Franz Kafka
Lothe, Jakob, Sandberg, Beatrice, Speirs, Ronald

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Constrained—and fascinated—by the narrative of Kafka’s “Forschungen eines Hundes” (“Researches of a Dog”), I will proceed by indirections, in the hope “by indirections [to] find directions out.” And so readers may be glad to see a précis of the argument in advance.1

As a young dog, the narrator is overwhelmed by the music accompanying the sudden appearance of a group of dancing dogs. This shock brings about a great change in his life, forcing him—for a time—to focus all his attention on these dogs and their music. Instead of consistently pursuing this reflection, however, he suddenly turns in another direction: he begins to investigate the source of “nourishment” for dogs, now claiming that this is the more fundamental question. His change of direction appears to be driven by an impulse of self-protection, a need to flee the thoughts thrown up by music’s power to dissolve the boundaries of the ego and, indeed, the self at whatever depth.

There is a homology between the dog’s intellectual life and Kafka’s: just as the dog deviates from his concern with music toward his concern with nourishment, so Kafka’s organism represses his reflective response to music in order to concentrate on writing—a repression that prompts Kafka to refer afterwards to his absolute unmusicality. Only late in life, with the story “Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse” (“Josefine, the Singer or the Mouse People”) does Kafka attempt to bring his repressed reflection into the half-light of literature.
The dog’s original deviation is central to the story, corresponding to Kafka’s own great thesis on his writing life as a deviation, a falling off, from an authentic origin. The story takes its shape, rhythm, or flow from tensions both proleptic and analeptic, carrying the reader along on a forward loop of thought, then backward, then forward again. The reader is impelled toward the end in the hope, shared with the narrator, of discovering something crucial about a lost or never-understood origin that might be called “traumatic knowledge.”

“Wie sich mein Leben verändert hat und wie es sich doch nicht verändert hat im Grunde!” (KKANII, 485) (“How my life has changed, and how, at heart, it has not!” [KSS, 132]). The opening sentence of “Researches of a Dog” contains rich but contrary narrative signals, which at once retard and advance the narrative, yet the final effect is to advance it in an interesting way. The opening thesis produces interest through its sense and thrust: the reader is eager to know in what way the narrator’s life has changed, especially as the claim is asserted with such gusto, promising a vigorous and engaging story. But Kafka’s signature tendency toward “stehender Sturmlauf” (KSS, 259–60), toward marking double time in place (“immobile assault” [D1, 157]), quickly produces a skeptic arrest through antithesis: My life has changed, and my life has not changed. The skepticism of this arrest is of the ancient kind, as in Sextus Empiricus’s celebrated citation of Pyrrhonism, that is, “the ability that sets up antitheses among appearances and judgments. . . . By such skepticism, on account of the ‘equal weight’ which characterizes opposing states of affairs and arguments, we arrive first at ‘suspension of judgment’ and second at ‘freedom from disturbance’” (Long, 75).

This “suspension” would bring the narrative to an end, in what Kafka calls a “Windstille” (KKANII, 72), a wind calm. But this story must advance, and it does so, propelled forward by the end signal “im Grunde” (“at heart,” “basically”), which in wonderfully concise form announces the voice of a philosopher. The phrase “im Grunde,” spoken by a mind questioning its first vigorous affirmation, breaks up this standstill by going further. It is a mind that cannot rest. The story advances on the wings of a flight from antithesis. By Kafka’s own account, from his diary entry of November 20, 1911,
Sicher ist mein Widerwillen gegen Antithesen... Sie erzeugen zwar Gründlichkeit, Fülle, Lückenlosigkeit aber nur so wie eine Figur im Lebensrad; unsern kleinen Einfall haben wir im Kreis herumgejagt. So verschieden sie sein können, so nuancenlos sind sie, wie von Wasser aufgeschwemmt wachsen sie einem unter der Hand, mit der anfänglichen Aussicht ins Grenzenlose und mit einer endlichen mittleren immer gleichen Größe. Sie rollen sich ein, sind nicht auszudehnen, geben keinen Anhaltspunkt. (KSS, 259)

(My antipathy to antitheses is certain... Admittedly, they generate thoroughness, fullness, completeness, but only like a figure on the “wheel of life” [a toy with a revolving wheel]; we have chased our little idea around the circle. As different as they can be, they also lack nuance; they grow under one’s hand as if bloated by water, beginning with a prospect onto boundlessness and always ending up the same medium size. They curl up, they cannot be straightened, they offer no leads.) (KSS, 196)

There is more than one kinetic aspect to the opening sentence of “Researches of a Dog”: there are also the expectations aroused by (1) the imperial first-person, (2) the double focus on the imputed past event of “Veränderungen” (“Wie sich mein Leben verändert hat”) and the present of reflective consideration (“und sich doch nicht verändert hat”), and (3) the tone of exclamation. These signals define the unfolding text as at once objective report and intimate memoir. It unfolds as an account of the chief episodes of the narrator’s past life as a cynic philosopher—presented, however, in a charged, subjective focus—a form not rare in Kafka’s work, as in “Ein Bericht für eine Akademie” (“A Report to an Academy”). The time conjured by the first person in the first sentence is the present of the consciousness that remembers, thinks, feels, as quite explicitly in the following sentence, “Wenn ich jetzt zurückdenke...” (“If I now think back...”). As the thinking subject begins to construct its opening narrative, it conjures the past time of remembered events, “die Zeiten mir zurückrufe, da ich noch inmitten der Hundeschaft lebte” (“the times [of which I ‘summon up remembrance’] when I was still living in the midst of dogdom”). But, as the sentence advances, we watch it perform a loop forward, from the past of remembered events to the present of active remembering, thinking, and feeling:

_finde ich... leicht, daß hier seit jeher etwas nicht stimmte, ... eine kleine Bruchstelle vorhanden war, der bloße Anblick eines mir lieben Mithun-
des . . . mich verlegen, erschrocken, hilflos, ja mich verzweifelt machte.
(KKANII, 485; emphasis added)

(I soon find that something was not quite right from the very beginning . . . , that a little fracture was in place, [ . . . that] the mere sight of another dog, someone dear to me . . . filled me with embarrassment, fright, helplessness, even despair). (KSS, 132; emphasis added)

With the words “seit jeher” (“from the very beginning”), the loop defines the temporal continuum of the narrative. And so this report, which we have also called a memoir, continually associates the times of the present of a narrating consciousness with the past of remembered events in ways that shape the narrative’s temporal rhythm.

