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## HOW DOES POWER SOUND?

### Sonority of Bureaucracy in Everyday Life

[from a talk presented at Errant Bodies studio, October 1, 2021]

It starts early. Entry into society: determination of sex, tax number, social security number, etc. Then: entering the educational system, where discipline, docility, and obedience are an informal, ideological part of the curriculum. This is all regulated via bureaucracy.

In general, bureaucracy is defined as *a large group of people who are involved in running a government but who are not elected*. Following both Marxist and critical theory, it can be defined as “neither a class nor a stratum analogous to those which can be distinguished within a class (such as office workers); its existence derives from the division of society into classes and from the class struggle, since its function is to secure the general acceptance of the rules of a common order (an order which no doubt stems from the relations of production but which must be formulated in universal terms and maintained by force).”<sup>1</sup>

We will here understand bureaucracy as *a mechanism for formalized domination*. In the broadest sense of this definition: bureaucracy as not only a repressive apparatus but also an ideological structurator and amplifier in the sense that “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”, and that ideology “has a material existence.” The omnipresence of bureaucracy gives an idea of the population as universal while it formalizes repressive and ideological standpoints of state government, and these standpoints are – in the current world-economy – favorization and assurance of economic and social inequality

The method used in this research is *critical listening of social sonorities*; in other words, a certain interest into the sonic aspects of specific discourses and a critical evaluation of sonorities of *relations*; how do power relations sound, how are they constructed through sounding and listening practices and, vice versa, how sounding and listening practices take effect on the dynamics of power relations.

At the same time, I prefer not to call it a method, but rather a *pre-method* in a Barthesian sense of the word. Not as a strict structure of a journey, but as a process of continuous beginning, opening; an encyclopedic or a librarian approach to archives, an approach which, due to the rhizomic appearance of sonic objects is not and cannot be finished at any point of arrival. The very object of research posits this approach; the compositional appearance of any sonic phenomenon, its contingent occurrence, its dispersive flow, its spheric habitation, its touching on unexpected objects, even on accidental subjects, those who are not strictly included in a certain interlocution, even on the silent public.

Within this research, I conducted critical listening through so-called excursions. I entered bureaucratic situations and bureaucratic spaces to listen to them repeatedly, but have set several limitations that would contribute to the consistency of excursions, data gathering, and analysis throughout the entire process. These restrictions are as follows: 1) We will only enter situations of public bureaucracy, not those of private corporations; 2) We will observe public spaces of

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<sup>1</sup> Lefort, Claude. *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*. Oxford: Polity Press, p. 90.

public bureaucracy; the spaces which more or less anyone can enter; 3) We prefer sonically extreme situations – this condition is of rather practical reasons, as it allows the researcher to establish more clearly a speech about the functioning of the sonority of bureaucracy; 4) We are interested in both spoken and non-spoken acts. However, among the segment of spoken acts, we are necessarily only interested in events that occur in a language that is certainly understood by all interlocutors and the relevant audience of the observed acts. In practice, I did deviate from these restrictions on at least one occasion – for example, where I analyzed the interlocution between Daniel Blake and the clerk in Ken Loach's film *I, Daniel Blake*. This sonic exchange, as we'll see, occurs in a closed space of public bureaucracy, but it is a situation that anyone can be familiar with, so to speak, and is in that sense open to anyone, not only because it is put on the cinema screen and hence made public.

The excurses I've executed include:

- the waiting room in a medical institution
- a public space of a Tax Administration institution
- the space of everyday life during the first lockdown in 2020
- the so-called coronavirus tracking mobile app
- the one-on-one interlocution between a civilian and an agent of bureaucracy, as presented in film.

All of the excurses have been executed in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

And so I invite you for a kind of sound walk with me through small bits of these situations.

We leave our private space. We pass through, and co-create, the public space of the everyday. We fuse with it. At the same time, the representation we show tells much about us. At the same time, some things about ourselves could only become known were we to sound them.

We go, we go, and we arrive at the Tax Administration office. We enter. The main hall services the financial business civil individuals have with the state. At the front end of the hall, there is a line of counters, around ten of them. Behind each of them, there is a clerk – an agent of bureaucracy. In front of each counter, there is a fluorescent mark on the floor – it marks the space of privacy for the person in communication with the agent of bureaucracy. After all, financial affairs are a person's private matter, they are confidential, and bureaucracy is well aware of that. The fluorescent mark is there to give each person an equal amount of much-needed privacy. No one will violate this rule. Here, in the face of bureaucracy, everyone is treated equally.

