Of Cinema, Food, and Desire: Franz Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog"

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I. Food, Film, and a Desire to Nothing but Literature

> 'Office life is a dog's life.' 'Yes, Kafka agreed,'yet I don't . . . bark at anyone and I don't bite either. As you know–I'm a vegetarian. We only live on our own flesh."[1]

Shortly after his early retirement in 1922 Franz Kafka went to live with his sister Ottla who was renting a summer cottage in the rural community of Planá outside of Prague. There he worked in her vegetable garden, took long walks in the woods with the landlady's dog (Binder 1975, 358)[2] and wrote one of his most accomplished and intricately reflexive short stories, "Investigations of a Dog." Completed a few months after *A Hunger Artist*, *Forschungen eines Hundes* represents both the final installment and culmination of Kafka's literary exploration of the spiritual and socio-cultural significance of

eating and food. Keying in on this largely underappreciated but abiding concern in this paper, I will read this overtly autobiographical tale as an ironic *"Bildungsnovella"* in which Kafka views the trajectory of his creative development through the prism of his own "alimentary aesthetics."[3] I will explore, more specifically, how the strikingly cinematic quality of the central event around which he spins this alimentary parable—about a canine nutritional scientist—is subtly informed by his ambivalence about the emerging cultural phenomenon of early film. Narrated from the perspective of the dog, who traces the vagaries of his obsessive dedication to this arcane field of inquiry back to the crucial but inscrutable–and remarkably "cinematic"–experience that determined the course of his life, the canine protagonist offers a suggestive reflection on his creator's aesthetic breakthrough and subsequent writing in which eating, food, and the largely subliminal "vestigial" effects of cinema are inextricably intertwined.

Kafka's prodigious literary accomplishments in the final years of his life are a testament to the power of imagination under the sign of not-eating. As if nourished by his advancing tuberculosis, which ravaged his body as it gradually starved him to death, Kafka wrote in the last two years of his life some of his most acclaimed stories, his third novel, *The Castle,* as well as his genial pair of hunger parables. It is prophetically ironic that Kafka had actually considered in 1923—while living in Berlin with his young lover, Dora Diamant—immigrating to the land of milk and honey where the two would open a restaurant and begin a new life, far away, as it was, from the dire material conditions and chronic food shortages of the inflation-wracked German capital (Diamant 2003, 49). In devoting himself to the real business of food in this imagined eatery in the promised land, Kafka fantasized achieving with Dora the domestic happiness that always had been denied by the ascetic demands of his literary pursuits, his desire to be "nothing but literature." His literary ambitions, Kafka told Hermann Bauer, his prospective father-in-law, are simply at odds with everything in his life, including his ability to bring home the bread: "My job," he indulges,

> is unbearable to me because it conflicts with my only desire and my only calling, which is literature. . . . I am nothing but literature and can and want to be nothing else. . . . Everything that is not literature bores me and I hate it, for it disturbs or delays me. . . . I lack all aptitude for family life except, at best, as an observer. (Kafka 1976, 230-31)[4]

Kafka drafted this letter in the summer of 1913 in the heady period of writing and reflection that followed his celebrated creative breakthrough and engagement to Felice Bauer. Similar formulations of this new-found confidence in his ascetic drive are recorded in his diary and letters of August and September, 1913, in which he begins to push his unstinting identification

with literature and his hermetic writing process to an extreme. It took several more years for him to understand this "myth of his existence," his "system of obsessions" and "the fundamentalist logic of purity," which in Reiner Stach's words, "would enhance his life on a narcissistic level but consume all of its vitality" (2005, 321ff, 421ff).

Kafka's creative breakthrough occurred in late September, 1912, when he wrote in one night of concentrated intensity "The Judgement."[5] This story, which he dedicated to Felice, was followed in quick succession in 1912 by "The Stoker," "The Metamorphosis" and most of his first novel, *Amerika* (The Man Who Disappeared)—writing in which Kafka's "alimentary aesthetics" reaches its first zenith. Stach attributes the intensity of this creative surge, as well as his aesthetic reflexivity and identification with literature to the presence of Felice Bauer and the prospect of married life (2005, 324ff). It was also, of related significance, at this time—late 1913—that Kafka's terse and sporadic mentions of the cinema in his letters and diaries almost came to a complete stop (Zischler 2003, 3).

This drive to be "nothing but literature" provides as such an important clue as to why Kafka was so wary of the cinematic phenomenon and took such pains to exclude, suppress, or purge from his writing film images and topical references to cinema that might have compromised the aesthetic integrity of his single-minded pursuit. With the exception of the novel fragment *Richard and Samuel*, a collaborative venture with Max Brod that ended in 1911, there are simply no explicit mentions of films or any aspect of cinema in his work. But this does not mean that Kafka's literary endeavors were unaffected by the meteoric rise of cinema or the aesthetic responses that characterized his generation's attempts "to negotiate, more or less consciously, the impact of the physiological and *visual*, of the ubiquitous, technologically magnified 'image realm' of the [new] urban experience" (Rumold 2002, xiii). To be sure, the clarity of Kafka's unadorned prose and his efforts to create vividly realistic depictions, whose evocative power was intrinsically linguistic, owes much to this generational response. However, in taking such care to preserve aesthetic automony of his highly visual language, Kafka was struggling as well, especially in the formative period of creative development, to maintain a critical distance from this new and increasing popular cultural phenomenon whose mimetic precision and aesthetic potential threatened the cultural hegemony of the literary tradition to which he longed to belong. The advent of cinema, as Anton Kaes argues in his book on the impact of early German cinema, produced an "identity crisis" in the literary establishment in the first decades of the twentieth century.[6] While Kafka, true to his skeptical nature, did not actively engage in the debates and intense poetological discussions, his ambivalent feelings about the cinematic

phenomenon reveal that his conceptual development and literary identity have deep roots in the intellectual fervor and crisis that transformed the socio-cultural panorama of central Europe at the height of the industrial revolution.

II. Nourishing Ambivalence

> In the evening our hunger for images is sated in movie-house. (Anonymous journalist of 1909)[7]

"The one convincing thing I can discern," Kafka writes in a cryptic note to Max Brod in August 1908, the month he assumed his position as attorney and claims investigator at the Worker's Accident Insurance Company, "is that we will have to pay more lengthy and numerous visits to the cinema, the factory floor, and the geishas before we can understand this matter not only for ourselves, but for the world" (1977, 44). In the movies, machines, and Eros of his cryptic injunction, Kafka marks the parameters of his hermeneutic drive by aligning the icon of the industrial revolution with the optical diversions of the showy geisha and movie house, both of which playfully pander to visual eroticism of masculine desire.[8] It is by no means coincidental that Kafka would entertain such grandiose notions at this important juncture in his professional career only a year after the opening of Prague's first movie house whose diversions, its proprietors advertised, could satisfy "all the spectator's needs" with "scenes from life and the world of dreams" (Zischler 2003,15).

Reflecting in his biography on the trip they took at this time to visit an air-show in northern Italy, Brod claims that his friend "was interested in everything new, up-to-date, technological" and especially "the beginnings of cinema . . . which he pursued with patience and inexhaustible curiosity to the very roots" (1995, 102-03). While Kafka may have been fascinated by the marvels–but also the contortions–of technological innovation, perhaps under the sway of Futurism and his professional duties,[9] he was decidedly less sanguine about this new cultural phenomenon than his friend Max who enthusiastically endorsed its aesthetic potential in both essays and experimental fiction. Whereas Brod understood "cinema as an extension of literature, a process of assemblage," Kafka viewed it more as a "demonic technological element" that challenged his "powers of sight and writing with very great, agonizing demands" (Zischler 2003, 16). Confirming such misgivings was Kafka's conspicuous disinclination to join Brod and a number of soon-to-be notable German authors who contributed to the hallmark *Kino-Buch* anthology of experimental screen plays published by Kurt Pinthus in 1914 (Kaes 1978, 26-27).

It may seem a bit incongruous that Franz Kafka, the master chronicler of modern dread, inexplicable guilt, and the labyrinthine ways of compulsive introspection, was not averse to feasting his eyes on the unaccomplished

Schundfilme of early cinema.[10] But this he did, especially early on between 1907 and 1913 when he and Brod were going on trips together, taking in the sights, visiting brothels, and trying to clarify their literary ambitions. While on the one hand intellectually skeptical, Kafka could nevertheless enjoy "boundless entertainment" at the movies, as he writes in his diary in early 1913, or be moved to tears in the dark movie-house where he sought out the "unself-conscious solitude" of mindless cinematic gazing in order to elude his dark brooding and "forget that he had forgotten."[11]

In a letter to Felice, also from in 1913, Kafka registers the complexity of his conflicted feelings about early film in a contradictory observation, writing: "I encounter nothing that moves me in any deep way. That is also the case when I cry, as was the case yesterday in a film theater in Verona. I have been given the ability to enjoy human relationships but not to experience them."[12] In his tears and his joy Kafka attests to his profound ambivalence about the powerful allure of the dark movie house where he could vicariously enjoy human relationships through the artifice of cinematic projection that countered not only his emotional disaffection but also the unending torment of his frustrated desire to be "nothing but literature."