We have called the text a memoir because it conveys the felt presence of a personal voice, tone, or mood telling the tale, and we have called it a report because, as the title indicates, it amounts to a summary of research accomplished, the kind of text that one might submit to a committee to justify a research grant. And indeed this objective, reportorial dimension is strengthened by the objectivity of the title’s diction. “Forschungen eines Hundes” is a title less likely to be given to his text by the reporter or memoirist than by an administrator to which it had been submitted. And so we have from the start the trace of an overarching consciousness reading or registering this memoir. For, just as the narrator throughout the tale will reveal almost no trace whatsoever of the existence of a consciousness higher than that of the dog—in a word, no trace of a human consciousness—we cannot imagine the dog narrator himself, or then again, a dog administrator, or even a dog readership to whom this report was to be submitted, titling it the researches of “a dog”—of whom else would the product be? Rousseau did not title his confessions Confessions d’un homme. Goethe did not title his autobiography Dichtung und Wahrheit im Dasein eines Menschen. This trace–presence in the title of “Forschungen eines Hundes”—the tailings of a higher, a human consciousness—alert us to the narrative duplicity that informs the entire memoir–report, an ontological duplicity mirroring the duplicity of genres. It is the omnipresence of the unremarked, invisible human order. The narrative, as readers of the story know, portrays a pursuit of the edible in the face of the unutterable.

A brief return to Rousseau’s Confessions will illustrate a basic feature of this narrative situation: this is the famous distinction between (1) the location and the tone of voice of the narrator remembering and com-
menting and (2) the location and the tone of voice, so to speak, of the
stages of past research he reports. This often remarked upon doubleness
of narrative, which sometimes leaps out and is sometimes kept hidden
in Kafka’s story, is analyzed by Rousseau in his letters to M. Malesherbes
apropos of his writing his *Confessions*.

Rousseau explains that his story will portray not a history of events
(it is not a report) but a history of the *états d’âme* that he felt along
the way: this dimension we have called the memoir-element. Thereaf-
fter—and this is very interesting—according to Rousseau’s account of
these moods, these *états d’âme* will be “doubled” (*dédoublé*) by the mood
of Rousseau’s interpretation of them. If genuine autobiographical lan-
guage begins, for Rousseau, with an act of recollection of the self as a
past affective state, this recollection must then abandon itself to what he
calls its “description” and above all to the mood that accompanies this
description. Rousseau writes, “In delivering myself over at once to the
memory of a past impression (*de l’impression receue* [*sic]*) and to the feel-
ing of the moment, I would doubly paint my state of mind, namely, at
the moment in which the event occurred and the moment in which I
described it” (1959, 1:1154).

Consider this interlacement of affects at the beginning of “For-
schungen.” The narrator writes, after reporting his malaise in the com-
pany of dogs, about the return of more serene and settled moments: “Wie
hätte ich auch ohne diese Erholungspausen das Alter erreichen können,
dessen ich mich jetzt erfreue” (KKANII, 485) (“Without these periods of
rest and recovery, how could I ever have reached the age I now enjoy”
[KSS, 132])—an example of the loop of affects modulating one another.
Rousseau teaches us to regard this latter moment of pleasure as involved
in the pleasure of the peace he knew in the past. Present pleasure adjusts
the tone of the narrative of the past, the narrative of the formation of
“einen kalten, zurückhaltenden, ängstlichen, rechnerischen, aber alles
in allem genommen doch regelrechten Hund” (KKANII, 485) (“a cold,
reserved, timid, calculating dog, but, all in all, a regular one” [KSS, 132]).
The factor of such attunement, let it be noted, appears in Nietzsche’s
writings on Wagner as the tempo of affect. And thinking now of Walter
Benjamin’s reflections on history, we discover here, in a phrase, the phe-
nomenon of dialectical affect.

The narrative is charged from the start with the passion for origins
of a *libido sciendi*. I earlier cited the sentence “finde ich . . . leicht, daß
hier seit jeher etwas nicht stimmte” (KKANII, 485) (“I soon find that
something was not quite right from the very beginning” [KSS, 132]).
This activity of remembering, thinking, feeling plunges us back again to
“the very beginning” and as such is the signature of a narrative haunted by origins. The “Grund” (“heart,” “basis”) sought by the narrative is the absolute origin of the drive toward “research,” of which this narrative itself is the crown. Threading through the succession of empirical moments in the protagonist’s life of research is an insistently regressive pursuit of clues as to the origin of this very narrative. The story is not an end product but is itself an expression of a drive toward beginnings. And this—the dog’s drive to understand—must be attributed to Kafka’s drive to understand something of the greatest importance for him: the place of music, and, indeed, the place of his resistance to music at the origin of his own writing.

II

The narrator’s crucial formative experience is his encounter with the “musical dogs.” Something of the importance of this moment is conveyed by the higher mimicry of subject matter and narrative ductus that informs the telling. And now, this narrative—the one you are reading—will resort to a higher mimicry of its own in assuming the voice of Professor Michael Levine, who has written about this passage with such an uncanny appositeness to the present argument that you, reader, cannot be better served than to have his words (with small interpolations of my own). The following brief discussion has four authors: Kafka, the narrator, Michael Levine, and (in a chiefly secretarial fashion) Stanley Corngold—a rare instance of cooperation in this dog-eat-dog world.8

The dog finds himself in “dem leeren Raum” (KKANII, 490) (“that empty space” [KSS, 134]) from which seven strange dogs conjure music. Coming from nowhere, this music is suddenly everywhere, for “alles war Musik” (KKANII, 490) (“everything was music” [KSS, 134]). Indeed, the brevity of the three-word sentence “everything was music” seems to register not only the abruptness of the change but the narrator’s own startled sense of transport, the sense of being somewhere utterly remote from the place he now occupies. Like the hallowed atmosphere in which the dog suddenly finds himself—both as past agent and present narrator—the music that fills this place is indescribable. It is music that pours into the ears and floods the body, moving it to dance. And dance indeed is just what is performed by the seven dogs that the narrator goes on to describe—the cadences and intricate turns of his own description seemingly patterned on the reciprocal “Wendungen” (“attitudes”), “Verbindungen” (“combinations”), and “verschlungene Figuren” (“intertwined
figures”) of the dance, only to find footing, at the close, in the beat that the “others, great masters,” so steadily maintained:

