object *a*, the subject that cannot be a self and an object that cannot be objective). But this is not the fantasy that would put things in order and relocate everything to the rightful places, presenting a meaningful world with which one could be at peace. Quite the contrary, it is an assumption that makes the reality itself coincide with the intrusion that disrupted it. The disruption, instead of being repaired, gains reality and thus the upper hand over reality. Making sense backfires, or it makes too much sense for reality to cope with or to bear. This is the hazard of making sense as such, and making sense of sounds in particular. It is a sense that is by its nature a hidden sense, a sense in retreat, lurking behind the visible and the audible, behind the appearances, regulating them from its retreat, inaccessible to senses. It oscillates between a universal assurance and a universal threat, salvation and damnation. Should it appear as a sense being (as both sensual and sensible), this would entail a struggle to annihilation—fatally, of the subject.

Tenth, there is the edge between the sound and the voice. The first seemingly evident discriminating factor would be the line animate/inanimate, but sound always blurs this line, it always seems to be the sound of something moving and hence alive, it is always a "live sound," a sign of budging and hence of animation. But there is more, there is a trajectory between the sound and the voice leading from the inanimate to animation and then from life to meaning. What singles out the voice among the infinite array of sounds and noises is its inner relationship with meaning. It points toward meaning, and there is in it something like an arrow that raises an expectation of meaning, an opening toward meaning. One can ascribe meaning to all kinds of sounds, yet they seem to be deprived of it "in themselves," independent of our ascription. The voice, however, has an intimate connection with meaning. It is a sound that appears endowed in itself with the will to "say something" (the French language has a handy pun, *vouloir dire*, where "wanting to say" and "meaning" coincide). The voice implies a subjectivity that inhabits the means of expression (Dolar, *A Voice* 14–15). Sound is on the verge between being pure sound and thus meaningless in itself, and being a voice to which one must not merely ascribe a meaning but that is already inwardly propelled by pointing toward meaning (so that the ascription, the interpretation, would merely spell out what is already there; explicate the implicit).[17] There is a structural wavering of sound between the senseless and the "senseful." Is every sound potentially a voice? As Chion puts it: "Thus every sound, if listened to long enough, becomes a voice. The sounds speak" (*Le son* 71). Conversely,

is every voice potentially a sound? For after all, the voice, such as Lacan singled it out as one of the paramount "embodiments" of the object *a* in psychoanalysis, occupies this position precisely insofar as it doesn't "speak"; its status of the object depends on its being entirely divorced from its sense-making capacity. It is, rather, its sound value in the midst of sense making that makes it an object. But if the voice is entitled to this special status of the object, why not the sound, which, as we have seen, is endowed with all the disruptive traits assigned to the object *a*? There is a subplot in Lacan's list of the objects with claims to the status of object *a* (and the lists he makes at various points are curiously inconsistent). Briefly put: the breast, the oral object; feces, the anal object; the voice and the gaze (to stick to the systematic progression in his seminar on anxiety) (*Le séminaire, livre X*). Namely, they are all "shaped" by the bodily apertures, by the orifices—that is, precisely by the points of transition between the inside and the outside, at the topological junctures (hence the topology meeting the object sound in the burrow) where the bodily inside extends into the world and the world extends into the body. They all pertain to the zones of topological junction/disjunction, following the utter contingency of anatomy, not some transcendental considerations. This is the materialist bottom line (and one can read a pun into this if one wants) that psychoanalysis never loses from sight, the point where the elevated questions of being, subject and object, reason, signification, knowledge, mind, world, and so on cannot be quite disentangled from the baseness of contingency. Voice is what links sound to the bodily topology, and the burrow is but an extension or extrapolation of it. So let me put it this way: what the sound points to, ultimately, in its crack of dislocation, can be described as an *orifice of being*, and the object that is at stake emerges in the link, the passage, the transition, the equation between this orifice of being and the bodily orifice, the point where the ontological orifice crosses its path with the contingency of bodily orifices—the ontological crossover, as it were, at the heart of the human experience.[18]

Eleventh, three (of the) most remarkable, most ambitious, and most staggering books of ontology in the past century bear the titles *Being and Time*, *Being and Nothingness*, and *Being and Event*. They span the century. They were written by very different authors at very different points in time, with very different assumptions and results (although it wouldn't be impossible, it would be enticing and has been attempted to some extent, to disentangle a developing common plot underlying the sequence). The three titles have the same form, no doubt the subsequent

ones being calqued on the previous, and they all involve the edge of being and . . . , being and something that would offer a clue to unravel the question of being posited at the starting term. Being requires a second term, a vantage point from which to address it; it divides into two in the very title. Would it be too much—I know, it would be, but nevertheless—to propose that the curious ontology of the sound that I have been pursuing could be placed precisely in the "and" of the three titles?

Twelfth, and last, the sound is placed on the edge of the modernist turn. Kafka's burrow is seemingly a timeless place of a timeless parable. All it needs is an animal and its burrow, animals being self-evidently deprived of historicity.[19] Yet this parable stands on the cutting edge of a historic moment. The experience of sound it describes, the curious ontology, and the topology it spells out and passionately examines epitomize an opening, an ontological crack, as it were, intimately linked to the advent of modernity, enabling a turn in literature, philosophy, the very emergence of psychoanalysis, and not least a turn in music in its relation to sound. On this last count, one could say that all modern sound art, the contemporary fascinating research in the realm of sound, stems from Kafka's burrow, is its heir. There were always sounds, but did one lend them an ear, properly? The moment one did, with the modern tenacity, the world was out of joint. Kafka's burrow is the modernist version of Plato's cave, so finally, can we take this flickering and fickle unsettling object sound that it so powerfully presents at the point of the greatest claustrophobic closure as the point of pursuit in our way out of the very modern, postmodern cave?

