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## Lingual Asthma: Stuttering of Language in Franz Kafka's Writings

The writings of Franz Kafka provide an interesting example of remaining both inside and outside of the language of literary tradition. Kafkan attitude towards tradition is thoroughly ambiguous as it manifests itself as nostalgia, anxiety, or uneasiness. What appear repeatedly in his *Diaries*<sup>1</sup> are remarks on the German language, Jewish rituals, Chasidic theatre, intellectual influences and Kafka's growing estrangement from his own social stratum. The variety of his alienation, which is manifested in his works, seems to form a paradoxical basis for his identity as a writer.<sup>2</sup> The most intriguing, though, seems his ambiguous view on language; language, which appears disobedient, on the one hand, and open to various possibilities, on the other. The style of Kafka's narration seems to originate from the very absence of an existing community, which he himself would identify with. Transforming the language of literary tradition, the author of "Josephine the Singer" opens the possibility of a community that is yet to come.

Throughout all his writings, Kafka appears to struggle with the substance of foreign language. His dispossession of the vernacular language,

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1 See, for instance: Franz Kafka, *Diaries, 1910–1923*, ed. Max Brod, trans. Joseph Kresh, Martin Greenberg, Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken Books, 1976, p. 9, 14, 46, 49, 56, 64, 87–88, 91, 103–104, 118, 129, 147, 148–153, 168–171, 173–176, 179, 249, 332, 360, 423.

2 Günther Anders, *Kafka Pro und Contra*, in: Günther Anders, *Mensch ohne Welt: Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur*, München, Beck, 1993, p. 54: "Als Jude gehörte er nicht ganz zur christlichen Welt. Als indifferenter Jude – denn das war er ursprünglich – nicht ganz zu den Juden. Als Deutschsprechender nicht ganz zu den Tschechen. Als deutschsprechender Jude nicht ganz zu den böhmischen Deutschen. Als Böhme nicht ganz zu Österreich. Als Arbeiterversicherungsbeamter nicht ganz zum Bürgertum. Als Bürgersohn nicht ganz zur Arbeiterschaft. Aber auch zum Büro gehört er nicht, denn er fühlt sich als Schriftsteller. Schriftsteller aber ist er auch nicht, denn seine Kraft opfert er der Familie. Aber 'ich lebe in meiner Familie fremder als ein Fremder'. (Brief an seinen Schwiegervater)"; Adam Lipszyc, *Rewizja procesu Józefiny K. i inne lektury od zera*, Sic!, Warszawa, 2011, p. 15.

‘lingual asthma’<sup>3</sup> as he himself calls it, makes it impossible and at the same time necessary to write. This inner necessity, mentioned in numerous passages of *Diaries*<sup>4</sup> is an urge for becoming something more, or rather something else.

What seems extremely interesting is how Kafka, through his peculiar writing style, deforms the structure of literary language in order to create a new sphere of ambiguity and possibilities. The exploration of the phenomenon described by Deleuze as ‘stuttering language’ will be of a great use for an analysis of the forementioned problem, namely, how Kafka develops his writing strategy, designed to challenge the matter of foreign, disobedient language.

### Theoretical framework: Stuttering of language

In an obscure entry of Kafka’s *Diaries*, one can notice the first display of a certain hesitation regarding the familiarity of language: “Listened to myself outside of myself, it sounded like the whimpering of a young cat,”<sup>5</sup> writes the author of *Metamorphosis*. The shaky, ‘whimpering,’ narrative voice of Kafka evolves eventually into a stutter of his prose, becoming the lingual condition that Gilles Deleuze describes as a language’s stutter.

The very idea of stuttering language remains in the focus of attention of the author of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* in his article “He Stuttered.” What appears to be the main premise of Deleuzian deliberation on the quality of minor literary creation<sup>6</sup> is the intertwinement of the lingual

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3 Compare: “Language is the music and the breath of home. I – but I am the badly asthmatic, since I can speak neither Czech nor Hebrew.” [*Die Sprache ist der tönende Atem der Heimat. Ich – ich bin aber ein schwerer Asthmatiker, da ich weder tschechisch noch hebräisch kann.*] Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, trans. Goronwy Rees, New York, New Directions Publishing, 1971, p. 138.

4 See: Franz Kafka, *Diaries*, p. 61, 104, 118, 134, 163, 214, 233–234, 237, 406–407, 423.

5 [(...) mich aus mir heraus zeitweilig gehört, wie das Winseln einer jungen Katze beiläufig, aber immerhin.] Kafka, *Diaries*, p. 14.

6 The term ‘minor literature’ appears for the first time in *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* (1975), the work inspired by Kafka’s oeuvre and devoted entirely to this concept. Minor literature constitutes itself in the opposition to great national languages, established meanings and literary canons. What minor literature does is creatively modifying collective regimes of articulation, disrupting the syntax and the phrase of the major language.

and non-lingual aspects of reality. Aforementioned Deleuzian assumption has one of its sources in J.L. Austin theory of performative function of language, to which Deleuze implies in the article “He Stuttered” and refers directly in *A Thousands Plateaus*.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of this theory, certain kinds of utterance function as performative acts, which influence the non-lingual aspect of world. Deleuze notes that if saying is doing, then stuttering is making language stutter; and what follows, a stutter of language results in stuttering of reality:

when the stuttering no longer affects the pre-existing words, but itself introduces the words it affects, these words no longer exist independently of the stutter, which selects them and links them together through itself. It is no longer the character who stutters in speech; it is the writer who becomes a *stutterer in language*.<sup>8</sup>

What seems to be the most prominent element of Deleuzian view on language is that stuttering should be perceived as “an affect of language and not an affectation of speech.”<sup>9</sup> Deleuze boldly separates the stutter from the act of verbal articulation in order to treat it as a mode of lingual dynamics that manifests itself on two dimensions: affectivity – a capacity of being affected by language – and intensity, which can be experienced in a state of lingual vertigo.<sup>10</sup> Giving priority to the form of expression over the form of content, Deleuze stresses the potentiality of such an understanding of

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Deleuzian conception of minor literature consists in three traits. First one is that most of the language that minor literature operates within is affected with deterritorialization. Second characteristic involves the element of politicality that is always present in the minor writing. The third one is that individual enunciation becomes collective as it refers to not yet established community. See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 16–17.

