

Homo *œconomicus* and the Threat of Noise: Kafka's *The Burrow* and the Liberalist Politics of the Sensorium

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We should not think that the problem of noise - supposedly generated in the spreading and merging of sounds and in the open, indiscriminate exposure of the ear - the dangerousness of noise, is so defined only inside the framework of *Raison d'État*, inside the forms of governance following the logic of the reason of state i.e the calculation of the forces of the state, of their maintenance and increase, intervention by means of the police, by means of the detailed regulations of everyday life, the politics of noise-abatement as well by means of the police and the regulations of the individuals' everyday sound-producing activities. If we follow consistently, alongside Foucault, the genealogy of the modern forms of governmentality, we should ask next, what happens to the problem of noise, to the definition and treatment of the dangerous potentiality of sound, when we turn from the reason of state to the framework of *liberalism*? Of course, just like above, I do not attempt to present anything like a general overview of Foucault on liberalism. The rather more modest attempt is only (as it was above with *Raison d'État*) to ask whether (and how) certain themes, coming to the fore in Foucault's analysis of the *liberalist governmentality*, relate to the issue of perception, the modalities of sensory perception, above all, to sound, and to the issue of auditory perception; whether there are certain points in Foucault's genealogy of the liberalist governmentality, through the elaboration of which we can gain insights into the issue of the *liberalist politics of the sensorium*, meaning the manner in which the *subject of liberalism*, the *free individual*, is constituted as *subject of perception*, is formed as subject of sensory experience of determinate kind, the emphasis being on the fate of auditory perception and -experience (the fate of the "ear" in liberalism, the "liberalist ear") in the constitution of the liberalist subject. And this, not only in the framework of the classical liberalism of the 18th- and 19th- Centuries, but also in the 20th Century

forms of German and American *ordo-* and *neo-liberalism* (despite the differences between these in other respects).

One of the central points in Foucault's analysis, a particularly interesting point, is the conception *homo œconomicus*, the conception of the economical man, economical subject, economical agent, and the centrality of this conception of the subject for the liberalist form of governance, for the liberalist art- and techniques of government. To condense it to the utmost, in the manner of a rough summary, the development of the concept of *homo œconomicus* proceeds from the utility-maximizing subject (and the subject of exchange) of the classical liberalism of the 18th- and 19th Century, to the calculating entrepreneur-subject, the subject as the entrepreneur of oneself (of one's proper capacities defined as "human capital") in the post- world-war-II - neo-liberalism.¹ What remains central, through all the changes in the concept, is the determination of the subject in terms of the formal rationality, as means-ends-calculation, offering the strategic principle of choices and conduct.² The second point, emphasized especially in American neo-liberalism, is one in which the issue of perception comes up. In his analysis of the elaboration of the concept of *homo œconomicus* in the neo-liberalist discourse, Foucault points out that the economical subject is determined not only by the procedures of the calculative reasoning, but also in "positive" terms as the subject of apprehension, as the subject facing and *perceiving the reality* as it is, that is, perceiving the reality objectively, as well as accepting the objective reality, as the milieu of activities, and thus basing the calculations on the apprehension-acceptance of the reality. *Homo œconomicus* is not only the subject of means-ends- calculation, but also the subject of *sensitivity*, sensitivity in perceiving the modification in the milieu of conduct, and sensitivity in responding to the variations perceived, responding to them in a systematic manner:

¹ "*homo œconomicus* as partner of the exchange (*comme partenaire de l'échange*), theory of utility beginning from the problematic of needs (*théorie de l'utilité à partir d'une problématique des besoins*): that is what characterizes the classic conception of the *homo œconomicus*...In the neo-liberalism... *homo œconomicus*...it is an entrepreneur and an entrepreneur of oneself (*un entrepreneur de lui-même*)...being in oneself one's proper capital (*étant à lui-même son propre capital*), being for oneself one's proper producer (*étant pour lui-même son propre producteur*), being for oneself the source of [one's] incomes (*étant pour lui-même la source de [ses] revenus*)...The consumer (*l'homme de la consommation*), inasmuch as he consumes, is a producer. What does he produce? Well, he produces very simply his own satisfaction (*sa propre satisfaction*)."(Foucault 2004, 232)