Of a piece with his qualms about the powerful diversions of silent cinema, was Kafka's pronounced aversion to the tempo and agitated motions of its fleeting images. This discomfort and indeed his general ambivalence about this new form of popular entertainment is evident in a diary entry of 1911 in which Kafka reflects upon a recent visit to diorama arcade. In comparing the moving images of cinema with the still, photographic scenery which the stereoscopic lens of the dioramic apparatus delivers to "tip of the tongue," Kafka finds the latter superior. Its delectable scenes, he writes,

> are more alive than the cinematograph, because they allow the eye the stillness of reality. The Kinematograph lends the observed objects the agitation of their movement, the stillness of the gaze seems more important. Smooth floor of the cathedrals at the tip of the tongue. Why is there no combination of cinema and stereoscope in this way? The distance between merely listening to a narrative and looking at a panorama [i.e, its stereoscopic images] is greater than the distance between the latter and looking at reality. (Kafka 1976, 430)

In this string of terse remarks Kafka quickly progresses from description and observation into an uneasy reflection on the representational efficacy of linguistic narration when he considers the relative distance from reality "between . . . listening to a narrative and looking at a panorama." In assessing the efficacy of these two modes representation, Kafka's purposive deliberations reveal that his psychic metabolism had most assuredly been stimulated at this formative juncture in his literary development by

technological innovations of visual culture and the phenomenal rise of early cinema. Regarding this passage, Zischler remarks with fortuitous insight: "In the interior space of the [diorama's] images at which he gazes . . . Kafka stores up, indeed incorporates a future déjà vu: He ingests–in front of the tongue–photography like food" (2003, 28)—a *future déjà vu*, which adumbrates, as I shall explore, the stimulating nourishment that his investigating dog derives from the inscrutably decisive "cinematic event" of his early youth.

Nearly a decade later, in a conversation with Gustav Janouch, Kafka again expresses his discomfort with the kinetic frenzy of the silver screen. Having noted his mentor's surprise whenever he mentioned the movies, Janouch asks Kafka if dislikes the cinema. "As a matter of fact, I've never thought about it," Kafka responds after a moment's reflection as though he had no recollection of the good old days (and nights) with Max, and adds:

> Of course it is a marvelous toy. But I cannot bear it, because perhaps I am too "optical" by nature. I am an eye-man. But the cinema disturbs one's vision. The speed of the movements and the rapid change of images force people to look continually from one to the next. Sight does not master the pictures, it is the pictures which master one's sight. They flood one's consciousness. (Janouch 1971, 160)

When compared with Kafka's dioramic reflections of 1911 Janouch's recollection would seem to ring true in capturing his particular psycho-physiological disposition as well as the ambivalence that conveys his increasingly defensive attitude about the emerging cultural phenomenon of cinema. His acute optical sensitivity and powers of observation apparently made him especially susceptible not only to the rush of images but also presciently aware of the subsequent proliferation of visual mass-media and popular culture in the twentieth century, which in the postmodern era has produced, as Jürgen Habermas notes, a profoundly disorienting "over-flooding of information that can barely be absorbed" (1970, 156).

Viewed from a more purely psychological perspective, which the epistemological obsessions of the canine investigator will help to disclose, Kafka's misgivings about cinematic experience are bound up as well with his not unrelated wariness about the sensuous pleasure he derives from his ascetic literary activity. And this, the latter, is in Walter Sokel's reasoned view one of the mainstays of Kafka's late reflexive writing in which he turns the tables on himself in an ironic condemnation of his self-indulgent courting of "magical omnipotence"—the narcissistic basis of a desire to be nothing but literature (2002b, 176).

II. Dogged Pursuit of Higher Observations

Kafka's writings are a long history of fasts. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 20)

In early 1922, after suffering a nervous breakdown, Kafka is forced to take stock of his life, and engages in his diaries in a process of self-analysis that gradually evolves into the intense creativity of his final two years. On January 16, a week after the breakdown, Kafka ventures an "interpretation" of his labile condition–using terms strikingly similar to those of his expressed aversion to cinematic motion to assess "the wild tempo of [his] inner process." Pursued by the "demonic . . . inhuman pace" of compulsive introspection that drives from the "midst of men" into solitude, which (similar to his cinematic forgetting that he had forgotten) he has "voluntarily sought," Kafka nonetheless manages to envision an alternative to the insane pace of his inner life and writes—vacillating as always: "Or I can—can I?—manage to keep my feet somewhere and be carried along in the wild pursuit." Literally dissatisfied with the metaphor of "pursuit," Kafka recasts his figural projection as an "assault on the last earthly frontier." As a matter of fact, he seems to realize in a moment of retrospective insight, "all my literature" has been but "an assault on the frontiers" which, he adds, "might easily have developed into a new secret doctrine, a Kabbalah" had "Zionism not intervened" (1976, 399). Indeed, this passing reference to the Kabbalah echoes comments contained in an earlier diary entry (of March 1911) in which Kafka reflected on the significance of Rudolf Steiner's theosophic work. Struggling to come to terms with his idealistic predisposition and literary ambition, Kafka had actually gone to visit Steiner, the author of "How Does One Achieve Knowledge of Higher Worlds," which he cites in his diary along with a transcription of the "prepared address" he had presented to the aging theosophist. Here Kafka first mentions his aesthetic transcendentalism, confiding in Steiner:

> My happiness, my abilities, and every possibility of being useful in any way have always been in the literary field. And here I have experienced states (not many) . . . in which I completely dwelt in every idea, but also filled every idea, and in which I not only felt myself at my boundary, but at the boundary of the human in general. (Kafka 1976, 48)

In late January, 1922, Kafka takes sick leave and travels to the mountain town of Spindelmühle on the Polish-Czech border where he spends two weeks in a resort for patients convalescing from tuberculosis. On the day of his arrival he resumes his self-analysis, though in a more upbeat vein than a few weeks earlier, and muses–in tones redolent of his little speech to Steiner–about the visionary, albeit problematic, transport and pleasure of his literary assaults:

> The strange, mysterious, perhaps dangerous, perhaps saving comfort that there is in writing: it is a leap out of the murderers' row; it is a seeing of what is really taking place. This occurs by a higher type of observation, a higher, not keener type, and the higher it is and the less within the reach of row, the more independent it becomes, the more obedient to its own laws of motion, the more incalculable, the more joyful, the more ascendent its course. (Kafka 1976, 406-07)

In alluding to the dangers lurking in these benighted moments of aesthetic transcendence "obedient to its own laws" Kafka registers not only his wariness about the narcissistic implications of his creative pursuits but also the self-recrimination that accompanies his desire to remain a bachelor in the service of his writing. In this perilous leap out of and beyond the guilt of murderers' row, Kafka's formulation calls to mind passages in his famous *Letter to His Father*, written three years earlier in 1919, where he describes his ascetic writing habits as a protracted aesthetic rebellion against his father's coercive influence–which he pointedly traces back to the demeaning training "in proper behavior" he suffered as small child "chiefly during meals."[13] Walter Sokel characterizes the juxtaposition of an ideal-ascetic self with its empirical antithesis, the bachelor, as a fundamental biographical substrate of "Kafka's mythos or super-narrative" (2002b, 42-49) which manifests itself, in his earlier "tragic" stories, in protagonists whose divided self is overtly at loggerheads with paternal power and authority. In his later "ironic" stories, this juxtaposition is internalized and subsumed within fanatically driven protagonists who "single mindedly and doggedly pursue" some peculiarly absurd or self-contradictory quest (46).

On February 10, six days before he leaves Spindelmühle, Kafka envisions what lies ahead for the "dogged pursuits" of his late animal personae: "Attacked . . . as I am by overwhelming forces, it is as plain as can be that I cannot escape either to the right or to the left–straight ahead, starved beast, lies the road to the food that will sustain you, air that you can breathe, a free life" (1976, 412)

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In early summer 1922, a few months after dispensing with the hungering artist, Kafka resurrects him in the form of the canine nutritional scientist of *Forschungen eines Hundes* who scoffs at artists, and is perhaps for this reason spared the paradoxical misfortune of his hungering precursor whose lethal virtuosity terminates his career. Despite the centrality of food and hunger in both title and theme in "A Hunger Artist," Kafka's dog story offers a richer and more focused literary exploration of his alimentary preoccupation.[14] While the hunger artist pursues his vocation by default–he passively fasts

because he cannot find food to his liking–the dog undertakes his experiment in food deprivation hoping to resolve some perplexing issues concerning the ultimate source of his species' nourishment. He, like his creator, is motivated by a deep and unremitting epistemological, qua spiritual, hunger to find a way to the "unknown nourishment he craved."[15] In justifying the extreme nature of his (near lethal) fast, the investigating canine maintains he has no wish to perish but rather "to achieve truth and escape from this world of falsehood" (1971, 312). He is motivated by a desire not unlike the one Kafka expressed in 1917 when his "passing satisfaction" with his story *Ein Landarzt* prompted him to hope he could "still write such things" in the future "and raise the world into the pure, the true, and immutable" (1976, 387). The dog's guarded optimism reflects, moreover, Kafka's rejuvenated creative confidence as he recovered from the nervous breakdown which he had channeled into the hunger artist's insouciance and spurious motivations.