<sup>7</sup> See: Gilles Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” in: Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis, 1997), 107; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousands Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 77–78; John Longshaw Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” 107.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the complexity of Deleuze’s understanding of intensity, see: Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 61–64.

language. It is directly linked to the instability of the lingual system.<sup>11</sup> The disequilibrium that introduces inner dynamics results in the potentiality of becoming.

The notion of ‘becoming’ seems to be one of the key concepts in Deleuzian philosophy, for it embraces the nature of life and thought. Since “everything happens at the boundary between things and propositions,”<sup>12</sup> becoming with all its aspects – becoming-other, becoming-minor, becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-imperceptible – describes the ongoing process of indiscernibility or undifferentiation that occurs in the zone between concepts and propositions. It expresses a genetic movement of change reflecting inner dynamics of reality, and therefore it is vitally important for the understanding of literary creation. “Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed,”<sup>13</sup> asserts the author of *Logic of Sense*.

On the basis of Deleuze’s account it is possible, then, for a writer to shift from stammer of a character to stutter of the language itself. Thus, when writer transforms himself into a stutterer he disrupts the substance of language introducing it to a state of perpetual disequilibrium. The writer who is ‘a stutterer in language’ becomes – in the effect – a cause of further cracks and fissures of the whole lingual system. The result of this violation of the lingual structure is that language is released from the restraint of the speaking subject. The language that stutters develops into an autonomous instance, which no longer serves as a tool of communication. It is being transformed into pure expression, a dynamic element that disrupts both the lingual and non-lingual order.

### **Revolutionary Machine**

Deleuzian concept of writing machine or ‘a-signifying linguistic

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11 This insistence on the instability of language seems to be a transposition of the inner instability of whole reality, the dynamics of life. Compare: Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence. Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 29.

12 Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, Charles Stivale (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), 8.

13 Gilles Deleuze, “Literature and Life,” trans. Daniel W. Smith, Michael A. Greco, *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1997): 225.

machine,<sup>14</sup> which emphasizes primarily a-subjective and automatic aspect of creation, is directly linked to the notion of revolutionary machine. Deleuze argues that the language, since it produces what is possible, is of political nature and has revolutionary potential. Author of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* distinguishes two kind of language: major, based on the constraint of what is given, and minor, created on the basis of what is mutable and possible.<sup>15</sup> Each existing language consists of two aforementioned kinds; hence, it is simultaneously stable and dynamic. Minor use of language opens it to the difference, to the change of hierarchical order of words, to the progressive deviation of the system. The fluctuation of meaning leads language into the space of vibration and variation. It is the sphere of potentiality, unrestricted creativity and becoming. “A minor language is a major language in the process of becoming minor, and a minority a majority in the process of change,”<sup>16</sup> observes Conley, researcher on Deleuzian philosophy. Minor literature, then, based on the dynamic mode of minor language, disrupts the lingual system by questioning binary oppositions, violating syntax and phrase. Going beyond its established borders, it introduces language to the sphere of original creation. And what is the most important, minor literature remains not merely the effect of the process of becoming minor but rather the process itself.

The introduction of the element of becoming into the sphere of language disturbs the lingual order and socio-political order, both remaining in the strong interrelation with each other. While operating with negation and ambiguity, it forms a kind of interpretative evasion that blurs the borders, disrupts the structures and unsettles the system from inside. Deleuze and Guattari present minor language as a mode of acting that undergoes continuous variation, resulting in the form of anarchy that raises the possibility of freedom. Since, according to the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the systemic organization of language with its syntax, lexical and semantic codes, reflects the structure of relations of power, the act of lingual deformation could be seen as a strictly political action. And because language and structures of power are interrelated, each attempt to transform

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14See: Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari*, 108.

15For a thorough monograph on a Deleuzian conception of language, see: Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Deleuze and Language* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

16Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2010), 166–168.

the language results in a change in the extra-lingual reality. Thus, literature gains a communal aspect even if the community, which concerns it represents, has not been established yet.

The work on language that is carried on by a minor writer is not only of a political character, but also it involves a strong stance on the character of creativity,<sup>17</sup> as the familiar substance of language is being transformed into a completely new and radically open sphere of possibilities. Deleuze comments on the problem in “He Stuttered,” confronting the tree-model of a static system with the rhizome-model of a dynamic structure.<sup>18</sup>

Creative stuttering is what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium: *III Seen, III Said* (content and expression). Being well spoken has never been either the distinctive feature or the concern of great writers.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that something can be simply ‘ill said’ is a sign of the potential power of language. This kind of potentiality paradoxically comprises also the potentiality within of language to go beyond its rules and question its own character – become what is ‘ill said.’ One has to remember that the act of stutter consists not only awkwardly repeated or prolonged sounds but also accidental pauses that significantly disrupt the flow of speech. What makes stutter difficult to understand is not only the accumulation of needless sounds but also the random moments of silence that tend to dismantle the whole structure of the utterance. Operating with silence, the act of stutter negates the act of communication and the content that it tries to convey and moves toward a mode of pure expression.<sup>20</sup> What Deleuze and Guattari claims about the original creation in language is that

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17 For further investigation on this subject, see: Frank Stevenson, “Stretching Language to Its Limit: Deleuze and the Problem of *Poiesis*.” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 35.1 (2009): 77–108.