In a way, George Tooker painted a picture of this situation, back in 1956:



George Tooker, *Government Bureau*, 1956. Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/488943>

Well-mannered people stand in the premises of a carefully designed bureaucratic office, where the lights are lined up in a linear formation, in repetition, just like the civilian subjects standing beneath them, tamed, alienated from themselves and others, alienated from the bureaucracy that is alienated from them, mutual alienation, but interestingly, alienation right there, at the core of the structure that determines almost the entire life of these very individuals. It seems so. Instrumental rationality seems to be producing instrumental rationality, sucking in all living things to numb presence and thus preparing them for mere instrumentality. The lower-level bureaucracy is indoctrinated with its role in instrumentality, which ultimately manifests itself as resignation, indifference, apathy, evident in this painting through the eyes that stare into the void. The lower bureaucracy is depersonalized, and mere anatomical outlines let it be known that it is not also disembodied. Heavy eyelids and dark circles. A gaze that reaches somewhere beyond, but also nowhere. A gaze that *is*, but does not *go*, let alone *reach*. While the lower bureaucracy appear as those who have eyes, civilians in the painting do not. They have neither a face nor an expression. It doesn't matter who they are. Anonymity has reached its peak in the modern city. Modernity has retained the old behavioural norms, and the early bureaucracy of behaviour has finally allowed the patient and still individual to stand and wait without any excitement indefinitely exactly where their whole life is being arranged.

What we cannot observe from the Tooker's painting – but can observe in each entry into a bureaucratic institution – is that the bureaucracy does not treat the civilians who enter its premises as a series of replicas, as anonymous subjects. The drooping eyes of officials behind the blurred glass partitions: the possibility of acceptance and the possibility of rejection, explanation and persistence in the cryptic vocabulary, the distance from the bureaucratic role and the complete merging with it. The state of 'may or may not'. Simple effect of authority (← meekness construction). If Tooker's painting suggests that bureaucratic situations are truly impersonal and completely subservient to the norm of moderation, the critical listener's entrance into the bureaucratic institution suggests something else: this static and moderate scene contains an overwhelming potential for an outburst of extraordinariness which is not only

caused by the individual's frustration with this or that aspect of the bureaucratic process but also involves the architectural and sound layout of the bureaucratic space which promotes control and surveillance (of everyone over everyone, especially bureaucracy over civilians and individuals) and aims to involve everyone present. The sonority of the bureaucracy, where bureaucracy in principle protects privacy, allows for its disclosure. By allowing sound disclosure of individuality in a sound-emptied space, bureaucracy creates the conditions for the realization of its ideological universalizing potential – it establishes a space of exceptional auditory control, but does not need to reveal its “ear” since the whole space acts as an ear. What is more, it activates (appropriates) the random audience who, at the same time, are the object of the same constant control and surveillance. We are in the process of normalization of disclosure of the private. But even more: such a sonic structure has the potential to *sanction* via a mechanism of the *sonic threat*: namely, the raising of awareness that there are conditions under which what you are observing (hearing) can happen to you as well.

I call this *panauralism*.

## PANAURALISM

The sound architecture of a bureaucratic institution is an ideological expression of bureaucracy. By entering a specific bureaucratic institution, we enter a kind of sonic panopticon. Foucault's panopticism as a “compact discipline dispositif” which is characterized by continuous registration of the population, surveillance of each movement and event, constant hierarchy and bureaucracy of liveness. However, Foucault didn't explicitly analyze the sonic aspects of discipline and punishment.

“The panoptic mechanism”, he tells us, “arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. ... Visibility is a trap.”<sup>2</sup> Bureaucratic institution: a scene of well-planned, well-constructed social choreography, presence of the ideological drive for a specific order and its normalization. Along with surveillance cameras, this becomes a space of panopticon. But surveillance doesn't seem especially threatening; it's been here for centuries, it acts as self-evident and “normal”. But if panopticon in its primary sense is there to, in Foucault's words, » “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power,” panauralicon is neither visible nor it appeals to visibility, but to audibility of that which the individual could perhaps have hidden to some extent from the public. The aim: not to arrange visibility, but – along with its primary surveillance function – to create a situation where 1) certain, and only certain, subjects of certain, and only certain, social and economic characteristics and status positions can, if decided so by the authority, be revealed as such; 2) this is directed at *all individuals present in the situation*. In other words: not only does the authority recognize me as such and such, but my sounding event can identify me as such to the general public without my sounding event being directed at them. They can – on certain conditions – hear what I don't necessarily intend to make audible. The prefix *pan-* in *panauralicon* here reaches its true meaning, as surveillance now isn't in the domain of only the agents of power, but is extended to everyone who is present. What seems to be a perfectly ordinary setting: a hall with people running their bureaucratic errands, is through critical listening revealed as a space of wide-ranging surveillance and potential punishment.