Das Heben und Niedersetzen ihrer Füße, bestimmte Wendungen des Kopfes, ihr Laufen und ihr Ruhen, die Stellungen die sie zueinander einnahmen, die reigenmäßigen Verbindungen, die sie mit einander eingingen, indem etwa einer die Vorderpfoten auf des andern Rücken stützte und sie sich dann so ordneten, daß der erste aufrecht die Last aller andern trug oder indem sie mit ihren nah am Boden hinschleichenden Körpern verschlungene Figuren bildeten und niemals sich irrten; nicht einmal der letzte, der noch ein wenig unsicher war, nicht immer gleich den Anschluß an die andern fand, gewissermaßen im Anschlagen der Melodie manchmal schwankte, aber doch unsicher war nur im Vergleich mit der großartigen Sicherheit der andern und selbst bei viel größerer, ja bei vollkommener Unsicherheit nichts hätte verderben können, wo die andern, große Meister, den Takt unerschütterlich hielten. (KKANII, 490–91)

(The way they raised and set down their feet, certain turns of the heads, their running and their resting, the attitudes they assumed toward one another, the combinations they formed with one another like a round dance, as when, for example, one braced his front paws on the other’s back and then they all positioned themselves so that the first dog, erect, bore the weight of all the others, or as when, their bodies slinking close to the ground, they formed intertwined figures and never made a mistake—not even the last one, who was a little unsure of himself, did not always immediately hook up with the others, staggered a little, as it were, when the melody struck up, but was unsure only by comparison with the magnificent certainty of the others, and even had he been much more unsure, indeed utterly unsure, he would have ruined nothing, since the others, great masters, were keeping time so steadily.) (KSS, 134–35)

And, as though the scene were too much for the little dog to take in—and even after all this passage of time, too much for the mature narrator to remember—the description abruptly breaks off at this point. Objecting to his own account, the narrator promptly adds:

Aber man sah sie ja kaum, man sah sie ja alle kaum. Sie waren hervorgetreten, man hatte sie innerlich begrüßt als Hunde, sehr beirrt war man zwar von dem Lärm, der sie begleitete, aber es waren doch Hunde, Hunde

(But it is too much to say that you actually saw them, you hardly saw any of them. They had appeared, you welcomed them silently as dogs; true, the clamor that accompanied them was very confusing, but in the end they were dogs, dogs like you and me; you observed them in the usual way, like dogs that you meet on the street; you wanted to go up to them, exchange greetings, for they were also very close—dogs, certainly much older than me . . . but . . . really rather familiar; I knew many of such a breed. . . .) (KSS, 135)

This sobering series of reflections, which are here cited only in part, moves gradually from the impersonal pronoun “man” [translated above as “you,” SC] to the first person “I.” The function of these reflections is to distance the narrator from his initial report, to detach the dazzled spectator he once was from the spectacle whirling before his eyes, and to affirm the separate identity of protagonist and narrator. Such separations, however, cannot be maintained as soon as the irrepressible music wells up again. As it does so, the narrative “I” disappears and is replaced once again by a series of impersonal pronouns:

während man noch in solchen Überlegungen befangen war, nahm allmählich die Musik überhand, faßte einen förmlich, zog einen hinweg von diesen wirklichen kleinen Hunden und ganz wider Willen, sich sträubend mit allen Kräften, heulend als würde einem Schmerz bereit, durfte man sich mit nichts anderem beschäftigen, als mit der von allen Seiten, von der Höhe, von der Tiefe, von überall her kommenden, den Zuhörer in die Mitte nehmenden, überschüttenden, erdrückenden, über seiner Vernichtung noch, in solcher Nähe, daß es schon Ferne war, kaum hörbar noch Fanfaren blasenden Musik. (KKANII, 429)

(But while you were still caught up in such reflections, the music gradually took over, practically seized hold of you, swept you away from these real little dogs, and quite against your will, resisting with all your might, howling as if pain were being inflicted, you could attend to nothing but this music that came from all sides, from the heights, from the depths,
from everywhere, pulling the listener into its midst, pouring over him, crushing him, and even after annihilating him, still blaring its fanfares at such close range that they turned remote and barely audible.) (KSS, 135)

As this and other passages make clear, everything in the text is a question of rhythm, of tempo—not only that of the dance and the music to which it is set but that of the narration itself. Just as the telling seems at times to become immersed in (and engulfs by) the story told, so too does the narrative “Ich” have a tendency to dissolve into an impersonal “man,” only to resurface and reconsolidate itself time and again. Such moments of dissolution are often associated with a loss of conscious control, with a sometimes anxious, sometimes ecstatic feeling of being swept away. [Here we might recall Kafka’s aperçu of the man with his arms raised: “Der Verzückte und der Ertrinkende—beide heben die Arme. Der erste bezeugt Eintracht, der zweite Widerstreit mit den Elementen” (KKANII, 53) (“The man in ecstasy, and the man drowning: both throw up their arms. The first does it to signify harmony; the second to signify strife with the elements”) (DF, 77), SC]. This loss of control is seemingly the case in the passage cited above—“seemingly” because what is so remarkable about it is the contrast between its descriptive precision and the overwhelming nature of the experience described. The narrative precision suggests not only the sharpness of the narrator’s memory as he tells the story many years after the fact but his surprising presence of mind at the time of the actual occurrence—at a time, that is, when he is said to have been crushed, overwhelmed, and nearly annihilated. It appears then that even in the midst of extreme dissolution, something of the “I” remains. [We again recall Kafka’s distinction between two kinds of self-loss—one negative, one positive: “Nicht Selbstabschüttelung sondern Selbstaufzehrung” (KKANII, 77) (“Not shaking off the self but consuming the self”) (DF, 87), the latter evidently suggesting its survival as a shadow of itself, SC]. The “I” endures but only as an infinitely small point . . . (Levine 2005, 1–4).

Exeat, with my gratitude, Michael Levine. I now resume in my own voice, turning, first, to Kafka’s own memorial account of his early relation to music.