² "This problem of the *homo œconomicus* and its applicability...this generalization of the grid *homo œconomicus* to domains that are not immediately and directly economical....maybe the object of the economical analysis must be identified to all finalized conduct (*toute conduite finalisée*) that implies, broadly, a strategic choice of means, ways and instruments (*un choix stratégique de moyens, de voies et d'instruments*): in short, identification of the object of the economical analysis with all rational conduct (*toute conduite rationnelle*)... A rational conduct as that which consist in using a formal reasoning (*un raisonnement formel*), is it not an economical conduct in the sense in which it was just defined, in other words: optimal allocation of rare resources to alternative ends (*allocation optimale de ressources rares à des fins alternatives*)."(Foucault 2004, 272)

“...The *homo æconomicus*, it is the one who accepts the reality (*celui qui accepte la réalité*). The rational conduct, that is any conduct that is sensitive to modifications in the variables of the milieu (*toute conduite qui est sensible à des modifications dans les variables du milieu*) and that responds to them in a non-aleatory manner, hence in a systematic manner, and the economics will thus be able to define itself as the science of the systematicism of the responses to the variables of the milieu (*et l'économie va donc pouvoir se définir comme la science de la systematicité des réponses aux variables du milieu*).” (Foucault 2004, 273)

So, the central determinations of the economical subject are: making choices and orienting its conduct according to calculative reason, being sensitive in perceiving, accepting, and responding systematically to the “reality” and its modifications. In Foucault analysis, these determinations of *homo æconomicus* are absolutely central in order to understand the functioning of the liberalist and neo-liberalist form of government, its rationality- and art of government, and the characteristic techniques it has introduced, that is, the techniques of *environmental (environnementale) governance* (Foucault 2004, 264-265). The rational economical subject is precisely the *surface of contact*, or the *interface* between the individual human being and the power, the surface where the liberalist mode of governance takes hold of the individuals. The constitution of human being as an economical subject in the model of *homo æconomicus* - pertaining to the self-relation of the individual, to the rational self-government - is their becoming eminently governable, eminently susceptible to the environmental type of intervention, that is, to interventions working by means of *modifying the milieu* of the rational actors, instead of intervening (instead of needing to intervene) directly upon the individuals themselves. The environmental governance has its central “resource”, the guarantee and condition of its effectivity, precisely in the sensitivity of the subject, in the sensitive responsiveness of the subject to the modification in the milieu. The environmental governance, which is liberalist governance *par excellence*, has its essential correlative in the constitution of *homo æconomicus* not only as a formally-rational/calculating subject, but also as the sensitive and sensory subject, as the subject of perception that perceives accurately and accepts the empirical milieu of its activity, in all its variations:

“ the *homo æconomicus*, meaning, the one who accepts the reality (*celui qui accepte la réalité*) or who responds systematically to the modifications in the variables of the milieu (*ou qui répond systématiquement aux modifications dans les variables du milieu*), this *homo æconomicus* appears precisely as the one who is easily influenced (*apparaît justement comme ce qui est maniable*), the one who is going to respond systematically to the systematic modifications that will be introduced artificially inside the milieu. The *homo æconomicus*, that is the one who is eminently governable (*l'homo æconomicus, c'est celui qui est éminemment gouvernable*). From intangible partner of the laissez-faire, the *homo æconomicus* appears now as the correlative of a governmentality that is going to act upon the milieu and to modify systematically the variables of the milieu (*de partenaire intangible du laissez-faire, l' homo æconomicus*

apparaît maintenant comme le corrélatif d'une gouvernementalité qui va agir sur le milieu et modifier systématiquement les variables du milieu."(Foucault 2004, 274-275)³