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<sup>2</sup> Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 200.

And this is what we enter when we walk into the Tax Administration office. Hear: a woman asking something, you only hear that she's asking about real estate. Another woman approaches the clerk. Hear that she has economic issues and a problem with getting Child benefits. Hear: she needs money. Meanwhile: a white man approaches another counter; he's wearing a suit. Hear: nothing. Another man, a man of colour, approaches another counter. Hear: his struggle to explain over and over again why he is there, that he's a construction worker and a foreigner and the clerk is seemingly unable to understand him, both of which leads them to speak more and more loudly which leads to nothing but – and this is crucial – the exchange being his louder and louder explanation of his position. And so on, and so on. After listening to dozens of interlocutions between individuals and agents of bureaucracy, a certain imbalance presents itself. We can hear some of them, and the others we can't. The imbalance does not seem to be coincidental.

We are in a situation of *hierarchies of sonic intensities* where resonance ceases to be strictly physical and evolves into that of content, and content is tightly related to social norms. The mark between the agent of bureaucracy and the individual; the embodiment of the role of an agent of bureaucracy; sonic modes as modes of power which the role of the agent absorbs: the terrain is ready. The bureaucracy, claiming to be protecting subjects and their “personal information” establishes with its sound structure such a field of control that protecting this data seems either virtually impossible or something else. Something else: the sound structure appears to be conducive to disclosure. But not only that: lower-ranking officials can (and often do) also participate in with their listening and sounding practices. We are dealing with the sounding of social hierarchies or the sounding of hierarchies of social differences. When we notice that we hear some sound events but not the others: which ones do we hear? Do they have anything in common or are they single cases? We shall say like this:

When bureaucracy universalizes (it says “You are all objects of my regulation.”), it individualizes with sonic mechanisms in a publicly accessible space (“You, speak up here, to me, and in front of everyone.”). Its demonstrated sound structure reveals externally its internal structure, its ideological basis, which is broader than the declarative instrumental regulation of the lives of the population. What seems to be the most self-evident elements of any public space of a public institution – counters, partitions, waiting rooms, an initial absence of the everyday sound of the most everyday institution – show its constitutive core in sonority. The so-very-ordinary or even absent sonorities in a bureaucratic space mustn't appear as self-evident and non-special; on the contrary, any determination of self-evidentness and randomness points to the successful naturalization of the order of domination.

A bureaucratic institution such as the one we are dealing with here establishes panauralism. Disclosure is not just a disclosure to bureaucracy, but a mutual disclosure of privacy between mutually unknown civilians and individuals. Everyone can listen to the subject of anyone that bureaucracy sonically points out. The formality of space, the horizon of arbitrary action of a bureaucratic clerk, and the declaration of privacy constitute technology that enables a sonic event of an utterance of individual privacy to be perceived. The bureaucratic institution, its sound structure, and the specific sonic dynamics of bureaucratic authority in only specific situations produce a spectacle of revelation. This is presented as a potentiality to all who enter this space, it acts on the universal population. However, it is not performed equally upon all individuals, but is based on a hierarchical structure of individuality. In this sense, we can also speak of “public confession” as a sonic event, as an event of acknowledging certain sinfulness, error, danger, deviation of the individual and their entire life – perhaps “bio-confession” – to authority (“biobureaucracy”) and the civil public (public sonic spectacle). An individual may

remain somewhat anonymous; we don't know what their name is, what their children's names are, they're merely producing a string of data. However, the individual can be made to carry out a disclosure of privacy. This happens through the clerk's perception of difference, that is, through a perception of that which deviates from the norm or the ideal and thus requires confession.