18 For the detailed description of the rhizome and tree-model, see: Deleuze, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3–25.

19 Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” 111.

20 Compare: “The expression must shatter the forms, marking the breaking points and the new tributaries. Once a form is shattered, the contents, which will necessarily have broken with the order of things, must be reconstructed.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature. The Components of Expression,” trans. Marie Maclean, *New Literary History* 16 (1985): 591.

“it’s easy to stammer, but making language itself stammer is different affair; it involves placing all linguistic, and even non-linguistic, elements in variation, both variables of expression and variables of content.”<sup>21</sup> Making the language stutter, hence, causes confusion between what is located in the frames of language and what remains beyond. It is the case of Franz Kafka, who gives primacy to the expression not articulation, and particularly to non-articulative modes of expression mainly animal voices such as piping, screeching or croaking.

### **Piping, screeching and croaking**

Gilles Deleuze refers to the stories of Franz Kafka in almost every work that is at least partially devoted to the analysis of the minor writing (in particular *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, but also both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and *Essays Critical and Clinical*). He argues that Kafkan narration is based on the ongoing work of deterritorialization<sup>22</sup> of the literary machine. What seems especially interesting in this context is his flight from language into the pure expression of animal noises.

The continuous and persistent deterritorialization of language that literary machine performs appears in the works of Kafka as a move toward inarticulate animal noises or silence. In Kafka’s case, this deterritorialization process displaces language in the beyond-verbal sphere, as for instance in the Kafkan note from 1910: “‘If he should forever ask me.’ The *ah*, released from the sentence, flew off like a ball on the meadow.”<sup>23</sup> This move of exploring the frontiers of language could be found in almost each writings of Kafka. He seems to explore it and develop in such a way that they lean toward two extreme possibilities. One of them is the incomprehensible, ambiguous or meaningless “screeching as of jackdaws,”<sup>24</sup>

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21 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 98.

22 Deterritorialization and reterritorialization are two twin terms of Deleuzian philosophy; their coexistence describes to the dynamics of becoming. See, for instance: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10.

23 [»Wenn er mich immer frägt.« *Das, losgelöst vom Satz, flog dahin wie ein Ball auf der Wiese.*] Kafka, *Diaries*, 9.

24 [Immer wieder hört man diesen Schrei der Dohlen.] Franz Kafka, *An Old Manuscript*, in: Franz Kafka, *The Complete Short Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, Martin Secker (London: Vintage Books, 2005), 416.

the uncanny laughter of Odradek, or the uncontrollable laughter of Kafka himself reading *Trial* out loud.<sup>25</sup> The second one is much more mysterious. It is a flight into silence, hence, going beyond the borders of language. As, for instance, in the case of Odradek, which, even though being able to conduct a conversation, often “stays mute for a long time, as wooden as his appearance.”<sup>26</sup> Silence of both Odradek and Josephine, who ceases singing and disappears mysteriously, seems to be an interesting variation on the stuttering of language, a certain form of lingual evasion.

Kafkan minute story “The Silence of the Sirens,”<sup>27</sup> for instance, is built entirely on this kind of cessation that paradoxically seems to provoke much greater hazard than any frontal attack. Its main character Ulysses is certain that trusting his uncanny wit he could flight from the great power of the Sirens’ song. What he invents, though, does not differ from a subterfuge of any other man. The only reason why he finally escapes is because Sirens halt their singing; they do not make a sound:

Now the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence. And though admittedly such a thing has never happened, still it is conceivable that someone might possibly have escaped from their [Sirens’] singing; but from their silence certainly never.<sup>28</sup>

The main theme of “The Silence of the Sirens” is the false triumph over language and sound. While one could try to escape language and its traps, what one could not escape however is silence with its emptiness. In his story, Kafka builds a beautiful paradox: Ulysses thinks that he does not hear the song of the Sirens, although in fact he does not hear their silence. And how could he hear that they were silent if he did not listen to them? This paradox is a result of the intriguing play of pretences, as Sirens fake

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25 Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, trans. G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 178.

26 [(...) *oft ist er lange stumm, wie das Holz, das er zu sein scheint.*] Franz Kafka, “The Cares of a Family Man”, in: Kafka, *The Complete Short Stories*, 428.

27 Compare it with extremely interesting counter-interpretation of this scene: Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 25–28.

28 [*Nun haben aber die Sirenen eine noch schrecklichere Waffe als den Gesang, nämlich ihr Schweigen. Es ist zwar nicht geschehen, aber vielleicht denkbar, daß sich jemand vor ihrem Gesang gerettet hätte, vor ihrem Schweigen gewiß nicht.*] Franz Kafka, “The Silence of the Sirens”, in: Kafka, *The Complete Short Stories*, 431.



their song and Ulysses feigns to listen.