By contrast to the omniscient perspective of third-person narration in *A Hunger Artist*, Kafka hands the storytelling over to the dog who recounts the vagaries of his life in the first person. This enhances the apparent authenticity of his biographical report but also plays to the reader's autobiographical expectations, which in turn, are heightened by the singularity this tale holds in Kafka's fiction: "Investigations of a Dog" is the only story he wrote in which all the significant phases of the protagonist's development, from early childhood and pubescence to old age, are fashioned into a life-narrative. Indeed, a short time before beginning this uniquely retrospective *Bildungsnovella,* Kafka had resolved to remedy the torment that so frequently beset him when "writing denied itself" to him, with a self-reconstruction project that would reverse the tracks of his career: "Hence, [my] plan for autobiographical investigations," he writes, envisioning the project not as, "biography but investigation and detection of the smallest possible component parts. Out of these I will then construct myself, as one whose house is unsafe wants to build a safe one next to it, if possible, out of the material of the old" (1953, 388). While "A Hunger Artist" and Kafka's ingeniously reflexive last story, "Josefine the Songstress," have enjoyed an extensive and differentiated critical response, his dog story has fared less favorably. This may be due in part to its cryptic complexity which seems to systematically defy the logic of interpretative discourse. In exploring the farrago of factors that contributed to his scientific career of failed experiments and complex but inconclusive inferential reasoning, the dog seems unequal to his diegetic task, and himself falls prey to his own speculations and "Aggadah" interludes–all of which in the end undermines his credibility and makes a mockery of his creator's pretensions.[16]

The aging dog embarks on his retrospective narrative by relating the vicissitudes of his life to his maladjusted disposition and unique identity: "How much my life has changed, and yet how unchanged it has remained at bottom! When I think back and recall when I was still a member of the canine community. . . . I find on closer examination that from the very beginning I sensed some discrepancy, some little maladjustment . . . [and] discomfort . . ." (1971, 278). Despite this discomfort, he assures his readers, he is in other respects "a normal enough dog," though somewhat "cold and reserved," who has "arrived at old age and is able to draw the consequences of my admittedly . . . not very happy disposition, and live almost entirely in accordance with them. Solitary and withdrawn, with nothing to occupy me save my hopeless but, as far as I am concerned, indispensable little investigations" (278).

Having established the psychological base-line for the *Bildungsnovella*, Kafka now untethers his obsessive dog and trains his sights on these "indispensable" investigations, which, he–the dog–concedes, have caused him to stray from the most fundamental and primally satisfying "communal impulse" that binds his species together and is the basis of all canine "laws and institutions"(1971, 279). The dog's asocial position beyond the reach of communal law is replicated in the conspicuous—though not unexpected—absence of the father throughout the story and especially in the account of his psychic development. Nonetheless, the dog assures his readers, his eccentric preoccupation is not all that strange, since, he reasons, it only confirms his species' capacity to enjoy "moments of exuberance" and transport when engaged in truly "strange vocations . . . holding firmly to laws that are not those of the dog world, but are actually directed against it"(280). In his particular case, namely his "strange" nutritional vocation, the dog is unambiguously clear when he singles out the all important "incident in his youth" that set the course of his life and reduced his puppyhood to "a few short months," abruptly ending "those inexplicable blissful states of exaltation which everyone must have experienced as a child." Fanciful allusions to a wonderous state of infantile narcissism are hard to miss in this fusional interplay of human and canine perspectives as well as in the dog's nostalgically inflated pronouncements of his "pre-oedipal" omnipotence: "I was still quite a puppy," he wistfully recalls, so that "everything pleased me, everything was my concern. I believed that great things were going on around me of which I was the leader . . . childish fantasies that faded with riper years." But then, still completely under their spell, "something actually did happen," something so subliminally powerful, it turns out, that it could divert and transmute all those inchoate infantile illusions into the obsessive mission of his life. It was "so extraordinary," he recalls, "that it seemed to justify my wild expectations. In itself it was nothing very extraordinary, for I have seen many

such things, and more remarkable things too, often enough since, but at the time it struck me with all the force of a first impression, one of those impressions which can never be erased and influence much of one's later conduct" (1971, 280).

The dog's quick denial of the event's extraordinary nature has the effect of implying the opposite. While he would like to defer to more remarkable things he has seen, he fails to disqualify its vestigial effects and is forced to revisit the unremarkably extraordinary event. Just prior to the encounter, he now recalls, he had been aimlessly scampering about in the dark "blind and deaf to everything," when suddenly, as if a switch had been tripped, night turned to day and in a flash of light seven dancing dogs appeared before his incredulous eyes. Looking up, he remembers,

> I saw that it was bright day, only a little hazy, and everywhere a blending and confusion of the most intoxicating smells ... when–as if I had conjured them up–out of some place of darkness, to the accompaniment of terrible sounds ... seven dogs stepped into the light. Had I not distinctly seen that they were dogs and that they themselves brought the sound with them–though I could not recognize how they produced it, I would have run away at once; but as it was, I stayed. (Kafka 1971, 280-81)

Unaware at this tender age that this terrible sound was actually music, "the creative gift . . . with which the canine race alone is endowed," nothing had "impelled" him, he explains, to take note of this "natural and indispensable element of existence" that had surrounded him since his earliest days as a "suckling" curled up at his mother's teats (1971, 281). It was thus altogether troubling and "indeed devastating," he asserts, that these "seven great musical artists . . . did not speak, they did not sing, they remained generally silent ... but from empty air they conjured music." Years of research and subsequent reflection, and even a foray into the science of music have, however, brought him no closer to understanding how such a thing could possibly be, and this then prompts him to obliquely defer to his canine audience in questioning the veracity of these perceptions that linger in his troubled mind: "But it is too much to say that I even saw them, that I actually even saw them. They appeared from somewhere, I inwardly greeted them as dogs, and although I was profoundly confused by the sounds that accompanied them, yet they were dogs nevertheless, dogs like you and me" (281). Dogs just *like you and me*. In appealing to the readers—you and me—as though we too were dogs, Kafka coyly invites us to identify with the pup and imagine from his naive perspective how it might be to stumble out of the dark into such a spectacular light-show of dancing apparitions. Indeed, if we were to "view" the scene through the untutored gaze of a young canine, we would be hard-pressed to say that we actually saw dogs, and yet, since they seem so life-like,

we would be strangely attracted in our momentary confusion and unself-conscious identification. Totally ignorant—that is, "blind and deaf to everything" in our world–we would have no reason to suspect that this miraculous vision beaming from the dark might be attributed to "Edison's invention," the technological dream-machinery that caused such a stir in early days of the twentieth-century. By the same token, we would know nothing about the rapid proliferation of movie houses in which the magical effects of moving images projected through the *haze* of tobacco smoke were heightened by the live, mood-inducing music produced by real but unseen musicians playing off-stage in the dark. Kafka, on the other hand, was likely familiar with the ideas presented in Kurt Pfemfert's satirical essay of 1911, "Kino als Erzieher" (Cinema as Educator), in which Pfemfert defensively denounces "Edison," not the person, but the metonym that defined the era—encapsulating its "geniality and triviality"—and had become the "battle cry" of the enthusiastically mistaken exponents of cinema (qtd. in Kaes 1978, 59-62). Interestingly, near the end of his tract, Pfemfert links noise, cinema, and dance in a concluding remark about the cultural deficit of this era, which otherwise had witnessed so many promising advances "in all fields of human knowledge," and disparages the fact that people prefer to listen to the clattering racket of cinema and play a new waltz on the phonograph (62).

Constrained by such naive horizons, the young dog would know nothing about these promising advances, including the phonograph, another of Edison's iconic inventions, and would be bemused as well by this apparatus and the many reproductions of the little terrier named Nipper, who, with cocked head listened quizzically to "his master's voice" as he was featured on the RCA Victor record labels, phonographs, and advertisements from 1902 into the 1930s. But, of course, we are not untutored puppies who know nothing about Edison and the rise of popular culture of this period—or the perplexed terrier named Nipper—and should have no trouble recognizing what previous critics have failed to see—a striking resemblance between the dog's "scenic" description[17] and the dancing images projected in the noisy venues of silent cinema. In suggesting this analogy, I am not implying that this is the key to unlocking the scene's deeper significance—whatever that might be given the dog's confused weave of details, implications, and perspectives which in toto militate against any such facile allegorical interpretation. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suspect, knowing what we know about Kafka's feelings and predispositions as well as the infantile implications of his pejorative comment about the "marvelous" cinema "toy," that all of this is replayed or re-enacted in the dog's obsessive analysis of his perplexing pubescent experience, the formative event that set the course of his career as an "autobiographical" nutritional scientist.