One may say that the sonic non-inhibition of some individuals is what causes the extreme audibility of their privacy. Not only would such an argument be unbearable stereotyping; it would place them on the side of the bureaucratic categorization of representations of classes, cultures, ethnic positions, and so on, from which audible sonic events in the space of bureaucracy arise in the first place. These are precisely the differences revealed by sonic events in the space of bureaucracy when they prove to be excessive. Mind you, the agent of bureaucracy can attach to their instrumental function another one, a preacher's one – by transferring their sounding expression onto the exposed individual.

A certain level of arbitrariness is present. If Weber's ideal type of clerk stood for objectivity, the lower-level clerks here have an option and means to express just the opposite. They may restrain from exposing the individual, but they don't have to. Sonic norms are a sort of grey area. In Slovenia, the Law for public order is a perfect example of this. You may be sanctioned for, I quote, *excessively loud speaking*. No one knows what exactly that is. But what we do know is that at the same time, when women report any kind of domestic violence, not only a physical type but a verbal, sonic one, the police will most likely only give a warning to the perpetrator, usually a male partner, as the *real* abuse (such as severe physical injury or death) has not been committed. And most recently the current government in Slovenia attempted to enact a law that would sanction those who verbally (sonically) assault members of the parliament. A group of protesters against the current government were fined for reading the constitution out loud in a public square in Ljubljana last year. Not only is this a bureaucratic expression of political, governmental ideology, but it is also an important channel in the bureaucracy's – and thus governmental – pleasure system. A bureaucratic pleasure in domination.

In short: in the situation of our tax administration office, the sound procedures of authority are in the order of subordination technologies. The imposed excessive sounding in the described situations takes advantage of the sound structure of the space in which the event takes place, by involving those who happen to be present, who are already the objects of bureaucracy before reaching the clerk's desk. The clerk may prevent this excess. They can encourage it, force it. What we will hear is not a simple sound, but a declaration of the social and economic difference of the individual. Their deviation from the norm and the ideal is expressed and thus placed in the dichotomy of correct-incorrect, clean and healthy vs. dirty and ill, harmless vs. dangerous. Something to confess. This sonic setting has an educational function. It shows to the randomly present public that this is what happens should you deviate. This could happen to you.

## **SILENT AUDIENCE SOUNDS**

We leave the Tax Administration office. We pass through, and co-create, the public space of the everyday. We fuse with it. At the same time, the representation we show tells much about us. At the same time, some things about ourselves could only become known were we to sound them.

We arrive at a hospital. We have a doctor's appointment. We're in the waiting. All is perfectly silent. Two men come out of the doctor's office. A nurse-administrator follows them. One of the men is a patient, circa 80 years of age, the other seems to be his son. The silence is broken by the son begging the nurse to give his father a certain medication even though the father doesn't have insurance coverage. The son promises they will pay as soon as possible. The nurse is uncomfortable not knowing what to do. All reason would suggest, *give the man his medicine*, but instrumental reason, based on the bureaucratic system (which is also an expression of an economic system), defies this reason. A doctor appears in the back shaking her head to communicate to the nurse to say *no* to the men. Which in the end she does. The two men leave. The incidental public in the waiting room is still there and has heard the entire interlocution.

Random audience. Incidental listeners. They can avoid any interested listening, reaction, involvement. However, this very inactivity establishes the audience's individual political position. The random audience is not passive, it is not out of the interlocution, it is precisely in it. The silent audience sounds. Let this not become a moral accusation of the public, but an attempt to understand the horizon of the audibility of social positions. In a public space of bureaucracy that allows for a sonic excess, a personal sonic excess can – precisely through the presence of the random public – become a political one. In this process, the silence of the random public is in no way trivial or passive – the absence of sounding is involved in the process of the construction of the sonority of power. Silence is not the absence of sounding, it is a mode of sounding, and as such plays an active role in the sonic exchange. Realizing this gives enormous responsibility to the random public; it makes it an important possible fuel of change. The public is no longer random, it is political. What all could be reached if the awareness of the sonic mechanisms of power was more present among the population?

The individuals of this active audience may have numerous reasons for keeping silent in a situation that is a bureaucratic expression of its formalization of inequality and neoliberal ideology. All of the reasons are legitimate. Perhaps they're tired from all the work they do, perhaps they don't care about what happens to that man, perhaps they're scared that they would be treated differently by the nurse and the doctor were they to sound their critique, perhaps they feel they don't have any power, perhaps they simply find it indecent to get involved. But this is precisely the point: they are involved. Each of the reasons falls perfectly into the frame of the established social normativity which runs the current production mode. Their sonic activity is directly linked not merely to the local culture, but to the political economy, the chain of hierarchies which runs from the smallest, micro-events to the relations of hegemony vs. subordination on the level of world-systems.