Silence, a key element of this story, performs a double function here. First of all, it is a cessation of singing or speaking; a necessary negativity, for it enables communication. Second of all, it appears to be the most powerful weapon within the arsenal of language. Silence seems far more pernicious than any other sound; it is a permanent, inescapable void. Like in the case of Odradek, Kafka appears to link silence to a certain permanency, which is dangerous and troubling, when located in the middle of a language and prone to continuous variations and transformations. Negativity of silence with its undeniable necessity is a heterogeneity installed into the system of language by the act of stutter.

Silence seems to play an important part for Kafka, for the moment of deliberate, though somehow uncomfortable silence is present quite often in his works.<sup>29</sup> At times, it is additionally confronted with excessive speech, music, or animal-like noises. It is worth mentioning that at least four short stories of Kafka have silence as one of their main topics, namely “Investigation of a Dog,” “The Burrow,” “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk” and forementioned “The Silence of the Sirens.” One could see in Kafkan silence only a simple gesture of withdrawal; at a closer look, however, it appears to be something more than a disturbing pause, for – as an act of a blunt refusal of enunciation – it opens language to the domain of negativity. I will follow Deleuzian remark on the philosophical phenomenon of silence, treating it as the act of taking language to extremes. On the basis of this conception, silence would be perceived as a sign of radical rupture of language.

Let us return to “He Stuttered,” where Deleuze describes the dislocation of silence from the external border of language to the inside as the consequence of the disruption made by a stammer: “*When a language is so strained that it starts to stutter, or to murmur or stammer... then language in its entirety reaches the limit that marks its outside and makes it confront silence.*”<sup>30</sup> The manoeuvre of the minor writer to translocate silence from the outside of language to the inside places negation in the very heart of literary creation. Inner negation hidden within the language disorganizes

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29 See, among others: “Description of a Struggle,” “Wedding Preparations in the Country,” “The Metamorphosis,” “In the Penal Colony,” “Investigation of a Dog,” “Little Woman,” “The Burrow,” “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk,” “The Silence of the Sirens,” “The Cares of a Family Man,” in: Kafka, *The Complete Short Stories*.

30 Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” 113. Italic emphasis in the original.

the principles of the communication, favouring both the silence and the extreme ambiguity of pure expression. According to Deleuze, minor writers confront the dynamics of the rhizomic mode of language with the static totality of its system. Disturbance of the inner balance introduces a foreign element into the realm of language. Stuttering ceases to be a lingual peculiarity that is external of language becoming an internal vibration instead. Minor writer “makes the language itself scream, stutter, stammer, or murmur.”<sup>31</sup> And exactly this essential lingual dysfunction, ‘a state of lingual disequilibrium,’ raises the very possibility of original writing.

A similar kind of disequilibrium seems to be the result of the piping of Josephine, the heroine of Kafka’s “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk.” Her piping, on the one hand, does not differ considerably from piping of other mice; on the other hand, however, there is some kind of marvel hidden in her singing, there is a hidden possibility of the occurrence of something entirely new, of the commencement of the process of becoming. Partially, it seems to be the result of the abrupt transition between an individual and communal perception of the world and art. The chant of Josephine causes at least a temporary disruption of the world’s order or the organization of the labour of the mouse folk. Functioning on the borderlands of the mice community, Josephine aims for the special privilege of being discharged from the communal obligations, especially from the duty to work. She insists on being acknowledged as an individual and not as a replaceable part of the labouring folk.

“Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk” is a great example of the passage from individuality to collectivity, of the entanglement of idiosyncratic language in the language of the nation. However, it is also the mystery of the relation between silence and sound, between muteness and language. “Is it her singing that enchants us or is it not rather the solemn stillness enclosing her frail little voice?,” asks the mouse narrator.<sup>32</sup> What disappears along with the mysterious vanishment of Josephine is not only her singing but most importantly – the silence. Something is definitely lost. And, since the members of the Mouse Folk are ‘no historians,’<sup>33</sup> they return to the unceasing and meaningless piping.

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31 *Ibid.*, 109.

32 [*Ist es ihr Gesang, der uns entzückt oder nicht vielmehr die feierliche Stille, von der das schwache Stimmchen umgeben ist?*] Franz Kafka, “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk,” in: Kafka, *The Complete Short Stories*, 362.

33 [(...) *keine Geschichte*] *Ibid.*, 376.

‘Noncommunicative language of singing’<sup>34</sup> remains one of the modes of expression, which in eyes of Kafka seems more valuable than the content they convey. The whistle of Josephine may be read as the flight from the language reduced to the mere act of communicative exchange. For Kafka as a writer, ‘a stammerer in language,’ the language tissue is not only a tool or a substance but rather the autotelic instance of expression.

It is difficult to disagree with the statement that in Kafka’s prose “aesthetic discourse involves suspending the communicative function of language.”<sup>35</sup> Stutter, as a part of aesthetic or rather contra-aesthetic discourse, does not communicate anything while at the same time it highly influences the sphere of communication. What seems extremely interesting in the notion of Ford, author of “Crowds, Animality, and Aesthetic Language”, is the strategy of suspension that temporarily disables one aspect of language and thus creates a state of imbalance. Only while being partially impaired as in the case of stammerer, language is open to the domain of becomings. The process of becoming entangles both the content and the form of expression, which in this ‘sonorous disequilibrium’ verges toward non-language in the movement of becoming-silence or becoming-caw.

Let us now return to the Ford’s remark and further investigate the nature of the animal’s muteness.