On January 3, 1912, Kafka noted in his Diaries:
In mir kann ganz gut eine Konzentration auf das Schreiben hin erkannt werden. Als es in meinem Organismus klar geworden war, daß das Schreiben die ergiebigste Richtung meines Wesens sei, drängte sich alles hin und ließ alle Fähigkeiten leer stehn, die sich auf die Freuden des Geschlechtes, des Essens, des Trinkens, des philosophischen Nachdenkens der Musik zu allererst richteten. Ich magerte nach allen diesen Richtungen ab. (KSS, 341)

For years, readers of the standard American edition of the Diaries have been accustomed to seeing the key sentence translated by Joseph Kresh as follows:

When it became clear in my organism that writing was the most productive direction for my being to take, everything rushed in that direction and left empty all those abilities which were directed toward the joys of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection and above all music. I atrophied in all these directions. (D1, 211)

But there is a crucial, attention-grabbing detail in the German text that this translation elides. The Frankfurt manuscript edition reveals above that there is no comma between “philosophischen Nachdenkens” and “der Musik.” In his polemic called “Sprachlehre” (“Grammar”), Karl Kraus began a tirade thus: “Of course, one would be unable to get the esteemed author to grasp that owing to the missing comma . . . ,” a rhetorical and semantic disaster ensues (Kraus 2010, 154). I shall pursue the exact, symmetrically opposite tack in reading Kafka’s diary entry. I shall not suppose that an author for whom—mutatis mutandis—my esteem is immense, never noticed, in a diary that he scrupulously kept, that he had omitted the comma that would safeguard him from a rhetorical and semantic disaster. This is especially true when the omitted comma produces an altogether different—and an altogether compelling—meaning.

This diary passage contrasts the implicit, unnamed, ascetic joy of writing—its dilettantism (about which “süßer wunderbarer Lohn” [Br, 384] [“sweet, wonderful reward” (KSS, 211)], Kafka would have a great deal to say in the following decade)—with several explicitly named joys, of which the strangest is the philosophical reflection performed by music, provoked by music, or addressed to music as its object. It is this considerable joy of thinking in the circle of music—by and about music—that has to be renounced in the name of writing. Writing exists as the specific renunciation of the joys of having sex, eating, drinking, and thinking
philosophically about music or listening to the sort of reflection that music might be imagined to produce about itself, as is if this utterly and crucially unstable, unresolved character of music were a sort of siren song that Kafka had to resist at all costs if he were to write. The ontological question for Kafka would then be, not “why is there Something rather than Nothing?” but rather, in the words of the narrator of “Josefine, the Singer,” “wie es sich mit dieser Musik eigentlich verhält” (KKAD, 350) (“what [is] this music . . . really all about?” [KSS, 95]). Writing exists as the resistance to such consideration, a refusal of a philosophy of music—as if to give oneself over to this principal reflection would be to cut oneself off from writing and be lost.

The issue, then, is not Kafka’s fascination with silence as the absence of music but with silence as the specific outcome of a refusal to listen to a meditation on the nature of music, one that might come as a development of the peculiar fact about him: his unmusicality, his unmusicality as a problem—and, as a problem, something to resist or selectively not to resist—but in both instances harboring, in its very problematic character, an unwonted source of strength. Consider Kafka’s letter to Milena of July 17, 1920: “Eine gewisse Stärke habe ich, will man sie kurz und unklar bezeichnen, so ist es mein Unmusikalisch-Sein” (BrM, 122) (“I do possess a certain strength that might be briefly and imprecisely described as being unmusical” [LM, 92]). You can hear in the word “imprecisely” the implicit requirement that unmusicality be “nachgedacht” (“thought through”). This strength is a function, too, of the perfection of Kafka’s “being unmusical.” In an earlier letter to Milena of June 14, 1920, Kafka insisted that he was “vollständig . . . unmusikalisch, in einer meiner Erfahrungen nach überhaupt sonst nicht vorkommenden Vollständigkeit” (BrM, 65) (“completely unmusical, more completely than anyone I have ever known” [LM, 48]). This claim to a perfection of “Unmusikalisch-Sein” belongs in any synoptic view of Kafka together with another, earlier claim bearing on the perfection of his “Schriftstellersein,” his “being (as) a writer.” In the diary entry of February 19, 1911, he noted,

Die besondere Art meiner Inspiration in der ich Glücklicher und Unglücklicher jetzt um 2 Uhr nachts schlafen gehe .... ist die, daß ich alles kann, nicht nur auf eine bestimmte Arbeit hin. Wenn ich wahllos einen Satz hinschreibe z.B. Er schaute aus dem Fenster so ist er schon vollkommen. (KSS, 30)

(The special nature of my inspiration in which now, at two in the morn-
ing) . . . is this, that I can do everything, not only with respect to a particular piece of work. If I write a sentence at random, for example, “He looked out of the window,” it is already perfect.) (KSS, 195)

In his famous Plana letter to Max Brod of July 5, 1922, however, the same ontological question runs decisively in the negative: “Aber wie ist es mit dem Schriftstellersein selbst?” (Br, 384) (“But how do things stand with this being a writer?” [KSS, 211]). The answer is that it is a killing sweetness and the prelude to a terrible death. “Schriftstellersein” and “Unmusikalisch-Sein” belong in a fluctuating relation that is not merely antithetical. In looking for models of their relation, one might consider the Dionysian/Apollonian pair in Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy, where these energies figure as antagonists but then also as siblings (they are complementary and have a common root) and then also as parent and offspring (each strives for primacy).

But whether we have here anything as productive as even a “Holzweg” will depend on the power of this errant path to draw evidence from the stories to itself. This is where “Forschungen eines Hundos” comes in, with its concern for the pursuit of the origin of music as a topic for philosophical reflection. Referring to that initial clamor, the dog reflects, in a first version of this story,


(Had I not clearly seen that they were dogs and that they themselves brought this clamor with them—although I could not see how they produced it—I would have run away this minute, but as matters stood, I stayed. At that time I knew almost nothing about the creative musicality with which only the race of dogs is endowed; it was something that until now had escaped my powers of observation, which were only slowly developing; others had attempted to call my attention to it; all the more surprising, then, even shocking, were those seven great musical virtuosi.) (KSS, 134)
Thereafter, Kafka begins the story again at another place in his notebooks; and after the sentence that speaks of the creative musicality of dogs that had until then escaped the dog’s powers of observation, he adds these lines:

(naturally, ever since infancy, music had surrounded me as a self-evident, indispensable vital element, but nothing had compelled me to separate it from the rest of my life; others had attempted to call my attention to it.) (KSS, 134)

With the addition of this sentence, the passage revolves entirely around the action of a “Sonderung,” a “separating off” of music; this means making music a fit subject of philosophical reflection. The narrator’s first formative experience, as he tells us, is of the separation of music from the naturally given life-world. And, indeed, “Mit jenem Koncert aber begann es . . . Ich lief umher, erzählte und fragte, klagte an und forschte und wollte jeden hinziehn zu dem Ort wo alles geschehen war” (KANII, 435, 434) (“It was with that concert that everything began . . . I ran around telling my story and asking questions, making accusations and doing research; I wanted to drag everyone to the spot where it had all happened” [KSS, 138]).