Hence, it can be argued that it is absolute central for the functioning of liberalist governance (this point is explicitly stressed in the framework of neo-liberalism), that the economical subject, *homo œconomicus*, is formed as the *subject of senses and sensitivity*, subject determined by its modes of *receptivity*, *reactivity* and *responsiveness* to the variables of its environment, and this together with its calculative-rational activity. Whether we are dealing with the neo-liberalist subject (the entrepreneur of oneself, -of human capital), or with the subject of the classical liberalism (the subject of utility-maximization, -of ownership, -of exchange), the capacity to perceive, and to react accordingly to the environment is at least assumed. So, the question suggests itself, as to how this liberalist perceptivity, sensuality and sensitivity are determined? In other words, what is the *sensorium of homo œconomicus*, and what is it not?, what does it exclude? Is there differentiation of the modalities of perception, of different senses in this framework, and how are the different senses qualified and organized, in the constitution of the economical subject? And finally - most centrally - what is the place of the ear, audition, and sound, inside the grid of *homo œconomicus*?

Foucault's analysis does not proceed into this direction. However, as it has already been said, the question suggests itself (as a pertinent one) through the reading of Foucault's genealogy of liberalism, and calls for further elaboration. To ponder on this issue in more detail, I would next turn to one particular text, which does not belong to the corpus of liberalism, and does not actually even deal with the issue of liberalism (at least no explicitly): the passage in Immanuel Kant's *Third Critique*, where the Kant presents some remarks on the peculiar qualities of sound and the sense of hearing, and on the art of sound, music. Furthermore, in this passage, what is explicitly reflected is the problematic, even conflictual relation between auditory perception and sound and, on the

³Cf.also: "that through which the individual is going to become governmentalizable (*gouvernementalisable*), that through which it is going to be possible to have hold over him (*avoir prise sur lui*), that is inasmuch as, and only inasmuch as he is *homo œconomicus*. Which means that the surface of contact between the individual and the power that is exercised upon him (*la surface de contact entre l'individu et le pouvoir qui s'exerce sur lui*), consequently the principle of adjusting of the power on the individual (*le principe par conséquent de régulation du pouvoir sur l'individu*), is going to be nothing but this sort of grid of the *homo œconomicus* (*cette espèce de grille de l' homo œconomicus*). The *homo œconomicus*, it is the interface of the government and the individual (*l'interface du gouvernement et de l'individu*) (Foucault 2004, 258)... Now it is not at all about adjusting the government on the rationality of the sovereign individual who can say 'I am the State (*moi, l'État*)', [but] on the rationality of those who are governed, those who are governed as economic subjects (*en tant que sujets économiques*)...That is what, it seems to me, characterizes the liberal rationality (*la rationalité libérale*): how to adjust the government, the art of governing, how to [ground] [*fonder*] the principle of rationalization of the art of governing upon the rational behavior of those who are governed (*le principe de rationalization de l'art de gouverner sur le comportement rationnel de ceux qui sont gouvernés*)." (Foucault 2004, 316)

one hand, and *individual freedom*, the *individual liberty* on the other hand; liberty understood above all in terms of privacy, of private space, of the sphere of detachment, of distance, of separation, of intactness and inviolability established and maintained by an individual. The issue of liberty is the question of establishing and maintaining an empty space around the individual, providing security from the others' influence. The private space surrounding the individual is also the space of the liberty of *enjoyment*, of the freedom of enjoying and having pleasure according to one's own choice, without being bothered or interrupted by anybody and anything, and without having to share one's enjoyment against one's choice with anyone (and without having to share, take part in the enjoyment of any other without one's choice). To go further still, it could be said, that the privacy of the private space is also what determines the liberty of private ownership, including the liberty of using one's property, of consuming it in privacy, that is, separately and in separation. From the same basis of the separation, distance and detachment of private space, around the individual, emanate also the liberty of transactions, of contracts in general, all of which (I believe) belong to the basic liberties of liberalism. Despite its brevity, Kant's remarks manage to bring into the focus, in an interesting manner, how these liberties are set in a rather antagonistic relation with the nexus of sound and auditory perception:

“Moreover, music has a certain lack of urbanity about it. For, depending mainly on the character of its instruments, it extends its influence (on the neighbourhood) farther than people wish, and so, as it were, imposes itself on others and hence impairs the freedom of those outside of the musical party. The arts that address themselves to the eye do not do this; for if we wish to keep out their impressions, we need merely turn our eyes away. The situation here is almost the same as with the enjoyment [*Ergötzung*] produced by an odour that spreads far. Someone who pulls his perfumed handkerchief from his pocket gives all those next to and around him a treat whether they want it or not, and compels them, if they want to breathe, to enjoy [*genießen*] at the same time, which is also why this habit has gone out of fashion.” (Kant 1987, §53)

Why is sound, then, so inimical to the freedom (and so non-urban), what is it exactly in sound and audition as such - in their constitution as a modality of sensory perception and experience - that so impairs, weakens or endangers, the freedom? Albeit the passage cited above is a brief one, it still manages to state in quite clear terms, what it is in sound and auditory perception that is especially dangerous to human freedom. Evidently, the danger is to be found in the nature of sound as an *event*, as movement, one that *spreads*, one that extends its influence irregardless of the will, irregardless of the intentions, irregardless (and often contrary to) the calculations, the reasoning, the decisions and choices of the agents, both of those who emit the sound and those who receive it, who cannot help receiving it. The sound is, inherently, transition and

transgression of the borderlines, from the inside to the outside, from one to the other(s), in-between, crossing the lines contingently, beyond the governance and calculation of any agent. What is at issue, is sound's nature as movement, escaping from the grasp, from the control, and from the direction, as well as its *imposing* itself *indiscriminately*, irregardless of the attempts to partition and exclusion, the sound's penetration into the ears, into *any* ears, in spite of the will, in spite of the choice and decision of the subject. The question is of the voice, or the sound of whom- or whatever, imposing itself upon whomever, in *anonymity*, without qualifications (indifferently from the question "who"). By such characterizations, obviously, what is the juxtaposition with vision, and the perception of visual phenomena, which are apparently much more susceptible to being governed by the will, much more compatible with the liberty of the subject, when it comes to the direction of attention, to the distancing or proximity, to the free decision in the discrimination, in the inclusion-exclusion of the perception ("the arts that address themselves to the eye do not do this; for if we wish to keep out their impressions, we need merely turn our eyes away"). Or, on the side of the visual arts, images, and visual phenomena themselves in general, in their pre-eminent susceptibility to being seized upon at will by the subject, to being governed by emplacement and enclosures, to being directed, to being hidden or covered, to being partitioned and selected, as well as to being owned, to being "proper" and being made into "property".

Interestingly, the qualities of sound and hearing, ones that make it dangerous to the freedom, are also the ones that relate it to the olfactory perception and sensation. Both sound and the smell spread and transmit themselves beyond control, from the inside to the outside and, so to speak, make themselves perceived, that is, compel the helpless subject to perceive them, by entering inevitably and irrespectively of the subject's will through the breathing, or through the indiscriminate exposure to sounds, brought about by the openness of the ear and hearing. In this transition from the inside to the outside, and again from the outside to the inside, the sonorous-aural nexus is constantly relating bodies with each other, is relentlessly generating contacts between bodies, taking place beyond the will of individuals, as well as beyond rational control, beyond planning and calculation. But also, as we read again the citation of Kant, we notice that sound's spreading, and its contingent imposing itself, does not only relate bodies to each other, does not only generate contacts between alien, anonymous bodies, (in the limited sense), but also *between minds, between souls*. What is most significant - and apparently most perilous to freedom - is the contingent spreading and imposing of pleasures and enjoyments, through the "non-urban" media of sound and smell. Through sound,

enjoyments *become shared* between a plurality of persons, amongst a multitude. Or, to put it still more specifically, sound *makes us share, takes and gives part, participates* - in a contingent as well as inevitable, compelling manner - our pleasures, our enjoyments. In the audition, through the ear, the other intrudes into my enjoyment. In this way, the sensory modality of audition is an offence against, a violation against the pure interiority and individuality of enjoyment. Sound and audition as such resist the ownership over enjoyments; they resist the properness and the property-form of enjoyments.