In Kafka’s story, aesthetic discourse involves suspending the communicative function of language; the silence instituted in this way allows the proximity of transindividual language to animal life to be encountered. The language of the crowd resounds with the muteness with which animal life confronts us, we who are individual subjects of speech.<sup>36</sup>

While Ford makes his remark, he does not refer to the transition from

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34 I use this term after Ford’s analysis of the Kafkan short story “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk.” See: Thomas H. Ford, “Crowds, Animality, and Aesthetic Language in Kafka’s ‘Josephine,’” in *Kafka’s Creatures. Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, edited by Marc Lucht, Donna Yarri (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), 123.

35 Ford, “Crowds, Animality, and Aesthetic Language,” 121. For the sake of the consistency of the argument, I will only focus on the phenomenon of ‘suspension the communicative function’ while in the further part I will return to Ford’s reading of “Josephine” and analyze Kafka’s aesthetic discourse.

36 Ford, “Crowds, Animality, and Aesthetic Language,” 121.

the human mode of communication to the animal expression, but to the transformation that occurs when Kafka in his short narratives engages in animal themes. Ford presumes, too hastily rather, that animal muteness is a significant part of the very original experience of human-animal encounter. And, since the sonic layer in most cases precedes the whole experience, the said presupposition seems a little doubtful. The muteness mentioned by Ford can relate to exclusively expressional character of the animal noises.

Ford's comment, however, seems far more adequate considering the context: Kafkan short story "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk." The narrative of this story contrasts the individuality of the Josephine with the faceless crowd of prematurely old children and childish grown-ups.<sup>37</sup> Josephine's piping is ordinary but quite different from the piping of any other mouse. At the same time, it seems to disturb and consolidate the community of the Mouse Folk. Josephine becomes a paradoxical element that is simultaneously inside and outside of the mouse collectivity. Her piping becomes some kind of principle that governs the faceless crowd. It directs it, however, to an unexpected destination. The first principle of the Mouse Folk is one of the daily labour. And, as it was already mentioned, Josephine unsuccessfully aims to be dispensed from this obligation. What she does succeeds at, however, is that for the duration of her song the work stops. The piping of Josephine is different from the one, which accompanies other mice labour. Her piping is idle and it communicates nothing. This negativity, though, becomes the impulse for a certain kind of dynamics inside of the collectivity. The Mouse Folk, which does not know history, experiences it because of the non-repeatability of Josephine, who disrupts the being of the mouse community. It is only an episode, however, and as narrator of the story assures she soon will "be forgotten like all her brothers."<sup>38</sup>

In the forementioned story, Kafka points out to the specific interrelation between communicative aspect of language and the community. The writing of Kafka originated from the alienation from community, caused by intentional separation that Kafka perceived as a necessary element of the writing process. Some themes present in the Kafka's works deal with the disturbances of enunciation, which in most of the cases are somehow linked to the problem of community and the dynamics of exclusion-inclusion. "A subject is always oriented, individually,

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37 Kafka, "Josephine, or The Mouse Folk," 369.

38 [(...) *vergessen sein wie alle ihre Brüder.*] *Ibid.*, 376.

by his or her position within the order of language,”<sup>39</sup> argues Ford. The order of language can be changed, though – that is the philosophical lesson of Kafka. That is the meaning of the Deleuzian term minorisation and the attempt to introduce movement and possibilities into language.

This distant between the actuality and potentiality of language leaves an open space for a creation. And the language plays here a critically important role. What seems to be at stake here is the difference between an event that is present in language and an event that is represented by the lingual means. In the conception of Costa-Lima, author of *The Limits of Voice*, language appears to be a unique mean to achieve a creation, which does not refer to anything that is beyond language. This is the case of Kafka, who withdraws from representation in favour of presenting, or in the words of Costa-Lima ‘staging,’ what is voiceless.<sup>40</sup> Language no longer serves as a medium; instead, it becomes an event of pure and original creation.<sup>41</sup>

### **Kafka’s trapeze**

As we have stated, the possibility of the new can occur only in the dynamic, perturbed structure. In this case of the problematic imbalance – that at the same time enables the originality, but disables writing as such – it seems crucial for the revolutionary element to be somehow disciplined. Kafka-the-writer seems the only element, which remains stable in the chaotic motion created by lingual disequilibrium.

It is worth noting that both equilibrium and disequilibrium are in fact relative terms, as they seem to require an external reference point. When stuttering destroys the inner balance, albeit existing structure is being reorganized, it seems that the relational character remains intact. It is impossible even to think what is non-relational. In the limitless potentiality of becoming and possibility of the new there is a hidden danger of the permanent destruction, of entering into the sphere of pure chaos, of impossibility of creation.

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39 Ford, “Crowds, Animality, and Aesthetic Language,” 128.

40 Luiz Costa-Lima, *The Limits of Voice: Montaigne, Schlegel, Kafka*, trans. Paulo Henriques Britto (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 198–199.

41 For reading stuttering language of Deleuze in aesthetic terms of event, see also: Simon O’Sullivan, “From Stuttering to Stammering to the Diagram: Deleuze, Bacon and Contemporary Art Practice.” *Deleuze Studies* Vol. 3, No. 2 (December 2009): 247–258.

Creation seems to be intimately linked to destruction;<sup>42</sup> in order to create, however, it seems necessary for a chaotic, disruptive element to be organized by the formation of new structures. And this is where the necessity of certain architecture arises, that would allow at least the general conceptualization of the occurring movement. It could be the architecture of a rhizome or of a burrow but this spatial aspect of language seems of a considerable importance while thinking about the language in terms of its stable or disturbed structure. Since words denote and define certain aspects of space, with the collapse of the word in Kafka's writings, with the stutter of phrase, the space created in his works starts shaking. Elfassy, who links language to architecture, observes that when "abandoning any grammatical semblance, the phrase falls apart. It is the event of language/architecture, in which language/architecture is not used to describe or denote, but rather to unname (undenominate) and disrupt."<sup>43</sup> What follows the deformation of the space, that becomes whole mazes and labyrinths, is the disturbance of temporal aspects of the narrative world. Nothing is certain in the story, as it questions its own existence by disrupting the lingual substance of which the narrative is made. The narrative world trembles.