This drive to research is not organized, no direction is given to the heightened consciousness of the dog by the mere fact of this separation. The development of the trauma comes from his own nature, the “eingeborenes Wesen” (“innate nature”) that continues to force the separation of music from the rest of life:

(I am not complaining, what is at work here is my innate nature, which would surely have found another opportunity to emerge even without
the concert, except that the fact of its happening so soon used to cause me a great deal of pain.) (KSS, 138)

The result of the dog’s pursuing his research is the loss of “Kindheit” (“childhood”) and its joys—“das glückselige Leben der jungen Hunde” (“the blissful life of young dogs”)—though quite possibly, he thinks, it is a preparation for a much greater bliss when he is old: the discussion concerns the kinds and amounts of joy a body can bear (KKAN2, 436). The main thrust of this discussion, however, is not about joy. It concerns an epochal turning, fraught with “despair”:

Ich begann damals meine Untersuchungen mit den einfachsten Dingen, an Material fehlte es nicht, leider, der Überfluß ist es, der mich in dunklen Stunden verzweifeln läßt. Ich begann zu untersuchen wovon sich die Hundeschaft nährte. (KKANII, 435–36)

(I began my investigations at that time with the simplest things; there was no lack of material, unfortunately; it is its very overabundance that, in the darkest hours, makes me despair. I began to investigate what dogdom took as nourishment.) (KSS, 138)

These sentences are not innocent; the explicit note of despair may be a displacement of a primary despondency, since the choice of direction implies a direction not taken. The missing direction, the path not taken is . . . music, the question of music (read “unmusicality”). But what path has been taken instead? What can the sense of “nourishment” be? I shall claim a connection between “nourishment” and the “fullness of writing,” enlisting Gerhard Kurz’s comment on a related moment in Kafka’s other great, late, long, unfinished story “The Burrow”: “Through this Eucharistic act of feeding and drinking, [this creature] defends itself against the crush of the provisions—in an allegorical sense, the crush of poetic inspiration” (KSS, 342). Research flees to writing, the opposite direction from reflecting on music, which is to say, from practicing “Musikwissenschaft” (“the science of music”) (KKANII, 480).

Well and good, but how then does the constitution of music as a philosophical object stand in relation to the subject of his research—to nourishment—for which I have claimed an intuitive connection to writing? Music is not the object of this research; it is its provocation ex negativo: “It was,” after all, “with that concert that everything began.” The moment has the identical structure of the origin of the life of writing
as given in the *Brief an den Vater (Letter to his Father)*: “Mein Schreiben handelte von Dir ... er [war] zwar von Dir erzwungen, aber [verlief] in der von mir bestimmten Richtung” (*KKANII*, 192) (“although [my writing] ... was forced by you, it took its course in the direction determined by me”) (*KSS*, 206); compare the father's force with the traumatic shock of sound. In “Forschungen eines Hundes,” the direction leads away from a meditation on “what this music is really all about” and toward nourishment, bringing the concert and nourishment, music as a philosophical object and writing onto the same ontological plane.

In “Forschungen,” Kafka had by no means finished posing the origin of music as a virtual topic for reflection. At this very point in his text we are discussing, he writes the following lines in the margin of his notebook before crossing them out: “wie viel Zeit mag vergangen sein, ehe das Hundegeschlecht erkannte, dass es inmitten einer Tonwelt lebte und vielleicht ist bis heute noch nicht genug Zeit vergangen, dies genau zu erkennen (*KKANIIA*, 391) (“How much time may have passed before dogdom recognized that it lived in the middle of a world of sound, and perhaps until today not enough time has passed for it to recognize this clearly”).

To live in the middle of a world of sound but not to recognize it means never to find the Archimedean point of silence from which the “separation” between the apprehension of music and the failure of the apprehension of music (unmusicality) could be “clearly” accomplished.

At any rate, the sentence was crossed out as ... could we say ... a dangerous piling on too soon of that philosophical reflection on music that is the negative counterpart of writing?

But “Forschungen eines Hundes” does not abandon the matter. Just as the question of the claim of music was taken up at the beginning of the story—and, as we have shown, repudiated—it is again taken up at the very close, where it then enriches before abruptly ending the story, although not without leaving a nimbus of radiant insight.

The ending is immediately preceded by an extraordinary passage. At the conclusion of the dog-narrator’s account of the agonies of his fasting, he conjures another musical dog:

Ich merkte ... daß der Hund aus der Tiefe der Brust zu einem Gesange anhob... Und ich glaubte damals, etwas zu erkennen, was kein Hund je vor mir erfahren hat, wenigstens findet sich in der Überlieferung nicht die leiseste Andeutung dessen, und ich versenkte eilig in unendlicher Angst und Scham das Gesicht in der Blutlache vor mir. Ich glaubte nämlich zu erkennen, daß der Hund schon sang ohne es noch zu wissen, ja
mehr noch, daß die Melodie, von ihm getrennt, nach eigenem Gesetz durch die Lüfte schwebte und über ihn hinweg, als gehöre er nicht dazu, nach mir, nur nach mir hin zielte.


(I noticed that from the depths of his chest this dog was getting ready to sing. . . . And then I believe I perceived something that no dog had ever experienced before me; at any rate, cultural memory does not contain even the slightest hint of it; and in infinite anxiety and shame I hurriedly lowered my face in the puddle of blood in front of me. What I seemed to perceive was that the dog was already singing without his being aware of it—no, more than that: that the melody, detached from him, was floating through the air and then past him according to its own laws, as if he no longer had any part in it, floating at me, aimed only at me.

Today of course, I deny any such perceptions and attribute them to my overstimulation at the time, but even if it was an error, it nevertheless had a certain grandeur and is the sole reality, even if only an apparent reality, that I salvaged and brought back into this world from the time of my fast, and shows, at least, how far we can go when we are completely out of our senses. And I really was completely out of my senses. . . . As it happened, I recovered physically in a few hours; mentally, I bear the consequences even today.) (KSS, 159–60)

In this episode, ecstasy and error mingle in equal parts. (The error consists, very likely, of a profound misapprehension of the music produced by the hunting horns of the humans that the researcher cannot or will not see.) The Kafka scholar John Hargraves notes that here “music obliterates the insight that the dogs are not alone in the world” (KSS, 325). For us it is chiefly important that the episode prompts the narrator’s meditation at the close:

Meine Forschungen aber erweiterte ich auf die Musik der Hunde. . . . Die Wissenschaft von der Musik ist . . . vielleicht noch umfangreicher als jene von der Nahrung, und jedenfalls fester begründet. Es ist das dadurch
zu erklären, daß . . . es sich hier mehr um bloße Beobachtungen und Systematisierungen handelt, dort dagegen vor allem um praktische Folgerungen. Damit hängt zusammen, daß der Respekt vor der Musikwissenschaft größer ist als vor der Nahrungswissenschaft, die erstere aber niemals so tief ins Volk eindringen konnte wie die zweite. Auch ich stand der Musikwissenschaft, ehe ich die Stimme im Wald gehört hatte, fremder gegenüber als irgendeiner anderen. Zwar hatte mich schon das Erlebnis mit den Musikhunden auf sie hingewiesen, aber ich war damals noch zu jung. . . . Auch war zwar die Musik bei jenen Hunden das zunächst Auffallendste gewesen, aber wichtiger als die Musik schien mir ihr verschwiegenes Hundewesen, für ihre schreckliche Musik fand ich vielleicht überhaupt keine Ähnlichkeit anderswo, ich konnte sie eher vernachlässigen, aber ihr Wesen begegnete mir von damals an in allen Hunden überall. In das Wesen der Hunde einzudringen, schienen mir aber Forschungen über die Nahrung am geeignetsten und ohne Umweg zum Ziele führend. (KKANII, 480–81; emphasis added)

(I widened my researches to include the music of the dogs. . . . The science of music is . . . perhaps even wider in scope than that of food and in any case more firmly grounded. . . . In music, it is more a matter of pure observations and systematizations; there, [in the field of nutrition] . . . it is above all one of practical consequences. Connected to this is the fact that the science of music enjoys greater respect than the science of nutrition, but the former could never affect the people so deeply as the latter. Before I had heard the voice in the woods, my relation to the science of music was also more remote than to any other science. It is true that my experience with the music dogs had already drawn my attention to it, but at that time I was still too young. . . . Furthermore, while in the case of the air dogs, music had been the first thing to strike me, their secretive nature seemed to me more important than the music; their terrible music was probably like nothing else in the world, and so I could neglect it more readily, but from that time on it was their nature that I encountered in all dogs everywhere. To penetrate into the nature of dogs, however, research into nutrition seemed to me most suitable and to lead unerringly to the goal.) (KSS, 160; emphasis added)

We have now learned something crucial. If research into nutrition means immersion in writing, then the project of writing, too, is in error from the start since this research into nutrition (read “writing”) is bent on nothing more nor less than “penetrating into the nature of dogs.” It
involves from the start, for good or for ill, something comparable to a cognitive program promising ethical insight, for moral, practical education. Everything goes back to the dancing dogs’ shamelessness and taciturnity. But how can this human, this ethical side of things be wrong, an error construed as an impurity? In an extraordinary letter to Felice, written September 30–October 1, 1917, during the very last days of their courtship, Kafka formulated the goal of real writing as the one goal that matters, the goal “einem höchsten Gericht zu entsprechen” (“to answer to a Highest Court”). Yet it might also subserve a baser practice as “sehr gegensätzlich” (“quite to the contrary”), it contents itself with a philosophical survey of mankind, striving, as Kafka writes, “die ganze Mensch- und Tiergemeinschaft zu überblicken, ihre grundlegenden Vorlieben, Wünsche, sittlichen Ideale zu erkennen, sie auf einfache Vorschriften zurückzuführen” (“to know the entire human and animal community, to recognize their fundamental preferences, desires, and moral ideals, to reduce them to simple rules [or laws]”). This entire effort—this psychological or anthropological study—is undertaken with another aim in mind, which Kafka surprisingly motivates as follows:

däß ich durchaus allen wohlgefällig würde, und zwar (hier kommt der Sprung) so wohlgefällig, daß ich, ohne die allgemeine Liebe zu verlieren, schließlich, als der einzige Sünder, der nicht gebraten wird, die mir innewohnenden Gemeinheiten offen, vor allen Augen, ausführen dürfte. (KKAB2, 333)

(so that this way I should become thoroughly pleasing to all, and, to be sure, [here comes the jump] so pleasing, that, without sacrificing this general love, I might finally, as the sole sinner who will not be roasted, parade the meanness that dwells in me, openly, before all eyes.) (LF, 545; translation modified)

We are dealing with a perversion of writing that suggests its vanity in the ordinary sense of the word, for this “nourishment” is not something that properly comes in from other people or goes out to other people. This text stands in a family relation with another text that highlights the same tension between a “pure” and an anthropological writing. This is the extended aperçu known as the wish on Laurentian Hill. Describing his wish as a young man to write—let us say—“purely,” Kafka concludes,

Aber er konnte gar nicht so wünschen, denn sein Wunsch war kein
Wunsch, er war nur eine Verteidigung, eine Verbürgerlichung des Nichts, ein Hauch von Munterkeit, den er dem Nichts geben wollte, in das er zwar damals kaum die ersten bewußten Schritte tat, das er aber schon als sein Element fühlte. Es war damals eine Art Abschied, den er von der Scheinwelt der Jugend nahm; sie hatte ihn übrigens niemals unmittelbar getäuscht, sondern nur durch die Reden aller Autoritäten ringsherum täuschen lassen. So hatte sich die Notwendigkeit des “Wunsches” ergeben. (KSS, 855)

(But he could not wish in this fashion at all; for his wish was not a wish, it was only a defense of nothingness, a granting of protection and civil rights to nothingness, a breath of cheer that he wanted to lend to nothingness, into which at that time he had scarcely taken only his first few conscious steps but which he already felt as his element. At that time it [the writing destiny] was a sort of farewell that he took from the illusive world of youth; it had, incidentally, never directly deceived him but only caused him to be deceived by the utterances of all the authorities around him. The necessity of his “wish” had come about as a result.) (KSS, 207)

Here, the enterprise of beginning to write is motivated by a compulsory leave-taking from a world in which, the speaker alleges, he had been deceived. Writing begins enmeshed in the original sin of the son’s complaint that an injustice has been committed against himself.  

In opposition to the science of music, the science of nourishment pursued by the dog is impure. But can we not learn what might be different from this enmeshment in impurity, this eternal deflection from the right way? We heard the dog declare that “to penetrate into the nature of dogs, research into nutrition seemed to me most suitable and to lead unerringly to the goal.” He continues and herewith concludes his report:

Verstand zeige und vor allem, wenn auch nicht die Wissenschaft, so doch die Gelehrten sehr gut verstehe, . . . von vornherein unfähig gewesen sein sollte, die Pfote auch nur zur ersten Stufe der Wissenschaft zu erheben. Es war der Instinkt, der mich vielleicht gerade um der Wissenschaft willen, aber einer anderen Wissenschaft als sie heute geübt wird, einer allerletzten Wissenschaft, die Freiheit höher schätzen ließ als alles andere. Die Freiheit! Freilich, die Freiheit, wie sie heute möglich ist, ist ein kümmerliches Gewächs. Aber immerhin Freiheit, immerhin ein Besitz. (KKANII, 481–82).