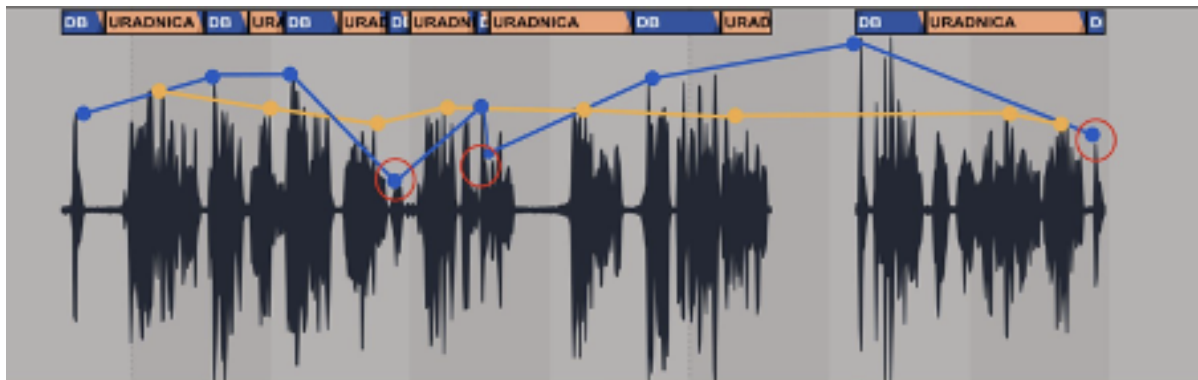
## **CIRCULAR SOUNDING AND MACHINISTIC SPEECH**

We leave the hospital. We pass through and co-create the public space of the everyday. We fuse with it. At the same time, the representation tells much about us. At the same time, some things about ourselves may become known even if we were not to tell them.

We arrive at the Employment Service office. We follow an individual into the closed-space office where agents of bureaucracy conduct conversations with individuals. This is something we might witness:

audio clip from the film *I, Daniel Blake* (2016):

Visual amplitude representation of this interlocution:



While Daniel Blake's locutionary acts are sonically dynamic, and even more, they follow a certain intensification through a series of locutionary actions, the clerk's sonic practice stays unchanged – no matter what *and* how Daniel Blake speaks. I call this *circular sounding and sonic machinism*, by which I wish to point out that not only does the bureaucracy use its specific semantic and syntactic system, but its very own sonic system of representation of its power.

Daniel Blake says something; the clerk says something; Daniel Blake, trying to explain himself to the clerk, says something (the same thing) again, but this time with a higher amplitude; the clerk says something with the same amplitude as before; Daniel Blake tries even louder; the clerk remains at her amplitudal level; Daniel Blake, being warned by the clerk that his sounding practice is really not helping his case, quiets down; the clerk repeats the same sentence at the same amplitudal level; Daniel Blake tries again, but immediately quiets down; the clerk remains at both her sentence and her amplitudal level; Daniel Blake embarks on another attempt, this time seriously irritated which is shown in his amplitudal intensification; the clerk insists on both her sentence and her amplitudal level; Daniel Blake again quiets down.

We've entered the sonority of repetitive audible speech. However, this repetition does not keep the sonic event in the same place. On the listener's side, it produces an effect that I'd like to call *sonic sedimentation*. The bureaucratic clerk can repeat – and does repeat – the same sentences. She always does this in the same way as if she were on preset – this is *sonic machinism*. But for the listener, this does not mean merely circulating through many turns back to the starting point: sonic repetitions are superimposed on each other while listening to repetitiveness, and this layering of sonic machinisms is what contributes to the frustration in the subject of bureaucracy. It is not true that bureaucracy cannot be told anything, as it is often said, and it is not true that bureaucracy doesn't work, as it is also often said. The bureaucracy is very much working – precisely through a specific technique of sounding (the circular-sedimentary sounding) and a specific mode of sounding (sonic machinism). It insists on mysteriousness and encourages the search for this mystery. It dominates and restores the hierarchy of power concerning its object of treatment. Precisely where bureaucratic action seems empty and meaningless, the bureaucratic purpose is constituted and proclaimed. Through its sonic techniques and modes. Through its specific sounding, bureaucracy precisely executes its own goal – formalized domination – without having to state it.