The problem of art and balance is being explored in one of Kafka's short stories, "First Sorrow." Its main character, a trapeze artist, as the result of his explicit request lives hung in the air. Occupying the same point in space, he remains the most unchangeable element of reality. Acrobat's extravagance seems to be serving as a point of reference vertically structuring the world's order. At times, this perfect harmony, however, is being broken by the necessity to travel, which plays a significant part in the circus life. What seems particularly interesting though are the means taken for the preservation this quasi-hierarchical structure:

for town travel, racing automobiles were used, which whirled him, by night if possible or in the earliest hours of the morning, through the empty streets at breakneck speed, too slow all the same for the trapeze artist's impatience; for railway journeys, a whole compartment was reserved, in which the trapeze artist, as a possible though wretched alternative to his usual way of

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42 For more radicalised stance on the relation between creation and destruction, see: Natanel Elfassy and François Roche, "Stuttering," *Journal for Architecture LOG* 19 (Spring/Summer 2010): accessed October, 25, 2012. <http://www.new-territories.com/blog/?p=457>.

43 *Ibid.*

living, could pass the time up on the luggage rack.<sup>44</sup>

The mode of existence of the trapeze artist seems to gain a significance of something ultimately important, as if it guaranteed the success of the whole endeavour. With the acrobat being almost worshipped by his fellow artists, the very nature of the whole circus enterprise appears rather mysterious.

It is worth noting, however, that Kafka seems to focus merely on the negative aspect of the acrobat's life. The very skill of the artist is not even explicitly mentioned, even though the whole narration is based on "his art at the pitch of its perfection."<sup>45</sup> It is not art, then, that captures the attention of the narrator but on the contrary all the moments when art is absent, as for instance in the case of travel.

The dynamics of the narration follows the evolving process of the decomposition of a certain world's order. The first symptom of the destruction arises with the acrobat's refusal of leaving the trapeze. The culminating scene in the train wagon could be seen as a radical gesture of violation of the appointed rules. His demand of the second trapeze introduces a disturbance into the stability of the world. Perturbed balance of reality seems to be even more endangered by the element of chaos when the only axis left – the acrobat's trapeze – is to be doubled. Nothing is stable anymore in Kafka's story. When first signs of inquietude echoing the collapsing order can be seen in the acrobat, they disturb not only his mind but also his infantile appearance with "the first furrows of care engraving themselves upon the trapeze artist's smooth, childlike forehead."<sup>46</sup> And the change in the acrobat's face is permanent, since his concern not only affects him but furrows through his body. The narration stops with the fissure of the only stable element in the world in constant motion.

It is truly fascinating how Kafka in "First Sorrow" juxtaposes the

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44[ (...) für die Fahrten in den Städten benützte man Rennautomobile, mit denen man, womöglich in der Nacht oder in den frühesten Morgenstunden, durch die menschenleeren Straßen mit letzter Geschwindigkeit jagte, aber freilich zu langsam für des Trapezkünstlers Sehnsucht; im Eisenbahnzug war ein ganzes Kupee bestellt, in welchem der Trapezkünstler, zwar in kläglichem, aber doch irgendeinem Ersatz seiner sonstigen Lebensweise die Fahrt oben im Gepäcknetz zubrachte;] Franz Kafka, "First Sorrow", in: Kafka, *The Complete Short Stories*, 447.

45[(...) seine Kunst in ihrer Vollkommenheit bewahren konnte.] *Ibid.*, 446.

46[(...) die ersten Falten auf des Trapezkünstlers glatter Kinderstirn sich einzuzeichnen begannen.] *Ibid.*, 448.

inner physical balance of the circus acrobat with the disequilibrium of the world showing the complexity of its correlation. First of all, the stability of the artist as such is based on his unsteadiness, on his ability to live life in a state of constant suspension. Secondly, his attempt to stabilize his situation, his refusal of leaving the trapeze, results in the destabilization of the external world. Thirdly, disrupted reality enters eventually into the sphere of unchangeable and the acrobat fractures in two. The artist's decision to double the trapeze results in his own disintegration, when furrows divide his face marking it with the signs of impending chaos. The end of the story returns to an interesting question: whether the disequilibrium of the world and silence that follows it are permanent or transient. I would closely investigate this problem analyzing the other example of the artist figure that appears in Kafka's writings.

The art of "A Hunger Artist" is a mere gesture of refusal, since the art of fasting is the mastery of rejection: what is being rejected is food and what follows life.<sup>47</sup> Because art signifies the exclusion from life, it transforms itself into its negation. What is worth noting is that the ongoing performance of the Hunger Artist is generally based on negativity. It is not what he does that makes him an artist but what he does not, namely what he refuses to do. Kafka explores the well-known phenomenon of travelling 'hunger artists' adding to it the element of striving for perfection.