Let me somewhat arbitrarily stop at the even dozen.

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Notes

1 I have this from a conversation with Agamben himself.

2 If the Castle in the novel presents the impossibility of ever getting in, into the unfathomable place of power, then this underground castle presents the inverse problem—if not the impossibility then the high risk—of ever getting out, out of the fortress where the badger is the sole master.

3 Read in this way, this could invoke something like "the primary scene" of Badiouean philosophy. One can recall Badiou insisting on the first pages of *Being and Event* that being is a multiplicity, indeed a multiplicity

of multiplicities, and that "one" is an operation performed on this irreducible multiplicity. Is the badger a prototype of a Badiouean philosopher, his philosophical animal, as opposed, for example, to the Deleuzean tick sticking to the surface? Curiously, Badiou offhandedly mentions the badger, *le blaireau*, in a completely different context in his book on Sarkozy, making a makeshift pun on the name of Tony Blair.

4 In retrospect, all the previous nightmares seem but a trifle compared with this one. "I have had a great deal of luck all those years, luck has spoiled me; I have had anxieties, but anxiety leads to nothing when you have luck to back you" ("The Burrow" 351). Luck is the retroactive product of calamity, one's luck never coincides with one.

5 In the Heideggerian vein, one could venture this: "[T]he meaning of the beast is the beast of meaning." But he is so easy to parody.

6 To take the simple example of the Borromean knot: it was initially meant to "illustrate" the particular connection between the three dimensions of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real, each presented by one of the three circles knotted together, connecting the unconnected in such a way that any two are held together by the third. Yet there is a real at stake in the knot itself, which is of a different order than the real epitomized by one of the circles forming the knot, and it is this real that the theory should take as its object.

7 Lacan's Seminar 9 remains unpublished in both French and English; Seminar 10 remains untranslated into English.

8 To quote the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*: "Anastomosis: Intercommunication between two vessels, channels or branches, by a connecting cross branch. Orig. of the cross connections between the arteries and veins, etc.; now of those of any branching system."

9 I must point out the brilliant book by Roberto Calasso, *K.*, which gives an extended analysis of this.

10 A remark by Walter Benjamin in his brilliant essay on Proust: "And there is no telling what encounters would be in store for us if we were less inclined to give in to sleep. Proust didn't give in to sleep" (238–39). Benjamin, a great reader of both Proust and Kafka, actually cotranslated two volumes of Proust's saga into German.

11 One can recall that the most extreme modernist novel by James Joyce is called *Finnegans Wake*, evoking both the wake over the dead and the strange temporality of awakening, a novel again written in the realm of the edge.

12 Lacan uses a peculiarity of French language, namely, the expletive *ne*, to make his point: What am I *avant que je ne me reveille*? What am I before I wake up?—or before I don't wake up? The ambiguity gets lost in English. What does the *ne* of negation mean? It is semantically superfluous and makes the meaning vacillate. Is one awake or is one asleep?

13 *Le son* is the best book on sound that I know of, and I am astonished that there is no English translation yet.

14 Here I am leaving aside another thread that should be carefully scrutinized and that leads to an analogous conclusion. It is the thread of technological novelties

that have, precisely at the turn of the century, profoundly modified the experience of sound and voice. Gramophone, telephone, tape recorder, radio, all devices of "fixed sounds," to use Chion's expression, and "tele-sounds"—they all had far-reaching and shattering consequences for the "ontological" status of the sound and the voice, their relation to presence. I have touched upon it in my book on the voice (*A Voice* 63–65, 74–78) and at more length in a text published in Slovene ("Telefon"), taking up some texts on the telephone by Proust, Kafka, Benjamin, and Freud. The two lines of reasoning intersect, the burrow is seemingly as far away from technology as possible, yet it addresses the "same" experience.

15 For the spread of this concept, see Chion's *La voix au cinéma*.

16 At some point the badger says: "If reason is to be reinstated on the throne, it must be completely reinstated" (349). If reason can be taken under the auspices of the imposition of one, then the badger's position may be described as "the crack of reason." Could one propose a simple "definition": the sound is the crack of reason?

17 If Heidegger took so much to heart the metaphor (if this one, this is the edge of metaphoricity) of the voice of Being, then voice is something inhabited by (potential) sense even if it is soundless (as is the voice of Being, bringing the voice to a pinnacle at its zero point) and even if it doesn't convey anything (but a pure opening to Being). But what of the sound of Being? The sound that is not a voice, it is beneath the threshold of sense, or more precisely at the limit of making sense and the senseless, between the visible and the invisible, between the clatter and the beast. Does Being have a sound rather than a voice? Is this a better metaphor to encapsulate Heidegger's endeavor or something that goes beyond it? Maybe this could serve as a telling limit line in Heidegger: between the sound and the voice. "Neither voice nor writing nor word nor cry, the transcendental rustling [*bruissement*], condition of all words and all silence" (Nancy 49).

18 My makeshift list of edges intersects in various ways with the list of ten reasons why the sound cannot be an object, proposed by Chion (*Le son* 38–51), why it is *inréfiable*, in his parlance (the impossibility of its placement in the divides cause/effect, order/chaos, acoustics/physiology/psychology, its evental character, the impossibility of isolating or totalizing it, etc.). He proposes a nice formula: "non-object with properties." It is in regard to its relation to object *a* that I see things differently.

19 I have left completely aside the consideration of the extreme strategic importance of animality in Kafka. I can only summarily single out Deleuze and Guattari's book on Kafka, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*, and the lucid reflections by Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life*.

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