The singularity of this formative experience has generated critical opinions that have brought to light a convergence of biographical reminiscences and forms of popular culture which complement the scene's visual-cinematic potential. The dancing dog scene has been construed as Kafka's "memory of the Yiddish theater group" (Bergmann 1972, 4)—itself a formative event in his literary development[18]—and, more generally, as a "circus act" (Pascal 1982, 23), a troupe of "trained terriers" performing on an "illuminated float" (Winkelman 1967, 204), "floating dogs . . . of a Variety show (Anderson 1992, 72), "a lighted room" where dancing dogs are "performing before an audience [of invisible humans]" (Robertson 1985, 276) or "a troupe of trained dogs responding to musical cues" (Fickert 1993, 190). The metaphorical significance of the seven dogs' strange music has also been related to Jewish mysticism and interpreted to represent, in Nicolai's opinion, "the realm of radiant light, the ineffability of music, the Dionysian, Being, or the unity of opposites and the congruence of pre-reflective nature and ultimate knowledge" (1978, 186-87).

Other critics have offered more encompassing readings and have viewed the story in relation to a number of Kafka's central thematic concerns. Sokel, for example, argues that the story represents the culmination of Kafka's "dog-metaphor" whereby this trope, which is "of central significance" in his middle period, is allegorically universalized and "becomes the story itself."[19] Steinmetz, similarly, views the story as a "kind of narrative key to Kafka's whole work" in the way it thematizes the protagonist's repeated but failed "attempts to interpret an alien reality in the terms of his own familiar categories" (1977, 122), a notion to which Ritchie Robertson accedes, adding that the story pushes this dilemma to the "point of caricature" (1985, 275).[20] In 1999, Gerhard Rieck offered the latest installment in this line of readings in *Kafka Konkret: Das Trauma ein Leben*, deriving the central thesis of his book from the dancing dog scene which he then employs as a kind of Rosetta Stone for deciphering the psycho-dynamic substrate, the repressed psychological "truth" that underlies all of Kafka's work (1999, 25-34). While the universality of this claim may sound extravagant, Rieck presents an interesting array of "concrete" motifs and repeated scenarios that supposedly re-enact in disguised form a "primal scene"—in a strictly-applied Freudian sense—of a disturbing, early childhood observation of parental coitus. What I find useful in Rieck's analysis, given that such wounding would have occurred near the end of the phase of primary narcissism (or late infancy) is the psychic dimension it adds to Kafka's canine *Bildungsnovella* with respect to his conflicted feelings about the narcissistic dimension of his writing and its subliminal repetition in the dog's scenically-cinematic description.

III. The Magnificent Seven

> Basically, I'm an incapable, ignorant person . . . fit to crouch in my dog-house, from which I leap out, only when food is offered.(Kafka to Felice, 18 Nov., 1913)

After appealing to the credulity of his canine audience at the end of his initial description of the Seven, the investigating dog delivers a detailed exposition of this overpowering sound-and-light show. He describes how his viewing was violently disrupted by intermittent sound so viscerally powerful that it knocked the breath out him and whirled him about as though "I were one of the musicians," he recalls, who had been victimized and, in effect, coercively tugged into the act itself. However, whenever the music broke off, releasing him from his *coerced* identification, the dog was able to refocus his attention on their curious movements, which on one occasion seemed to reveal that these dogs were performing under a strange compulsion and "in some incomprehensive way," as if projecting his quandary onto them, "in need of help" (Kafka 1971, 283). Wanting to come to their aid–having empathetically identified with them—he barks out to his brethren, but, incredible to him, not surprisingly, with an eye to the (silent) film analogy, they do not reply and "behaved as if I were not there" (283)—which, he exclaims, is an audacious infringement of canine nature and law that commands that all dogs bark when barked to.

During another respite, when the mono-perspective of his camera eye scans his own position, he describes how he had become entangled on the ground in a "labyrinth of wooden bars which arose around that place" (Kafka 1971, 282)—the legs of chairs or benches upon which, one might analogically wonder, a viewing audience could sit? There is, however, no explicit mention of spectators, seated or otherwise, which—were this a human franchise—would be consistent with the conspicuous absence in *Investigations of a Dog* of those beings who claim dogs as their best friends. (This absence has led some critics to wax allegorical, reading this inability to perceive the master, the "higher" being who bestows the food, as a manifestation of the inherent metaphysical or epistemological limitations that block the apprehension of the ultimate—the "allegorically" divine, e.g, paternal, hand that feeds, one might further conjecture.) Perplexed by their audacious silence, the pup speculates that these dogs may have simply wished to be left alone—undisturbed—so that they could do whatever good friends choose to do privately "within their own four walls" (285). The enclosed space implied by "four walls" suggests that the miraculous show was confined to a space designated for such things. From the dog's speculative perspective, such a private enclosure would also help to explain why these "great artists" were so wantonly, indeed indecently, exposing themselves: they "had flung

away all shame" and were engaged in the unthinkable, "they were standing on their hind legs . . . uncovering their nakedness, blatantly making a show of their nakedness . . . as though it were a meritorious act." (283-84). Though morally repelled, the little dog was compelled by the force of the music, as he later somewhat disingenuously claims, to continue observing them "committing sin and seducing others to the sin of silently regarding them" (284). Repelled but compelled by their behavior, the pubescent pup could not take his eyes off these licentious canines who, like so many erotically coded film stars, pandered to his diffuse instinctual desires and reduced him to whimpering just before, as quick as the flip of a switch, they vanished into the dark. That these dogs, who recede into the dark, had originally issued forth from a nocturnal space ("as if I had conjured them up—out some place of darkness") might have something to do with a pubescent pup's primal hankerings, is ironically manifest in his indignant response to a shameful, scenic enactment of something he is yet unable to comprehend.

Zischler provides an account of the subliminal presence of a film reminiscence in Kafka's early fiction that may shed light on this shamefully indecent dog show. He relates this cinematic echo—one of the few clear instances he has detected in Kafka's stories—to an embarrassing incident in the summer of 1911 when Kafka and Max Brod had cajoled a young woman they had just met on a train into going on a short taxi ride through the dark streets of Munich. In drawing upon a seduction scene from *The White Slave Girl*, a tawdry melodrama Kafka had seen a year earlier that catered to prurient interest by peeping into the seedy world of a bordello, he was able "to unburden himself of the reality" of that embarrassing taxi ride, Zischler argues, by transposing it only slightly retouched into a strikingly similar scene in "Richard und Samuel" (2003, 39). Through this process, a "special trick" that "evidently remained obscure to him," Kafka displaces his guilty conscience into his writing and "transforms real shame into unreal shamelessness of cinema" of his melodramatic fictionalization (41). Has Kafka enacted a similar trick in his canine *Bildungsnovella* by displacing some tawdry hankering (or unease with the sensuous pleasures of the movie-house) into the "unreal shamefulness" of his silently sinful dogs?

In any event, to return to the dog's guilty gazing, he recalls how he detected from his hiding-hole view a strange incongruity in the dog's artistic virtuosity: "I saw, on looking more closely"—zooming in from his voyeuristic redoubt—that their "limbs apparently so sure in their movements, quivered [zitterten] at every step with a perpetual apprehensive twitching" (Kafka 1971, 283). Aroused by his little discovery, he can only surmise in his naivete that it "could not be a fear of failure that agitated them so deeply; dogs that could achieve such things had no need to fear that"

(283). From our less-naive perspective, on the other hand, we might come to a different conclusion, knowing what we do about the twitching images of the silent movies and accustomed as we are to the cinematic barrage of erotic signals. In this context of jittery images and arousing excitement, it may be illuminating to recall Max Brod's account of an evening in 1911 when he and Kafka happened upon the Omnia Pathé cinema in Paris. "There we stood," Brod writes, "at the origin of so many of our pleasures . . . at the center of the operations whose beaming projections had so intensely over-illuminated the whole world." Unable to resist its "magical attraction" the two entered the "dark hall" where they "were magically spellbound [verzaubert] before the blindingly white surface of trembling [zitternden] images" (1987, 209-12). Some months before their trip to Paris, Kafka had described his intermittent feelings of happiness as kind of fluttering motion, writing in his diary that this "feeling . . . is really something effervescent that fills me completely with a light, a pleasant quiver [Zucken] that persuades me of the existence of [my] abilities" (1976, 29). Kafka's choice of words certainly suggests that his confidence in his talents is evoked by a quiver of pleasurable feelings not unlike those elicited in the visual resplendence of the movie house. Two years later, Kafka seems to confirm this connection when he writes to Felice Bauer about a recent spate of happy days he associates with the "happier" days of early cinema: "I am trembling [zittere] all over, just as the light made the screen tremble in the early days of the cinematograph" (1966, 259/386). The unworldly pup is, of course, unaware of any such things and at one point in his frustrated indignation he simply invokes the realm of magic: "Great magicians they might be," he dismissively quips, "but the law was valid for them as well" (1971, 283).