The obsession to continuously improve oneself and go further in art have already appeared in "First Sorrow" and as in the case of "A Hunger Artist" became the centre motif in the narration of the story. This strain to explore and eventually cross each frontier introduces inner dynamic into the story. What provokes all the further events is the attempt of the Hunger Artist to fast better and longer. The continuous work of negation in the end results in negating itself. His art of fasting is good to such an extent that it ceases to be interesting. "Just try to explain to anyone the art of fasting! Anyone who has no feeling for it cannot be made to understand it."<sup>48</sup> The phenomenon of this art is difficult to comprehend because its *artificiality* is

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47See "Investigation of a Dog" for an interesting comparison between the fasting of a Hunger Artist and fasting of a Dog: Franz Kafka, "Investigation of a Dog", in: Kafka, *The Complete Short Stories*, 307–315.

48[*Versuche, jemandem die Hungerkunst zu erklären! Wer es nicht fühlt, dem kann man es nicht begreiflich machen.*] Franz Kafka, "A Hunger Artist", in: Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, 276.



based on what is against life, what is a refusal of life for the sake of art.<sup>49</sup>

Let us once more return to the theory of Deleuze. For the sake of art, minor writer explores the extremes of language, examining the borderlines of the system and all the inner inconsistencies. One of the researches on Deleuze, Ronald Bogue, claims that “Kafka pushes the paternal image to the limit until it explodes.”<sup>50</sup> And it seems that Kafka uses the same strategy with paternal<sup>51</sup> language. Destroying its power becomes a means of liberating the source of unlimited creation. It is another Kafkan paradox: the language of narration is being treated as a substance, which is explored by the means of language itself. Thus, language of Kafkan prose enters into chaotic, disruptive sphere, where, as Deleuze claims, “it is no longer the formal or superficial syntax that governs the equilibriums of language, but a syntax in the process of becoming, a creation of syntax that gives birth to a foreign language within language, a grammar of disequilibrium.”<sup>52</sup> Writing is being transformed into a process of continuous foreignization of language.

This strategy of using language in such a way that it becomes foreign and distant – to make phrase stumble – seems to be linked to lingual privation. Strangeness of language appears to be the result of this strategy as well as its cause. Kafka carefully explores the notion of his own lingual discomfort and the feeling of alienation. Like the main character of “Crossbreed,” half-cat half-lamb, Kafka, who is described by Deleuze as “a bastard, a half-breed,”<sup>53</sup> manifests the ambiguity of his own sense of belonging. He appears to put himself in the position of a foreigner who stammers speaking and stumps walking. For being a foreigner within own language is closely related to the experience of the foreignness of own body. The awkward disrupted motion of the body creates an interesting parallel to the stammer of speech.<sup>54</sup>

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49The problem of art is one of the themes that Kafka explores extensively in his short and longer stories. Beside the acrobat from “First Sorrow” the figure of the artist is a central topic in “Investigations of a Dog,” “A Hunger Artist,” and “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk”.

50Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari*, 110.

51This distinction between the paternal and maternal language is interestingly explored by Kafka himself in his *Diaries*. See: Kafka, *Diaries*, 88.

52Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” 112.

53Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 98.

54For the relation between the movement of the character’s body and the stammer of

Stuttering of language seems to be a form of evasion from the lingual and non-lingual conjugation involving every dimension of perceived reality. By including the stammer in his prose Kafka appears to move toward the extremes of language. Exploring the silence as a state of emergency of expression he questions the whole system of language as such. Although, I want to argue that Kafka's descending into impossibility of articulation, either by pure expression or silence, into anti-language is only a strategy of suspension<sup>55</sup> and not an act of radical disruption.

### **Carnival of Language**

I will start with the problem of Kafka's unfinished novels, for incompleteness is an important part of the Kafkan strategy to go beyond language. It seems to be a move toward infinity of interpretations, infinity of new possibilities within literature, and not necessarily toward defragmentation of language. Kafkan problem with unfinished novels seems to be linked with the complex strategy of desistance that is manifested on the various layers of his literary work. The negation of language as such by the vague gesture of refusal entails the definite impossibility of literary creation. The silence of Kafka who rebuffed finishing his works and of Kafkan characters that escape into the solitude of silence is a bold strategy that not only thwarts any attempt of interpretation, but also leads to cessation of writing. Kafkan gesture of refusal should not be considered, however, in terms of success or failure. Unfinished novels of Kafka seem to be the mode of manifestation of the complex strategy based not on a total rupture of language, but on temporary suspension of its order.

Secondly, there is a certain similarity that could be seen in writing strategy of Kafka and the suspension of social rules in Bakhtin's theory of

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whole narrative, see: Deleuze, "He Stuttered," 108-111; John Hughes, *Lines of Flight: Reading Deleuze with Hardy, Gissing, Conrad, Woolf* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 61-64.

<sup>55</sup>For a brilliant analysis of the suspension of spatial coordinates and syncopating of time in Kafka's prose, see: Michael G. Levine, "'A Place So Insanely Enchanting': Kafka and the Poetics of Suspension," *MLN* Vol. 123, No. 5 (December 2008): 1039-1067. For an interesting catalogue of Kafka's writing strategies and among others the strategy of suspension, see: Henry Sussman, "Kafka's Aesthetics: A Primer: From the Fragments to the Novels," in: *A Companion to the Works of Franz Kafka*, ed. James Rolleston (New York: Camden House, 2002), 123-148.

carnival.<sup>56</sup> A vision of a world *à rebours* that is presented during a carnival in a way resembles the meaning that emerges from silence, from the negation of language. As Bakhtin argues: “Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.”<sup>57</sup> During the carnival all the determinants of the structure of ordinary life are suspended. The hierarchy of the social structure is disorganized, as is the distance between its elements. This “free and familiar contact among people,” how Bakhtin describes it, provokes the spontaneous emergence of a dynamic configuration of momentary relations: “Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life.”<sup>58</sup> Thus newly framed structure is full of possibilities, which are limited only by the duration of the carnival. And, since certain actions become ‘half-played-acted,’ the reality gains an artificial character of a staging performance.<sup>59</sup>