While the bureaucracy, especially its principle of flooding its subjects with a ridiculous amount of forms and procedures, its insistence at a rigid approach to clearly different subject-positions of the population may seem, and is often said to be, simply absurd, we cannot be content with



this claim. Not only is it not enough, but it would be wrong to do so. A critical listening assessment of sonic mechanisms of bureaucracy shows this. As a mechanism of formalized domination, the circular-sedimentary and machinistic sonic mode make bureaucracy precisely efficient, because it is a mode of claiming *and realizing* domination itself. Even more, it includes sanctions of the subject's any attempt to defy this power position; again, through its very sonic mode. The circular and machinistic mode is a sonic claim and a material realization of the dominant power position, and vice versa, of the subject's subordinate position.

The subject's each following locution leads to the bureaucracy's same locution. If interlocution is a dynamic process, this sonic expression of power relations acts on the subject as *the silence of bureaucracy*, a silence that is cumulative and holds no expectation of constructive resolution of any problem. Silence as a sonic tool of power. The subject is first called up from an object of bureaucracy into its subject and at once returned into an object. In this process of subjectivation, an illusion that bureaucracy can be reasoned with is born, the subject is tempted to enter a dialogue that might drive the change of their position, but this circular and machinistic sonic practice of bureaucracy which acts as the silence of bureaucracy, makes the illusion collapse; the next time, the subject's will to survive and even improve their position will, from the very fact that bureaucracy is *willing to enter a sonic exchange* (and thus subjectivize its object), again construct an illusion, etc. etc.<sup>3</sup>

## **CORONAVIRUS MOBILE APP AS A MEDIUM FOR SPEECH**

We leave the Employment Service office. We pass through and co-create the public space of the everyday. We fuse with it. At the same time, the representation we show tells much about us. At the same time, some things about ourselves may become known only were we to tell them.

While we were running our bureaucratic errands, everything's changed. Or not. We realize that the first Covid-19 lockdown is taking place. The city as a public sphere is on hold. The sonic representation of a city has changed into a hi-fi soundscape. Interlocutions are concentrated in private and virtual spheres. The state government is imposing a series of restrictions and delicts, most of which change by the minute. Most of the government decisions are imperative and restrictive. But there is one that is not preventing us from doing something; quite the contrary, it is kindly inviting us to do something. Something which might seem like a serious invasion of our privacy, but we are assured that it is a kind of an idea that will most of all preserve OUR complete anonymity. The coronavirus-tracking mobile app.

In Slovenia, this project did not go well. We are in no position to generalize about the reasons for this failure. However, we can speculate and even argue that there was a certain uneasiness among the population that prevented it from adopting the app.

The government claimed that this is a mobile app that secures the health of the population of the country. The problem with this is bigger than simply realizing that this app does not and cannot itself secure health, it can only collect data. This app constructs a population of a country

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<sup>3</sup> It might prove reasonable to understand this more broadly than the particular bureaucratic situation. In current times, "dialogue" is a kind of a mantra that is also used by minority, non-governmental, and activist groups, but the recognition of the disproportion of power between the interlocutors is omitted there. A dialogue in which there is no equal balance of power, no real coercion to the repressive apparatus, is from the point of view of a sonic structure not a dialogue. Due to the disproportion of power, the repressive apparatus can always be silent, and it is then that it sounds its starting points, constitutive content, and goals, which is to maintain this power relation.

based on biological signifiers. The citizens as social and political beings are transformed into terms of hygiene. Furthermore, it asks the individual to state its personal data to a specific instance of authority. It promises that this will be done in complete privacy. In a way, the app becomes a secular confessional. It constructs a bioconfession. The state of urgency, which a pandemic surely is, allows it to present such a mechanism of biopolitical control. If we are to assume that a relevant segment of the population is socially responsible, that only a small segment of the population doesn't own a smartphone and that only a relatively small segment of the population falls into the categories of anti-vaxers, conspiracy theory supporters, and even if we – for the sake of the argument – disregard the mistrust of the population in the current government, a mistrust which in Slovenia has risen significantly in the past year, we are still dealing with a relatively large segment of the population that could be said to be responsible but would in no circumstances use such an app. What can be said about this from a perspective of critical listening?