A sound as such, is already enough to compromise, to violate the liberty of the ownership, the sort of sovereign liberty of the owner to decide over his property. What sound and the ear threaten to take away, essentially, is the liberty of being alone, in detachment and separation, inside the empty private space, with one's possessions. Sound, audition, the ear as such, in their constitution as sensory medium, threaten to take away the liberty of enjoying alone, without interruptions and intrusions, they threaten to take away the liberty of not having to share one's enjoyment with anybody or anything else, of not having to give away any part of one's possession, and of one's satisfactions, one's gratifications, without choosing to. Besides, by the contingent as well as compulsive relating, associating, establishing contacts, making share and -participate between anonymous strangers, it could be also argued that sound and audition are, at their very basis, violations against the liberty of contract, against the *contractual* model of founding intersubjective relations (sound-audition is essentially non-contractual). Vision on the contrary, if we follow the logic of this juxtaposition, is the *contractual sense*, the sensory mode contractual relationships *par excellence* (of the distance, contemplation, and choice at their origin). In opposition to this, the auditory-sonorous mode as such appears to be a violation against these basic liberties, the sensory modality of sharing, of giving- and taking-part, of giving- and-taking-away, of the transference of property and "properness" contingently, irregardless of the reasoning and choices of any of the subjects involved in the nexus. Through the sound and the ear, the strange, the alien, intrudes and interrupts the privacy, in the manner of a parasite, an uninvited guest, or a thief. This is how we come across the issue of *methexis*, *methexis of sound* again, of the sound's spreading, its resonance and echoing, now becoming problematic in the framework of liberalist governance.⁴

To return explicitly to Foucault's genealogy of liberalism once again, there is still one point, which needs to be examined in detail, one that relates in an interesting

⁴ Points to some extent similar are also presented by Blumenberg (1993), Jonas (1954); Burrows (1980); Quignard (1996); Mallet (2002).

manner to the issue of audition and sound, as I attempt to show in the following .This is Foucault's reflection on the significance of the liberalist *culture of danger*:

“It can be said that after all the slogan of the liberalism (*la devise du libéralisme*), it is ‘to live dangerously (*vivre dangereusement*)’, which means that the individuals are perpetually put into situation of danger, or rather they are conditioned to experience their situation, their life, their present, their future as being carriers of danger (*ils sont conditionnés à éprouver leur situation, leur vie, leur présent, leur avenir comme étant porteurs de danger*). And it is this sort of stimulus of the danger (*cette espèce de stimulus du danger*) that is going to be, I believe, one of the major implications of the liberalism. The whole education of the danger, the whole culture of the danger appears (*toute une éducation du danger, toute une culture du danger apparaît*) indeed in the 19th Century, which is very different from those great dreams or those great menaces of the Apocalypse such as the plague (*la peste*), the death, the war by which the political and cosmological imagination of the Middle Age, of the 17th Century still, fed itself (*dont l’imagination politique et cosmologique du Moyen Âge, du XVII^e siècle encore, s’alimentait*). The disappearance of the horsemen of the Apocalypse (*disparition des cavaliers de l’Apocalypse*) and, on the contrary, the appearance, emergence, invasion of the everyday dangers (*des dangers quotidiens*), everyday dangers perpetually animated, reactualized, put into circulation (*perpétuellement animés, réactualisés, mis en circulation*) by, thus, what could be called the political culture of the danger (*la culture politique du danger*) in the 19th Century and which has a whole series of aspects. Whether it is, for example, the campaign in the beginning of the 19th Century for the savings associations (*sur les caisses d’épargne*); you see the appearance of the detective novels (*l’apparition de la littérature policière*) and of the journalistic interest in the crime beginning from the middle of the 19th Century; you see all the campaigns concerning the sickness and the hygiene ; take a look also at all that takes place around the sexuality and the fear of the degeneration (*la crainte de la dégénérescence*): the degeneration of the individual, of the family, of the race, of the human species. Finally, from everywhere you see this stimulation of the fear of the danger (*cette stimulation de la crainte du danger*) which is so to speak the condition, the inner psychological and cultural correlative of the liberalism (*le corrélatif psychologique et culturel interne, du libéralisme*). There is no liberalism without a culture of the danger (*pas de libéralisme sans culture du danger*).” (Foucault 2004, 68)