Perhaps I was wrong on that count. Of course, there is some overlap between the two sciences that even then aroused my suspicions. I mean the doctrine of the song that calls down food from above. Here again I am severely handicapped by the fact that I have never seriously penetrated into the science of music. . . . The deeper reason for my incapacity . . . seems to me to be an instinct, and to tell the truth, it is not a bad instinct. If I wanted to brag, I would say that precisely this instinct has destroyed my scientific skill, for it would certainly be a very remarkable phenomenon, to say the least, if I, who display a passable intelligence in the ordinary business of daily life, which is certainly not so simple, and above all who, even though I do not understand science, nevertheless understand scientists very well . . . were from the very beginning unable to raise my paw even to the first rung of science. It was my instinct that, perhaps precisely for the sake of science but a different science than is practiced today, an ultimate science, led me to value freedom above everything else. Freedom! Of course, the freedom that is possible today—a stunted growth. But nevertheless freedom, nevertheless a possession.) (KSS, 160–61)

Pure writing equals a certain freedom, and also the perfect absence of sound: stillness.

We alluded earlier to the question of music in Kafka’s “Josefine” of 1924. Observe that the very “joy,” the philosophical reflection on music, of which Kafka was deprived in 1912 and which is named but resisted in 1922, will make its appearance here. This topic, when it resurges in Kafka’s late work, would then have the character of a return of the repressed in a mode in which it could be tolerated, a fusion of the even pleasure of writing and the odd pleasure of a reflection on the nature of music.

Such a return would point to the gaiety, the subtle good humor that glances off the pages of his late work. Think of the movement of reconciliation that is especially vivid in Das Schloß (The Castle), Kafka’s bliss in joining two alien worlds—Schriftstellersein (“the being of the writer”) and Beamtenwesen (“the being of the bureaucrat”). What a happy thing to
make the hell of bureaucracy redound to the benefit of his fiction. This is
the only happiness Kafka could know: linking, fusing together in litera-
ture contesting parts of the structure of his desire—“die ungeheure Welt,
die ich im Kopfe habe” (KSS, 562) (“the enormous world that I have in
my head”) (D1, 288).

Kafka’s last proposals, in the passage from “Forschungen eines Hun-
des” to “Josefine,” advance toward a reconciliation of his Schriftsteller-
sein and his Unmusikalisch-Sein by a return to a meditation on music. But
that immersion does not occur without resistance. “Forschungen eines
Hundes” raises the topic only to conclude with the narrator’s explicit
refusal to do “the science of music,” to reflect systematically on music,
musicality (and, in principle) unmusicality; just as in “Josefine,” we real-
ize, the philosophy of music is alienated as a topic by the narrator’s only
questionable interest in it. In “Forschungen,” the narrator speaks not on
behalf of a pure reflection on music but instead on behalf of a freedom
that is nurtured by its refusal—the unheard-of freedom that he terms “an
ultimate science.” We might call this moment the invocation of “pure
literature,” literature degree zero, and hence something more than the
beautiful, enigmatic, but, alas, hybrid thing that “Josefine” is—“hybrid,”
because it is unremittingly ethical and anthropological in its bias.

IV

It might be fruitful to review our line of argument, extracted from its
many turnings. “Forschungen eines Hundes” is driven by a task, one that
continues to maintain a hold on the narrator as he reflects: he means to
recover the origin of his drive to do research, which principally focuses
on “the science of nourishment.” But this focus is achieved only by dint
of a fatal turning away from a musical concert, whose substance is his
more authentic concern. The dog’s development is marred by his sup-
pression of a philosophical reflection on music, musicality, and unmu-
sicality. Yet at the end he alleges that this movement, this very turning
away, is an impetus toward “freedom,” the promise of freedom, which I
connect, now in Kafka’s case, with the goal of “pure writing.”

The dog’s claim does not jibe with what we have been told in the
story or in Kafka’s account of the emergence of his writing (his exer-
cises in “the science of nourishment”). Accounts in his confessional work
cloak this emergence in bad faith—a flight from a philosophical mate-
rial that mattered; they are allegories of shock. A trace of that turning
presumably survives as a fault in Kafka’s writing, which can therefore never be pure: like the dog’s research, his writing is informed by a barely suppressed consciousness of indwelling errancy. In the dog’s own words, which are suited to his author, dogdom has deviated from “das wahre Wort” (KKANII, 456) (“the true word” [KSS, 148]).

Hence, something like the ethical, psychological fault at the outset of Kafka’s decision continues to manifest itself as a strain in his writing, a strain that he abjures—an ethical, psychological, “anthropological” competence that is ultimately there only for show. Likewise with the dog, it is not music but rather the “nature of dogs” (KSS, 160) that, following his “innate nature” (KSS, 138), made him run from the study of an original traumatic event. Hence, all the knowledge the dog can acquire through his research is not of the urgent kind, not “traumatic knowledge” but a dusky knowledge of the error of his flight.

Kafka, it would appear, needed to (but did not) come to grips with a first cataclysmic separation; he was then captivated by a dream of pure writing, but, in the language of the Laurentian Hill aperçu, he could never dream this dream properly (KSS, 207). Henceforth, writing was an evasion of a primary task, his dream of freedom a fugitive, his “science” a deviation from the start.

This fear haunted him; his only relief was the memory of what once seemed an exalted state. His ecstasy in writing “Das Urteil” (“The Judgment”) was the great warrant for the rightness of indulging an instinct for this other freedom, but he lived in the shadow of its loss.

Postscript

Professor Ronald Speirs, one of the editors of this volume, who generously shaped the opening of this essay (see note 1), has again made a remarkable contribution. I will quote in full a letter from him, which I consider apposite to my argument; his remarks widen my argument’s frame. On January 18, 2010, Professor Speirs wrote,

I would raise a question apropos your closing remark about Das Urteil (“The Judgment”). The question is connected with that story or, more precisely, with a letter to Milena referring to it. In that letter (August 28, 1920), Kafka wrote: “Die Übersetzung des Schlußsatzes ist sehr gut. In jener Geschichte hängt jeder Satz, jedes Wort, jede—wenn’s erlaubt ist—Musik mit der ‘Angst’ zusammen, damals brach die Wunde zum ersten-
mal auf in einer langen Nacht . . . ” (BrM, 235) (“The translation of the concluding sentence is very good. Every sentence, every word, every—if I may say so—music in that story is connected with the ‘fear.’ It was then, during one long night, that the wound broke open for the first time . . . ”) (LM, 173–74).