Suspending the order of everyday life effects in emergence of a new type of communication that Bakhtin defines as “special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression.”<sup>60</sup> Information is no longer of the prime importance while the carnival is all about the exaggerated expression, liberated from any norms and open to sudden events of language. Vulgarity enters into language and questions the validity of the distinction between what is vulgar and what is noble. No distinctions are sustained during the carnival, which is the feast of relativity and change. There is a certain ‘carnival idiom,’ believes Bakhtin, that is adopted to describe a uniqueness of the carnival experience. This experience demands an adequate form that would be undeterminable and mutable to fit the rapid dynamics of the expression.

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56 For an analysis of relations between Bakhtin’s theory and philosophy of Deleuze, see: Fred Evans, “Deleuze, Bakhtin and the ‘Clamour of Voices’”, *Deleuze Studies*, Vol. 2, 178–188.

57 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.

58 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 123. Italic emphasis in the original.

59 Bogue points out certain similarities between Deleuze–Guattari’s and Bahtin’s stance on language. One of them is the close relation between the language and action. See: Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari*, 136.

60 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

The chaotic dynamics of the carnival, however – when everyone can become anyone else and nobody expects the result – remains only a suspension of the ordinary order of the world with the negation included into the very order. The derivation from the system seems to be one of possibilities of the system itself as far as it happens accordingly to the exceptional rules that only temporarily withdraw the existing ones. It is the case of silence as well, which is both the very negation of language and the necessary condition for the understandability of an utterance. I claim then, that Kafka does not negate language as such but rather celebrates a certain carnival of language,<sup>61</sup> which remains essential for the emergence of new writing. It is a state of temporal disability of certain lingual functions that allows for the potentiality to appear. Kafkan silence, then, should be understood not as a complete negation of language but a state of emergency of expression, pure potentiality.

### **Conclusion: Kafka's laughter**

Deleuze and Guattari argue in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* that “what interests Kafka is a pure and intense sonorous material that is always connected to its own abolition — a deterritorialized musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words — a sonority that ruptures...”<sup>62</sup> The authors of *Anti-Oedipus* seem particularly interested in the line of flight that transforms the word into a meaningless sequence of sounds. Kafka's focus is on the disruptions of language, ‘a sonority that ruptures,’ these moments when language negates its own character. The animal howl, croak, piping can be seen as a flight from enunciation, entering into a different mode of being in language – is a pure expression, being at the same time something more and less than the ordinary utterance.

The concept of the lingual stutter, or rather ‘lingual asthma’, assumes that language is an autonomous instance that can be influence or disrupted from within. The dynamics introduced by a stutter into language provokes

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<sup>61</sup> It is worth emphasizing that Bakhtinian conception of language and especially carnival language considerably differs from the idea of the carnival of language. The latter is an attempt to transpose the theory of carnival into the field of language. For Bakhtinian remarks on language see particularly: Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Michael Holoquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>62</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 6.

its structure to redefine. The moment of reorganization becomes the sphere of pure potentiality; language is not stable anymore and since nothing is clearly defined, everything can enter into the movement of becoming. Language reaches its borders, exploring the extremes of pure, 'a-signifying' expression or silence. This silence, however, does not necessarily signify a refusal or an impossibility of writing. It becomes an opportunity to constitute a certain strategy that puts language into the state of imbalance and enables new sphere of senses to appear. Silence introduces an inner motion into language; operating within the distance between the centre of language and its borders, it makes language swing.

The animal stories of Kafka remain the interesting example of the lingual evasion and opening to the new zones of narration. Its context often includes the oppressiveness and foreignness of language and therefore also the problem of impossibility of writing. The screeching from "An Old Manuscript" or the thin piping of Josephine may be seen as the attempt to simultaneously be included and excluded from the sphere of language. While the minor writing explore its frontiers, the whole system is being put into question. Eventually, however, stuttering of language changes itself into inarticulate sound or animal caw and gains a profound significance without carrying any meaning. The importance of this gesture manifests itself during the disturbing act of refusal or the burst of laughter. Kafkan laughter seems to be overloaded with meaning, for it is a bizarre laughter, the "kind of laughter that has no lungs behind it."<sup>63</sup>

It is worth emphasizing that Kafkan strategy of literary creation does not imply a complete destruction of language of tradition. Kafka disrupts substance of his narration, questions and refutes existing forms. It seems however that mere act of creation is not understood as radical destruction, being rather a suspension of the language order, a carnival of language, which lasts only for a given moment. Kafka introduces a particular architecture in his writing: instable architecture of trapeze in motion.

Writing freed from restraints of language is a pure possibility of expression. It remains a revolutionary force for all literature: it deprives of meaning, disorganizes the sense of great literature, disrupts the language, destroying old forms of expression. This kind of literary creation has the potential for emergence of a new collectivity, new, utopian world order:

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63 [(...) *es ist aber nur ein Lachen, wie man es ohne Lungen hervorbringen kann.*] Kafka, "The Cares of a Family Man," 428.

from non-existing community Kafka shifts to the one that is yet to come. Literature no longer serves as a medium of communication between individual and community or between individual and tradition: literature itself becomes the ultimate purpose of writing. What remains at stake of writing is unrestricted creativity, change in reality, new possibilities and new forms of expression.