The dog's invocation of magic is crucially important because it reinforces the link between cinema in its infancy and the "strange, mysterious . . . saving comfort" the protagonist's human creator could experience through the magic of his writing beyond the quotidian realm of paternal order. Other indications may also be gleaned from cultural-historical milieu of Kafka and Brod's first movie house visits in Prague where they saw magicians perform between screenings of the short films. This was neither unique nor coincidental. It happened elsewhere—most notably in Paris—where illusion artists enhanced the carnivalesque atmosphere with their sleight-of-hand tricks that heightened but also invoked the "magic" that thrilled early cinema-goers. In the last decades of the nineteenth-century, "great" magicians such as Georg Meliès, most famously, had performed an important act of midwifery in the development of cinematic techniques when they expanded their bag of illusionary tricks by experimenting with the emerging devices and optical technology that actually contributed to the development

of "Edison's invention." The magicians who shared the stage with the earliest movies were at once a living vestige of the prehistory of cinema, an anachronistic prelude to the motion pictures whose side-show taint needed to be discarded as cinema began its march to legitimacy. This unsavory taint, however, had vitality and clinging power which, unlike the displaced magician, was subtly abetted by the institution of cinema itself in its reflexive—modernist—habit of turning back upon the conditions of its making. Kafka undoubtedly saw some of the early retrospective films that featured magicians and conjurors engaged in their play with illusions. A more primitive version was also prevalent in the earliest kinetoscopic (diorama) productions that simply presented recordings of jugglers, dancers, mimes, and trained animals performing on a stage (Mast 1986, 10-42).[21] *Performing animals* rings a bell within earshot of the dancing canines, the "great magicians" (Kafka 1971, 385) who unleashed the investigator's insatiable epistemological cravings. That Kafka's performing dogs numbered "magical" seven lends further credibility to the presence of cinematic residues in his autobiographical tale, vestiges of the milieu in which his writing got its start. (Of interest as well are two films Kafka saw, *Lux*–about a talented police detective dog–and *Daddy Longlegs* which featured an intoxicated dog cavorting about [Zischler 2003,134, 42]).

After the Magnificent Seven vanish into the night, the dog scampers back to the pack with the news of his miraculous sighting. To his dismay, his fellows show little interest and cannot be coaxed into following him back to the place where it all happened. Nonetheless, he reports,

> I kept on unceasingly discussing the foregoing incident . . . analyzing it into constituent parts . . . devoting my whole time to the problem . . . which I found as wearisome as everyone else . . . but for that very reason was resolved to pursue indefatigably until I solved it. . . . Just so have I with less childish means—yet the difference is not so very great—labored in the years since and go on laboring today. (Kafka 1971, 286)

This passage, which resonates with Brod's remark about Kafka's early interest in cinema "which he pursued with . . . inexhaustible curiosity to its roots," marks as well a decisive moment in the story's development. It is here that the dog begins to refashion his chronological account into a reflexive self-reconstruction project that inscribes a dialectical interplay of past and present. This stratagem is repeated throughout the story in a variety of related scenarios in which the dog elaborates how some past event or pre-disposition is carried over, subsumed, and reenacted in subsequent activities and preoccupations. He thus re-presents the process whereby his grandiosely childish fantasies, which preceded his encounter with the Seven, were transformed and subsumed into his subsequent conduct, his wearisome

analysis, which in turn informs "with less childish means" his belabored investigations that continue their regressively repetitive pattern up to the narrative present.

While Kafka's dog acknowledges that his life of inquiry was initiated by "that concert," he is quick to qualify its importance by contending it was more his "innate disposition" (1971, 286) that propelled his quest, which had initially fixed upon "the simplest of things," the fundamental question–"by no means a simple question"–of canine nourishment. Since dogs find their food on the ground, his inquiry and subsequent disquisition are devoted to the ground of this ground, which he distills into the essential question: "Whence does the earth procure this food?" (288). The dog does not miss a beat and with Agradaic zeal elaborates for his canine audience the scientific and historical parameters of *Nahrungwissenschaft* (science of nutrition) which have occupied dogs "since the dawn of time." This prodigious field of inquiry, he reports, is the "the chief object of all our meditation, countless observations and essays" that have grown "into a province of knowledge" whose compass is "beyond the comprehension of any single scholar, but of all our scholars collectively" (286-87).[22] Though in theory impressive, this canine obsession has little pragmatic import, since as the dog concedes,

> I swallow down my food, but not the slightest preliminary methodological polico-economic observation of it does not seem to me worth while. In this connection, the essence of all knowledge is enough for me, the simple rule with which the mother weans her young ones from her teats and sends them out into the world: "Water the ground as much as you can." (Kafka 1971, 287)

This maternal directive, to which all the (paternal) scientific inquiry inaugurated by his *Urväter* has nothing to add–Kafka takes oblique pleasure in asserting—is a natural and universally—dogmatically—assumed necessity which dogs cannot refrain from doing on a regular basis (when, one assumes, males answer mother nature's injunction by lifting a hind leg).

One of the narrating dog's abiding frustrations, but motivations as well, concerns the stubbornly taciturn nature of dogs who, as a subtle carry-over from the silently performing Seven, for some "tacitly concealed" reason maintain an infrangible silence on crucial, existential questions. This is especially disconcerting, it "poisons" his existence, Kafka has him assert—in inversely nutritional terms—because "all knowledge, the totality of all questions and all answers, is contained in the dog" (1971, 290). Ironically, this tacitly concealed reticence pertains to him as well and for this reason he is chided by his fellows. Just be out with it, they mock, and

> the great *chorus* of dogdom will join in as if it had been waiting for you. Then you will have as much clarity, truth, and understanding as you desire.

> The roof of this wretched life . . . will burst open, and all of us . . . will ascend into the lofty realm of freedom. (Kafka 1971, 290; my italics)

In training this collective chaffing on the narrating dog, Kafka pokes fun at his autobiographical alter ego, mocking his transcendental pretensions to breach the silent bounds of the inexplicable. "That which one is," Kafka writes relatedly in his journal, cannot be expressed . . . one can only convey that which one is not, thus the lie. Truth lies only in the *chorus*"(1953, 343; my italics). The futility of his pretensions, also subjected to canine lampoon, derives, as Kafka wrote to Milena Jesenská, from his insistent attempts "to convey something that cannot be conveyed, to explain something inexplicable . . . to explain something in my bones that can only be experienced in my bones" (1960, 249; my translation). Despite such difficulties, the dog, like his viscerally minded creator, persists with his investigations and "renounced all enjoyments, . . avoided all pleasures . . . and addressed [himself] to the task" (1971, 292). Again, Kafka's private musings from the past percolate to the surface. In early January of 1912, the year of his breakthrough and the apogee of eye-feasting visits to the movie house, Kafka reflects on the corporeal dimension of his aesthetic drive: "When it became clear in my organism," he writes of this constitutional recognition, "that my writing was the most productive direction for my being to take, everything (all those abilities which were directed towards the joys of sex, eating, drinking, philosophical reflection, and above all music) rushed in that direction." His conclusion, not surprisingly, invokes the language of alimentary contingency as well: "I simply starved myself in all these directions" (1976, 163-64). The bony ground of this coveted experience seems to be on the dog's mind as well as he questions his desire to hog to himself the "richest marrow" of the hardest bones that can only be cracked in chorus by the "united crunching of all the teeth of all dogs" (1971, 291). The dog's epistemological fancy, however, is poisoned, as it were, by the bestiality of such a self-centered act, of sending his fellow dogs back "to the ordinary life they love, while all by myself, quite alone, I lap up the marrow . . . almost as if I wanted to feed on the marrow, not merely of a bone, but of the whole canine race itself." It is perhaps for this reason that he dismisses his monstrous if not cannibalistic fancy by quixotically concluding, in inverse nutritional terms: "The marrow I am discussing here is no food; on the contrary, it is a poison" (291).

Buried Traces of the Magnificent Seven

Never again psychology! (Kafka, Aphorism 93)[23]

In the discursive course of his self-inquisition, the dog singles out for special consideration two additional instances of canines whose inexplicable nature bears a *mediated* relation to the Magnificent Seven. In a section in which the dog defensively discusses his peculiar "mixture of elements" (Kafka 1971, 293), he cites the legendary "soaring-dogs" (or "air-dogs" as Kafka's *Lufthunde* would suggest), a feeble and wantonly effete breed who enjoy a lofty, air-born existence in complete, visceral "detachment from the nourishing earth" (286) as a justification for his own esoteric proclivities. And while he has never actually seen one himself, it was, so he claims, his youthful encounter with the musical dogs which had convinced him that such improbable canines not only exist, but also, owing to the "important place" they hold in his "picture of the world," have provided him with "fertile ground for investigation" (294), that is, an extrinsic perspective for modulating his analytical view of his "constituent parts."