The main point here is that Kafka connects writing not with unmusicality but with music. This is at odds with other cited passages in the letters to Milena, where he relates writing to unmusicality. My own way of dealing with this apparent contradiction is to regard Das Urteil as representing a quite exceptional experience of writing in his oeuvre. All his own recollections of the process of writing that story describe experiences of self-opening and self-abandonment in which the narrator moves along “wie in einem Gewässer” (KSS, 460) (“as . . . through a body of water” [KSS, 197]), as if he were both the fetus being delivered in the story and the duct through which it was delivered. This strikes me as rather like the dog’s initial response to the music produced by the other dogs, of being overwhelmed and transported, especially in the passage where he hears the music before it has even entered the dog-performer, as if it were a disembodied force finding embodiment and expression in this chance agent. If the link is correct, Das Urteil would represent a rare, possibly unique example of the kind of writing that was not blighted by the reflections on morality, purpose, justification, nourishment or even “music” itself but rather something close to the Poésie pure he dreamt of (“die Erzählung ist mehr gedichtmässig als episch”) (Br, 149) (“the story is more poetic than narrative” [L, 126]), in which all parts were connected by necessity, nothing joined up mechanically with the aid of factitious arrangements [“Konstruktionen” (KSS, 597)].

So is the dog that refuses the call of the music, closing himself off from its power in order to pursue other things, that part of Kafka with which the musician in him was in conflict, the self-aware, self-critical, analytic and reflective part (that eventually composes the scaffolding of the aphorisms to build a systematic tower out of experiences that actually resist such treatment and want to find a more proper outlet in the rare music of Das Urteil)?

Professor Speirs’s view of the unique quality of “Das Urteil” is surely correct. I also argued this point in my book Lambent Traces:

On the night of September 22, 1912, Franz Kafka wrote his story “The Judgment,” which came out of him “wie eine regelrechte Geburt” (KSS,
This act of creation struck him as an unmistakable sign of his literary destiny. Thereafter, the search of many of his characters for the Law, for a home, for artistic fulfillment can be understood as a figure for Kafka's own search to reproduce the ecstasy of a single night. [Corngold 2004a, 2].

The originality of Professor Speirs's comment consists in his connecting that ecstasy to the dog's experience of music so that all of Kafka's writing after “Das Urteil” would seem like a deflection, calling for punishment. This is an idea implied in Kafka’s “In der Strafkolonie” (“In the Penal Colony”), when his main character asks of the culprit, “Er kennt sein eignes Urteil nicht?” (DL, 211) (“He doesn’t know his own judgment?” [KSS, 40]). Professor Speirs is incisive in linking that deflection to Kafka's work on a sort of aphoristic Tower of Babel, an idea supported by the dog's describing “die Musikwissenschaft” (KKANII, 480) (“the science of music” [KSS, 160])—and not “die Musik” itself—as a place “wo es sich . . . mehr um bloße [also, nicht praktische] Beobachtungen und Systematisierungen handelt” (KKANII, 480) ([where] . . . it is more a matter of pure observations and systematizations” [KSS, 160]). These are directions that the reader of this volume may be interested in following.

Notes

1. A lengthy comment on this paper by Professor Ronald Speirs of Birmingham University was of inestimable help in formulating this précis of my argument.

2. See Geoffrey Hartman’s excellent essay “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies” (1995, 537–63). See also the chapter by Gerhard Neumann in this volume for another analysis of the effects on Kafka’s narratives of an inaccessible originary experience that both demands and evades narration.

3. A title assigned by Brod, true, but a title that we will consider to be a part of the story that has come down to us.

4. Note that this other order is (negatively) marked at the outset even through its absence: it is in the laws that dogs obey although “the rules [. . .] are not those of dogdom, indeed, are more truly opposed to it” (KSS, 133).

5. The narrative is a sequence of propositions, accompanied by a continual vertical reference, in both a concrete and a figurative sense: the dogs, the dogs’ bodies, are themselves often turned upward toward the virtual source of their nourishment. The figurative sense of this verticality—figurative, because it is invisible—is this: the entire narrative is oriented toward the (unreadable) narrative of another law: the laws of the human world, to which this dog has no access. And so, not unlike The Trial, we have here a story of two worlds of law.
6. In notes unpublished in his lifetime, Nietzsche wrote of the decadence of Wagner’s music as evident in “das Tempo des Affekts.” See Nietzsche.
7. My phrase alludes, through modification, to the leading idea in Walter Benjamin’s incomplete Arcades Project (1999, 462).
8. The degree of fraternity involved here exceeds anything to be encountered in dogdom at the best of times; on closer scrutiny we find the following footnote in Professor Levine’s text: “As Corngold notes in his unpublished essay, ‘Kafka and the Philosophy of Music; or, Des Kommas Fehl Hilft,’ again and again, in Kafka’s poetics, the dreamt-of poem is figured as a bodily birth. I am grateful to Professor Corngold for sharing his very rich and provocative reading of Researches with me” (Levine 2005, 18). So I have returned—or, in fact, snatched—this favor.
9. For a similar account of the centrality of movement in other examples of Kafka’s narration, see also chapter 10 in this volume.
10. An earlier version of part 3 of this chapter was published in Corngold (2004b, 4–16).
11. Kafka wrote, “Die Erbsünde, das alte Unrecht, das der Mensch begangen hat, besteht in dem Vorwurf, den der Mensch macht . . . daß ihm ein Unrecht geschehen ist, daß an ihm die Erbsünde begangen wurde” (KSS, 856) (“Original sin, the old injustice committed by man, consists in the complaint unceasingly made by man that he has been the victim of an injustice, the victim of original sin” [Benjamin 1955, 114]). Benjamin ingeniously sees the complaint as also directed by the son against the father for the sin of having produced an heir!
12. It was alleged by Dora Diamant that Kafka, in Berlin during the winter of late 1923, urged her to burn all his extant manuscripts, since they had been written under the spell of his Prague family, which was the very essence of unfreedom; only writing produced in a condition of freedom might one day be worth saving (Murray 2004, 371–72).

Works Cited