The liberalist culture of danger - the politically- as well as psychologically produced and conditioned awareness of dangers by each individual subject - is of course a central part in the liberalist turning away from the grand programs of the collective, public protection of the population *à la Raison d’État*. The liberalist political - psychopolitical - culture of the danger, by producing and maintaining a general awareness of the dangers of everyday life, works in order to stimulate, to activate each individual subject into his/her own private, rational activities of self-protection, self-defence, and self-insurance etc. (instead of expecting these from the public power, or from the collectivity). We notice that it is not just any sort of sensitivity and experience of danger, and not just any sort of indeterminate affect of fear which the liberalist culture of danger put forward and maintains. It is a determinate kind of fear, one that leads to, or is supposed to lead to, and is supposed to be intrinsically related to the rational determination, the recognition and identification of the dangers, of the risks. The

liberalistic fear is the fear of the rational risk-awareness, which is supposed to lead the subject to the *emplacement or localization* of the dangers of his/her life in space and time, to set the dangers in determinate coordinates, to draw a map of them, so to speak, to detect their causes (where, when, who, what, how). The liberalist culture of danger is one of the objectivation of danger, of the making of the dangers into determinate objects of perception and knowledge. In this manner, what is expected to take place, is the individualized submission of the dangers under calculations, concerning the possible means and techniques to prevent, eliminate or minimize the dangers, to establish and execute plans of self-defence and self-preservation (of one's own life, of one's own health, of one's own productivity, of one's own property, of one's capital etc.). The fear produced by the liberalist culture of danger, is this rational sort of fear, a rationalizing fear, a calculative fear, a fear stimulating risk-calculation and activities prevention/elimination/minimization of risks by each individual (in opposition to the "irrational", overwhelming and "passivating" Apocalyptic fear). In Foucault's account, as noticed, the origins of this political culture of danger are in the 19th- Century liberalism, but we can notice, how this culture remains, keeps its centrality, and is perhaps even kernel in the 20th Century - tenets of ordo- and neo-liberalism model of the individual subject as *homo œconomicus* as *enterprise*)(Foucault 2004, 149-155, 228-258).

In the preceding presentation of what I regard as the central constituents of what Foucault calls the liberalist political culture of danger, what comes up, again, is the question of the sensorium, that is, more specifically, the sensorium of danger, or the sensorium of risk, the sensorium determined by the liberalist culture of danger. The subject of liberalism, the point of reference of liberalist governmentality, i.e. *homo œconomicus* the calculative agent of the economy, the calculative agent of interest, the agent-enterprise, is also to be produced, to be conditioned and determined as the *subject of perception* of definite kind, one that uses (and is supposed to be using) his/her faculties of perception to retain the adequate experience, the adequate sensitivity, the adequate state of alertness for the constant dangers confronting him, threatening his life, his own productive capacity, his own "human capital", his property etc. *Homo œconomicus*, determined as a subject of perception, as a perceptive subject, should use its perceptive capacities, its senses, effectively for the objectivation, for the localization, as well as for the estimation and calculation of dangers, and then, for the launching of the effective self-protective, self-defensive, or self-pre-emptive activities against the dangers detected. To elaborate a bit further on Foucault's terms, one could ask what are the faculties of perception and the modes of experience mobilized in and by the constitution

of *homo œconomicus* for these purposes, which modalities are favoured, which ones are rejected by the liberalist culture of danger? How could we characterize the liberalist-political culture of danger as a *sensory culture*, *sensory culture of danger*, and as a political culture of the senses? What sort of differences, what sort of partitions does it induce on the sensorium, are these made in terms of equality, or does it produce a hierarchic setting of the senses? How could we characterize liberalist governance as governance over the sensorium, over the senses? And, of course, the special focus is here on the fate of the audition, on the fate of the ear, in the liberalist and neo-liberalist governmentality. I believe these questions come up, and are relevant in Foucault's genealogy of liberalism, despite the fact that Foucault himself does not offer any more detailed, explicit answer to them.