In investigating these foppish creatures who have contributed to his powers of apprehension, the dog must admit to being amazed by their special technical skill [Kunst]," though he, unlike some, would never deign to refer to them as "artists." Nevertheless, it is something to behold: "It is wonderful," he concedes, that they "should be able to float in the air . . . with no relation whatsoever to the general life of the community" (Kafka 1971, 294). But even more wonderful, in his view, is the sheer "senselessness, the *silent* senselessness of their existences" (my italics). Perplexed as he once had been by the apparitional Seven, whose improbability, the dog had complained, "mocked every attempt," to "make a breach in it" (297), he again defers to the credibility of fellow canines: "But why, my good dogs, why on earth do these dogs float in the air? What sense is there in their occupation?" (294). In struggling with this conundrum—about which his reticent fellows provide no help—the dog proceeds to entangle himself in aporia and hearsay in an extended Agradaic discussion that undermines his effort, pushing it to the point of self-caricature in what would seem to be a parodic embodiment of transcendental pretensions (or narcissistic indulgence) as well as, as critics have detected, a cynical portrayal of Jewish concerns, stereotypes, and elements of Zionism.[24]

At one point in his speculations the dog hits upon an idea that resonates with his pubescent response to the licentious Seven. "If one tries to put oneself in their place," one will begin to understand, he feels, "that they must do what they can to obtain pardon . . . for their way of life" (Kafka 1971, 297). In seeking our pardon, these creatures engage in all kinds of diversionary

tricks, he reports, and are even able "to conjure new generations of themselves out of nothingness"—despite their apparent sexual impotency. If, however, we step back from the narrator's speculations and sexual allusions, and view all of this within the larger context of his retrospective reconstruction project, we can assemble another picture, a spectacular tableau vivant of silent canines who by dint of some technological wonder dance about as if suspended before our desiring eyes performing their amazing, if not shameful acts. We can, in other words, reconfigure certain intrinsic features, namely, those component parts and inexpungible vestiges of his encounter with the Magnificent Seven that have been carried over into the air-dog interlude. Unlike the dog, who is ignorant of the rise of popular culture in the age of mechanical reproduction (which was quickly generating new generations of dancing air-dogs) we may recognize from our analogically enhanced perspective a subliminally charged and suggestive literary construct—perhaps a "cinematic" scenario—that exhibits many of the oneiric qualities for which Kafka's vividly visual stories are renowned. Aspects of the dog's portrayals of this breed, who are "detached from the nourishing ground," resemble a dream state of reversed memory in which past impressions and experience are projected in disguised—transfigured—form onto the screen of the imaginary present. Viewed within the story's related contexts, Kafka's air-dog Aggadah presents an intra-ludic commentary, laterally delivered (and concealed perhaps to its creator) on the alimentary parameters of oneiric creativity as well as, if we reverse the tracks of memory, the vestigial presence of cinematic experience which, to quote the dog, "can never be erased and influence[s] much of one's later conduct."

The second case investigated by the dog features a single musical dog (who barks when barked to) and occurs in one of the story's more striking scenic portrayals, which, understandably, has caught the eye of nearly all commentators. It is not Aggadaic but serves, like his description of the Seven, a crucial diegetic purpose that revolves around another apparitional encounter. Within the tale's narrative development, the event represents the culmination of the dog's nutritional investigations which had come to fixate on one of the most contradictory canine practices: the ordinary dogs' food-inducing song, dance, and incantation. Contrary to precepts of canine science, which, the dog apodictically asserts, teaches that the good earth "engenders our food" (Kafka 1971, 302), his misguided fellows, he believes, are in error when they direct their ceremonies upward, to the skies. Misguided as they may be, they are not altogether off track, he must concede, since their ritual ministrations—which he considers ancillary to the physical preparation of the ground, watering and scratching—seem to increase the earth's potency and, on occasion, actually draw forth from the air above

another kind of food. The allegorical unseen—human—master reading may be helped along by this manna-like air-food, especially when Kafka alludes to the dogs' song and dance as the "usual barking and leaping" (302) about that precedes the arrival of air-food—the expectant excitement all hungry dogs would experience whenever they see that the bestowing hand is about to toss out some victuals. But, this air-food, he further notes, may even pursue the dog, coming down vertically, at a slant, or in some cases, actually spiraling in for a landing (spiraling dog food might pose an exegetic snag for the overly narrow, allegorically-minded critic.)

To establish the validity of his hypothesis about these errant practices, the dog devises his most prodigious endeavor–and the "greatest achievement" of his life (Kafka 1971, 304)—his near lethal, experimental fast. To limit the parameters of his endeavor he dispenses with the dancing and attempts to keep leg-lifting to a minimum so that he can devote himself solely to the function of incantation. Accordingly, he directs his quiet recitations solely to the earth below, fantasizing with grandiose delight achieving fame and recognition should sustenance from above nevertheless arrive "and knock at my teeth for admittance" (306). During the early phase he is filled with hope and overwhelmed by moments of sublimity, but as time drags on with no tangible results his spirits begin to flag when the visceral reality of his churning stomach takes hold of his imagination and assails him with "delicious dainties that I had long since forgotten, delights of my childhood," Kafka prompts him to assert with thinly veiled psychological mockery, "yes, I could smell the very fragrance of my mother's teats" (311). By contrast to the single-minded hunger artist, the investigating dog does not waste away into paradoxical oblivion, but simply falls into a faint from which he is revived in the nick of time by a beautiful hound. "But one does not die so easily," he explains, "I merely fainted, and when I came to . . . a beautiful but not at all extraordinary hound stood before me" (312). With the mediated clarity of his post-fast hindsight the dog begins, predictably, to doubt whether the appearance of this hound, whose uplifting song had shamed him into returning to the community of eating dogs, had not been a grand illusion conjured by his over-excited psycho-somatic state (313), though he remains convinced to the end that "the highest can only be achieved through the highest of efforts . . . which for us is voluntary fasting" (312). Still, the whole experience left its indelible—subsumed—behavior mark on his subsequent (full-bellied) investigations by diverting his searching away from nutritional science into the esoteric science of music whose intricate theoretical precepts, he notes, are concerned with "pure observation and systematization" (315). Contributing to this occupational swerve is the dog's ability at this stage in his adult life (which comprises only the last few pages

of his story) to recognize music as music, which he reminds us—invoking the Seven—had been beyond his pubescent grasp. And while, we might recall, he had been mystified by the silent Seven's behavior, it was the visceral effects of their "music" that (literally) had moved him in the most profound way and ultimately left him in a swoon (284).[25] Very similarly, it is the power of his canine savior's strange singing that intercedes and brings about his final transformation. "I thought I saw," he recalls—"trembling" [zitternd] in his ecstatic visionary state—

> that the hound was already singing without knowing it, nay, more, that the melody, separated from him, was floating on the air in accordance with its own laws. . . . Today, of course, I deny the validity of such perceptions . . . but even if it was an error it had nevertheless a sort of grandeur, and is the sole, even if delusive, reality that I have carried over in this world from my period of fasting. (Kafka 1971, 314)

In this remarkable passage the dog correlates the saving grace of this career-altering encounter with this synaesthetic experience of visualized, free-floating and autonomous music—whose hallucinatory grandeur is the sole "reality" that carried over into his adult life. Mediated as such, this reality is a vestigial remnant of the dog's psychic development in which the "inexplicable blissful states" of his pre-pubescent grandiosity have transmogrified through a series of constitutional events (beginning with his "cinematic" encounter) into what he is at present. From the autobiographical perspective of Kafka's aesthetic self-analysis of early 1922, the passage resonates as well with the "mysterious saving comfort" of the visionary experience of his writing whose transports are independent and obedient to their own laws of motion.

Mother's Teats: from Nurture to Music and Sensual Surfeit

> Attacked right and left . . . by overwhelming forces . . . only straight on, starved beast, lies the food that will sustain you . . . a free life, even if it will take you beyond life. (Kafka Diary of 2 Feb. 1922)

In the final and appropriately fragmentary section of Kafka's *Bildungsnovella*, the insatiable dog must at last confront the reality of his present state—as it manifests itself in his acquired taste for music. Unfortunately, there is very little to report, because his musical appreciation is in itself insufficient, inadequate to the esoteric rigors of *Musikwissenschaft*. Here the dog reveals once again how closely the trajectory of his scientific career parallels, coincides with, and now overtakes his creator's literary aspirations and development. The dog's retrospective investigations cannot progress because his narrative has arrived at the frontier region in Kafka's creative endeavors which, when viewed from the endpoint of his deathbed,

could only be "assaulted" by a resolutely aesthetic mouse whose singing completes the metaphorical transition from nurture to music.[26] In "Josefine" food, hunger, and alimentary distress, the abiding thematic concerns which developed over the course of Kafka's career into an obsessive preoccupation in his later short fiction, are conspicuously absent. "Investigations of a Dog" is not so much a terminus (except for the dog[27]) but the suspended midpoint between Kafka's *Nahrungswissenschaft* and his final *Musikwissenschaft*; it prefigures unrealized possibilities with its prismatic retro-perspective of the past refracting into the future which was cut short by his premature death, by his consumptive starvation at age forty.