I would argue that even though this mobile app operates as a generator of data (containing demographic and social signifiers) which is then not dispersed to other users, its use – the insertion of data – acts as speech, as a meaningful locution that involves sound, voice, even though the user doesn't say a word in conventional terms (sonification). The app in a way acts as a medium of speech. The app acts like a secular confessional where the confession is not kept but dispersed. It is a bureaucratic procedure, just as a confession is a process characteristic of religious bureaucracies, but it is also biopolitical. We are in the zone of biobureaucracy.

Last year, when journalists were conducting ad hoc surveys among the population regarding the use of this app, some people said they use it as they feel their anonymity is guaranteed, while others felt a certain uneasiness with it. In any case, the so-called digital age opens new questions about our understanding of voicing, its occurrences and habitations. It seems that virtual communication, such as it takes place for example in social media, despite lacking the conventional forms of sounding, is precisely sonic. The text and the emoticon not only deliver a message but imply *the manner in which it is articulated*; put simply: they set *the tone*. The simulation of everyday contact in physical space is complete: precisely by excluding sound, it drives sonic perception – this does not mean that it broadens the horizon of auditory culture, but rather narrows it, as the listener relies on rough conventions (even stereotypes) in such an environment. The sonic imagining of the consumer of the text in the digital sphere of sociality is what frees the text, fills it with volume and, in cooperation with the interpretive frameworks of the reader, who is also a listener, endows it with ambience. Speech is “disembodied”, the subjective body is somewhere, while the subjective expression, the very sound-expressive being in society, is somewhere else. The fact that they are constantly torn apart from each other is crucial because this enables the individual to be dissociated from their representation in the social exterior (or interior), it makes them susceptible to the illusion of universalization, where a certain work will take place *on the people* (while they will believe they are not present there). A certain discursive turn follows, namely, one that gives free reign to the bureaucratic appropriation of speech in everyday life and the application of new technologies of biopolitics. There is no text in the mobile app, no meeting, no identification, no contact, there is only data. Even if this mobile application records precisely contacts, precisely social encounters, even though it needs precisely identification for it to work, it discursively eliminates all of these elements by simply changing the vocabulary; it replaces a person with data.

The identity, the real subject, seems to be somewhere else. The user of the application provides data, this data is of and about them, they are individually specific and the data significantly determines them, it changes them from an individual into an ill/healthy, unclean/clean

individual, which in the society of hygiene is the point of stigmatization. They make their contribution to this technology, their actions are marked as positive, but because their expression is transformed into mere data, they do not seem to be present as a subject at all. Speech is transformed into inaudible data and sonified into a beep. For this app to work, speech must cease to be speech.

I would like to add that the use of a mobile app as a speech act with identification potential was later shown in concrete cases. The media reported: the individual was at home, was alone, but he found out through the app that someone near him was infected with the coronavirus. Not someone, not anyone, his neighbour. A specific person. The neighbour didn't tell him they were infected, the stigma surrounding being infected with this virus could be severe, but the app acted as a speech simulator at the time – it was as if they'd told him. And they did tell him. But they didn't want to tell them. In short: the sound aspects of expression need to be taken into account in new, digital, non-sounding platforms that state bureaucracies are beginning to employ. What is sonified from a transformation into bare data can by effect easily return to the sounding form with the identification effect. If Foucault, observing the 19th century, spoke of the so-called *Great Closure*, the contemporary society is dealing with a *Great Opening*, a crucial part of which is our understanding of sonic elements in any social action.

In the past hour or so we've rushed through several bureaucratic spaces and situations with the ambition to articulate some of the grounding stones of their sonic structures and dynamics as well as to show that even though sonic events appear to be ephemeral and often are spontaneous, even trivial, they carry with and within themselves a certain social history and ideological drives. A change in the sonic activity of anyone involved in a bureaucratic situation, where bureaucracy is a formalized domination, changes the dynamics of this domination. In Franz Kafka's short story *The Silence of the Sirens*, Ulysses doesn't deal with the sound of sirens by deciding to endure it, but by deciding not to listen to those sonic agents. A kind of sonic disobedience is taking place. Where bureaucracy as a mechanism of perpetual (and normative) domination is not taken for granted, and especially not taken for granted in its current, neoliberal capitalist form, then the neoliberal capitalist production mode is no longer taken for granted. Listening to bureaucracy is a matter of imagining the possibilities of the future. The sonic elements of bureaucracy are open for change, and so is bureaucracy as a mechanism of power. But only to the population which is aware of both the political in the sonic sphere and the possibility of social change towards social and economic equality.