In tracing the course of his obsessive pursuits back to his encounter with the silent Seven, whose mediated presence continues to flashback in his subsequent conduct and attempts to understand the unique "mixture of elements" (Kafka 1971, 293) that constitute his disposition, the dog has also charted, in effect, the development of his musical appreciation, which, like Kafka's began in the formative period of his career. In Kafka's case, this period corresponds to the two years of gestation that preceded the nocturnal birth in September, 1912 of his breakthrough story, when—under the threat of marriage and the confluent influence of Yiddish theater, his new-found interest in eastern Judaism and the mysticism of its Cabalistic lore, as well as the gestural efficacy of silent cinema—he experienced another, not unrelated breakthrough in his ability to enjoy music.[28] Prior to this breakthrough, in 1910, Kafka had lamented that his unmusical nature consisted in his "inability to enjoy music connectedly, it only now and then has an effect on me," he writes, adding, "and how seldom it is a musical one. The natural effect of music on me is to circumscribe me with a wall" (1976, 137). However, in March, 1912 Kafka sings another tune, writing in his diary: "Max's concert Sunday. My almost unconscious listening. From now on I can no longer be bored by music. I no longer seek in vain, as I did in the past, to penetrate this impenetrable circle which immediately forms about me . . ." (198). By contrast to the canine protagonist, who had failed to penetrate the mystery of the dancing dog disconcerting music, Kafka actually acquired a taste for such things, which like the mechanically generated sensual delights of the movie house, could induce a semi-conscious perceptual state of narcissistic pleasure. And while this self-transcendental effect may have suggested an aesthetic paradigm, which Kafka explores with an incisive ambivalence in *Josefine*, music qua music, was not something he ever unqualifiedly warmed up to. He remained troubled by "multiplication of sensuous life" whose "dangerous pleasures," as he indicated to Janouch, run counter to the aim of literature, which is to clarify "the confusion of pleasures, purifying and therefore humanizing them" (Janouch 1971,137). "Music for me," he tells

Janouch, "is like the sea. . . . I am overpowered, wonderstruck, enthralled and yet so . . . terribly afraid of its endlessness." Kafka's ambivalence about this Dionysian sea, this oceanic effect of sensuous surfeit is nothing if not the auditory counterpoint to the visual overload that flooded his consciousness in the movie house.

In his insightful analysis of the passages Kafka deleted from his novels, Mark Harman notes, regarding *The Trial's* protagonist Josef K. and his suppressed "Variant K" : "We can attribute the deletion of many of Variant K.'s traits to Kafka's often-expressed dislike of psychology. However, instead of entirely eliminating psychology, Kafka buried the workings of his hero's psyche in the interstices of his writing" (Harman 2002, 333). Although the abandoned and slightly reworked version of *Investigations of a Dog* is too short to reveal a suppressed Variant Canine, the interstitial situation is similar in that Kafka diverts the reader's eye with his uncharacteristically overt, satirically-tinged treatment of the dog's psychological disposition and development, as if there were nothing to delete, bury, or disguise. This strategy is apparent in the dog's dismissive treatment of his childish behavior and his whimsical mentions of his mother's teats in his discussions of the two most significant events of his life. It may be discerned as well in his assessment of his encounter with the dancing Seven that prematurely ended his mockingly inflated, prepubescent feelings of omnipotence associated with "that blissful life of a young dog, which," he ironically quips, "many can spin out for years. . . . So be it," he scoffs, "there are more important things than childhood" (1971, 286). This dismissive stance, however, gives one pause to consider what may be buried beneath its blanket denial. One might be tempted to enlist the analytical excavation techniques of such thinkers as Jacques Lacan or Julia Kristeva, who align seeing and being, vision and identity formation with the dispelled visual symbiosis between infant and the nurturing mother. Kafka's later overtly dismissive attitude about the marvelous cinematic toy—an infantile plaything—strongly suggests that he may have buried within the interstices of his dog's retrospective narrative the *formative* impact of cinematic experience, which from a Lacanian perspective, would play to subliminal desires and pleasures of visual plenitude and psychic self-sufficiency. Also helpful in teasing out the subliminal—sublimational—subtext would be the feminized variant of Lacanian theory proffered by Julia Kristeva who links the musical effects of the pre-oedipal (pre-linguistic) "semiotic" disposition to the aesthetic elements of discourse that represent primal, somatic pulsions (most importantly *oral*—"mother's teats") and reproduce the subject's pre-oedipal relationship with the maternal body (1980, 132-34). A Kristevan approach, to be sure, would be illuminating when aimed at Kafka's late musical turn to the feminine, to the singing mouse who has "displaced" the mas-

culine dog and his ties to paternal order of socio-alimentary conscription that Kafka, a resolute vegetarian, had traced back to his imperious father, the son of butcher.

Such theoretical adventurism is just that, adventurously theoretical, but one thing is verifiably the case: Kafka's writing flourished in the early phase of cinematic wonder, in an era that was awash with philosophical and aesthetic discussions of representation as well as the seminal psychoanalytic studies on dreams, narcissism, and sublimated desire, from Freud, Rank, Jung, and Kassner to—stretching the temporal tether to 1936—Jacques Lacan who first presented that year his mirror-stage paper in Rome. The later Wittgenstein, when looking back to this era–the one in which he promoted his "picture" theory of language in the *Tractatus* (1922)—speaks to its penchant for visual metaphorics and concludes: "A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (1968, 48).[29] Nineteen twenty-two, we may recall, is the year that Kafka's canine nutritionist investigates the reiterated impact of the Magnificent Seven who despite his repeated denials, so profoundly captivated his troubled mind. Mock as he may, Kafka, like his hungering dog, cannot dispel the quiet suspicion that his creator's writing derived sustenance—during his formative breakthrough period—from his, Kafka's, unself-conscious gazing at the fleeting apparitions of the silver screen.

Writing to his friend Walter Benjamin, Adorno cryptically remarks that he likes to think of Kafka's novels as "the last and vanishing relatives of silent film (and it is no accident that the latter disappeared almost at the time of Kafka's death)" (1999, 70; trans. altered). That is, before the spoken word infringed upon the visual, before the noise of the human voice broke the spell of an art form that silently shows but also conjures a resplendent realm of sensual pleasures. Intriguingly, Adorno's comment about Kafka's cinematic relatives is followed by another suggestive comment about the ambiguity of his gestural language, which lies between a sinking into silence, in the destruction of language, and its re-emergence in music; and this, Adorno concludes, is perhaps most poignantly manifest in his "depiction of the group of dogs and their silent music-making" (70), which suggests, if Adorno has his bearings straight, that we have been barking up a tree not too far from Kafka's literary *Stammbaum*.

Notes

[1] Janouch (1971, 169). For several years, beginning in 1920, Gustav Janouch, the teenage son of a colleague of Kafka's, often visited Kafka at the Accident Insurance Institute to talk about literature and a wide range of related issues. Janouch took

detailed notes and years later, with the help of Max Brod, published these conversations in which Kafka was unusually candid and forthcoming in discussing his views on literature, art, and the world. While the veracity of some of his claims and recollections has been called into question, the fact that Brod deemed them worthy of publication would seem to indicate their general validity.

[2] Harmut Binder's compendium of annotated commentary on Kafka's short fiction, *Kafka Kommentar*, is an indispensable source of background information on "Forschungen eines Hundes."

[3] The present article is part of a larger monograph study of Kafka's "alimentary aesthetics" in which I explore the pervasive presence and function of food imagery in Kafka's writing. In nearly every story he wrote, Kafka places his characters in distressing situations invariably associated with some aspect of eating or food (see Note 15 below).

[4] Throughout this essay I have relied on the translations cited in the bibliography, though I occasionally make slight editorial changes to sharpen the translation or remedy errors and omissions. Translations are mine when no translator is indicated in the Works Cited.

[5] Kafka's enthusiastic analysis of his creative breakthrough—in writing *Das Urteil* (The Judgement)–is found in the diary entries of 23 Sept. 1912 and 11 Feb. 1913 (1976, 212-16).

[6] See Kaes' *Kino-Debatte* (1978) for an excellent overview of the intense, early literary response to cinema, its aesthetic potential, and its impact on literary production.

[7] Quoted by Kaes (1978, 41).

[8] I here allude to "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Laura Mulvey's foundational study of the perspectival visual eroticism of masculine desire in classical cinema.

[9] Kafka was certainly familiar with the tenets of Futurism, which in 1912 created a sensation when its first traveling exhibition came to Berlin and was extravagantly trumpeted by Herwarth Walden in his influential expressionist journal, *Der Sturm* (Vietta and Kemper 1990, 112). As part of his engaged work as claims adjuster for the Accident Insurance Institute Kafka visited many industrial sites where he witnessed first hand the horrific and dangerous working conditions which, as Stach has argued, were "etched in his memory just as deeply as what he read" (2005, 294).

[10] The apparent incongruity of Kafka's fascination with the trashy *Schundfilme* and his high-brow literary aspirations has been replicated in Kafka criticism. It was not until 1996 that the summons of this critical lacuna was answered in the first book-length study, which oddly—or perhaps understandably—was not written by a pedigreed Kafka scholar or literary critic, but rather by the German movie actor and director, Hanns Zischler (who, in 2002, produced *Kafka geht ins Kino*, a documentary film that shares its name with his book). For the most part Zischler pointedly avoids what literary critics would find unavoidable by side-stepping the unexplored intersection of film and fiction. His rationale for doing so takes its cue from Kafka's reticence: "Cinema," he writes of Kafka's work, "is not thematized as technique or as an image; it remains oddly excluded . . . because Kafka doubted it could be turned

into literature" (2003, 107). Though questioned by literary critics, Zischler's work is indispensable for those interested in Kafka's relation to cinema. It contains a wealth of painstakingly researched archival material on Kafka's movie-going as well as a provocative psychological analysis of his complex relationship to early cinema.

[11] In a diary entry of 1917 Kafka describes how gazing out the window of a speeding train can induce a "childlike" experience and lull one into a state of profound "forgetting that one has forgotten" (1976, 375), which Zischler relates to the "unself-conscious solitude" that Kafka sought out in the early movie-houses (91ff).

[12] Zischler notes three films that Kafka may have seen in Verona: *Die Rächerin* (The Female Avenger), *Poveri Bimbi* (Poor Children), and the romantic tragedy, *La Lezione dell'Abisso* (The Lesson of the Abyss). *Poveri Bimbi*, a sentimental film about children suffering as "sad a consequence of love story" (2003, 100), might have moved Kafka to tears, though Zischler has indicated to me in a personal correspondence that *La Lezione dell'Abisso* was, owing to its alluring title and the circumstances of Kafka's state, most likely the film he saw that elicited his disaffected emotional response.

[13] In his letter to his father Kafka laments: "for me as a child everything you called out was positively a heavenly commandment, I never forgot it, it remained for me the most important means of forming a judgment of the world. . . . Since as a child I was with you chiefly during meals, your teaching was to a large extent the teaching of proper behavior at table" (1966, 27). In rebelling against the heavenly commandments of his father's table training, Kafka rejects not only his father's coercive influence but the more profound conscription and conditioning that is embedded and conveyed in the socio-cultural discourse of eating and food (from the process of primary socialization, to the prescriptive function of food in the Biblical fall and an array of Greek myths and European folk tales in which children are devoured by monsters, witches, and sometimes their own parents). As a vegetarian, Kafka strove, as Thomas Pekar has argued, not only to improve his health but also to "de-semanticize food," and achieve "a utopia of 'food devoid of meaning' (bedeutungsfreie[s] Essen)" (1994, 339). Kafka's decision to become a vegetarian is, to a degree, a rejection of the culture of meat eaters whose primary representative was Hermann Kafka, the son of a kosher butcher.

[14] Existing research on Kafka's food imagery is dispersed in studies devoted to other issues or concerned with isolated aspects of individual stories in, most notably, *A Hunger Artist* (1922) and Kafka's canonical masterpiece, *The Metamorphosis* (1912). While scholars have noted the prevalence of food imagery in many of Kafka's stories, they have failed to take measure of its larger socio-cultural significance—almost as if this imagery were too obvious to warrant serious critical analysis. The New Historical focus of recent Kafka scholarship has begun to counter the long-standing modernist assumption that his "autonomous" writing is "rooted in no particular culture of period" (Anderson 1992, 10). My analysis is indebted to the two most prominent strains of this work which has investigated how Kafka's Jewishness and/or his multi-layered prose engages, often at a sub-textual level, with a wide range of socio-cultural concerns specific to the Victorian era. I draw in particular on Anderson's article (1988) in which he relates Kafka's late short fiction to the emerging medical

discourse of anorexia in the late 19th century as well as two of Sander Gilman's influential books (1986, 1995) on Jewish and cultural stereotypes which he aligns with Kafka's bodily preoccupations without, however, treating eating and food in a systematic way. Most recently, it has been the work of feminist critics such as Leslie Heywood (1996), Laura Wright (2001), and Heather Benbow (2006) who have pursued Mark Anderson's basic insights and made Kafka into a poster-boy practitioner of the "anorexic logic" underlying early modernism. Though they have analyzed only a few of his short stories, their work has quite effectively shown how Kafka's desire "to be nothing but literature" enabled him to create lean, clean, and highly visual prose whose significance, he hoped, would transcend the personal and particular.

[15] On the last evening of his life, Gregor Samsa, who is literally starving to death, hears his sister's violin playing, which elicits his famous vision: "[I]hm war," Kafka writes, "als zeige sich ihm der Weg zu der ersehnten aber unbekannten Nahrung" (Kafka 1994, 146).

[16] Stanley Corngold, following Sokel's lead, relates the self-mocking tendency in much of Kafka's later fiction to his interest in "the systematic theology of Gnosticism, including the 'Gnostic edges of Kabbalah,'" which "theorized" the illusory nature of both self and sensuous world (Corngold 2004, 8-12, 111-125; cf. Sokel 2002b, 292-310). This Gnostic sensibility emerges in the canine narration in a parodic interweaving of ideas drawn from Jewish mysticism, Talmudic commentaries, and Zionist precepts. Taking a cue from Benjamin and Scholem's discussion of Kafka's secular contortion of Jewish lore, Iris Bruce argues that Kafka offers in "Investigations of a Dog" "devastating critiques of both Tradition and Zionism" which are "humorously deflected through a *parody of talmudic reasoning.*" The story enacts, as such, a series of talmudic-like, discursive commentaries interspersed with tangential "Aggadah" narrative interludes (Bruce 1992, 7-10).

[17] Peter Beicken (1999) offers to date the most discerning exploration of the cinematic qualities of Kafka's "scenic" narration and builds on the pioneering work of Jahn (1962), Ramm (1983) and Augustin (1985), who noted similarities between Kafka's earlier style (in *Amerika*) and the structure of silent cinema, e.g., mise-en-scene montage, optical exposition, continuity of vision, and parallel cross-cutting. Beicken extends the analysis beyond Kafka's earlier work and expands the parameters to include the voyeuristic look in modernism, Kafka's thematization of vision, and his use of filmic techniques to develop his protagonists' mono-perspective focus. Beicken also relates this limiting of perspective to the shift from omniscient to character-oriented narration in nineteenth-century realistic fiction to the impact of photography whereby authors developed a form of scenic portrayal to visualize rather than just tell their stories. Some of Beicken's argumentation, referenced above, is as yet unpublished and was presented in 2002 as a conference paper in a session on Kafka and cinema at the Annual Conference of German Studies Association in San Diego. Prof. Beicken provided me with a copy of this paper when I presented the original ideas of this study at that session.

[18] See E. Beck's *Kafka and the Yiddish Theater* (1971).

[19] Sokel contends that the researching dog "embodies the will of an omnipotent self, . . . the magician and combines them . . . with the mystic's yearning for seclusion and quietude" (1964, 213).

[20] Ingeborg Henel also speaks to the story's central significance: "While Kafka deals with a specific problem in his other stories, he holds forth in *Investigations of a Dog* on the entire range of intellectual life: the self-undermining search for truth, problematic aspects of science, the question of progress, art, and the significance of religion and its manifestation in cult (dance and song) as well as its theoretical systematization" (1967, 283).

[21] Binder cites as a possible source for the Magic Seven, E.T.A Hoffmann's autobiographical tale about Berganza, the magically spell-bound and musically-inclined "theater-dog." Berganza is himself on loan from Cervantes' talking-dog story, "Dialogue between Scipio and Berganza" (1975, 268).

[22] See Kudszus's essay (1983) for probing analysis of the story's systematic undermining of the relationship between subject and object posited by scientific inquiry.

[23] In this one-line aphorism found in an "Octavo Notebook" (1991, 96), Kafka registers his problematic relationship to psychology and then later crosses it out with pencil–burying, though not erasing its presence. In an earlier "Octavo" entry, which is not crossed out, Kafka wrote: "Psychology is reading a mirror-script, which means that it is laborious and richly informative in regard to its always correct result; but nothing has really happened" (53).

[24] See Anderson's discussion of the relation between the anti-Semitic term "Luftmensch" and "Lufthunde" (1992, 90ff). Suggesting an affinity between the air-dogs and the dancing Seven, Anderson writes: "Kafka, following his encounter with the *Luftmenschen* of the Yiddish theatre, takes the term literally, depicting the artist as a 'groundless' being, often an animal . . . who hovers in the air" (91).

[25] Deleuze and Guattari argue that music in Kafka's works "always seems caught up in an indivisible becoming-child or becoming-animal" which is also a "sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying" (1986, 5-6).

[26] Kafka was on his deathbed when he put the finishing touches on "Josefine." See Binder (1975, 323-26). See also Brod (1995, 206).

[27] "Investigations of a Dog" marks the end of the line for dogs, e.g., the dog-metaphor, in Kafka's fiction. In making his exit, the dog also takes along with him the alimentary distress which has plagued in one form or another most of Kafka's characters; in the stories he wrote after "Forschungen eines Hundes" there is significant decline in the characteristic features of his alimentary aesthetics.

[28] In his stylistic analysis of Kafka's first novel, *Der Verschollene* (Amerika) Mark Anderson, with a bow to Wolfgang Jahn's work (1962), touches upon the cinematic dimension to Kafka's post-breakthrough style and his thematic representations of the act of seeing (1992, 117-22). A related argument is offered by John Zilcosky in his book *Kafka's Travels*, in which he applies Malcolm Pasley's observations about the filmic quality of Kafka's travel writing to his breakthrough fiction, whereby Kafka

eventually exchanges his jagged, parataxtic, "collage style" with a "filmic idiom" of "flowing narration" (1985, 6, 12).

[29] See my study, *The Mirror and the Word* (1993, 1-90) for a discussion of the post-Enlightenment epistemological obsession with visual metaphorics which has shaped modern(ist) forms of self-understanding and literary expression in the first decades of the 20th century.

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