There is one text in particular, which, if we read it against this background, offers a vivid depiction of what takes place, from the perspective of the economically calculating subject, in its attempt to survey, emplace, calculate and defend oneself against dangers, in the subject's relation to the auditory mode of perception, in its relation to sound. The text in question is not one of Foucault's, and neither does it belong to the corpus of liberalist economical-political thought. The text I am suggesting, is a short story by Franz Kafka, titled *Der Bau* (*The Burrow* in the English translation).⁵ The character in the story is a creature, we are not told who or what it is (perhaps a mole), one that is building and inhabiting an underground burrow, or rather a complex of different kinds of caves, rooms, passages and corridors. What really comes to the fore in the story, is the depiction of the mentality of the creature, which is possessive and hyper-calculative: the creature is relentlessly making calculations concerning its property, on the things it possesses, to keep and maintain it, to stock it adequately, to increase it, and above all, to prevent the loss of property by any possible cause, to protect and defend the property against all possible dangers. The constant calculation, the constant planning of the most effective defensive measures, to be enough prepared for any possible danger, is the real *raison d'être* of the architectural design, and of the laborious building-work of the whole spatial complex. Essentially, the creature must have an *overview*, *a surveying*, *englobing*, *global look* upon the space and upon the possessions stored therein:

“In this castle-place I assemble my stores⁶, everything that I capture inside the Burrow over and above my current needs’, and everything that I bring along from my hunting

⁵ This story is briefly discussed in Dolar (2006,166-167) and analyzed in a more detailed by Szendy (2007,73-79). However, the reading presented goes to a slightly different direction, in relating the story most centrally to the problematic of *homo œconomicus* and the genealogy of liberalist governmentality.

⁶ (*auf diesem Burgplatz sammle ich meine Vorräte*)

outside⁸, I pile up here⁹. The place is so great, that stores for half a year do not fill it¹⁰. Consequently, I can really spread them out, walk around among them¹¹, play with them, rejoice their plenty and their different odours¹², and always have an accurate overview upon what is available¹³. Then, as well, I can always make reassignments and, corresponding to the season, make the necessary pre-calculations and hunting plans for the future¹⁴.....The continual preoccupation with defensive preparations brings it about¹⁵, that my views concerning the making use of the burrow for such goals change or develop, albeit within narrow limits¹⁶.”

The primary concern of the creature in the story is to keep the private space, the space-property empty. The creature feels itself safe only knowing that it (and its possessions) is surrounded by the empty space, by the hermetically enclosed space. The “knowledge”, the perception of the emptiness, and of the perfect tranquillity of privacy is provided above all by the ear and audition, or more exactly, by the *absence of auditory perception*, by the absence of sound, and the perception of this absence. To feel safe, to know that it is safe, the creature needs *silence, stillness*:

“But the most beautiful thing about my burrow is its stillness. Of course, that is deceitful¹⁷. All of a sudden at once it can be interrupted and all is finished. For the moment, however, it is still here¹⁸. For hours I can creep around my corridors and hear nothing¹⁹...There I sleep the sweet sleep of peace, of appeased desire, of achieved goal of possessing a house²⁰. I do not know whether it is a habit that still persists from former days, or whether the dangers of this house of mine too are still strong enough to awaken me²¹: regularly every now and then I start up out of deep sleep and listen, listen into the stillness which reigns here unchanged day and night, smile feeling reassured and sink with loosened limbs into still deeper sleep²². Poor homeless wanderers on roads, in woods, at the best having crawled for warmth into a heap of leaves or a pack of their comrades, delivered to all the perditions of heaven and earth!²³ I lie here in a place secured on every side - there are more than fifty such places in my burrow²⁴....Your house is protected, enclosed into itself. You live in peace,

⁷ (alles, was ich über meine augenblicklichen Bedürfnisse hinaus innerhalb des Baus erjage)

⁸ (und alles, was ich von meinen Jagden außer dem Hause mitbringe)

⁹ (häufe ich hier auf)

¹⁰ (der Platz ist so groß, daß ihn Vorräte für ein halbes Jahr nicht füllen)

¹¹ (infolgedessen kann ich sie wohl ausbreiten, zwischen ihnen herumgehen)

¹² (mit ihnen spielen, mich an der Menge und an den verschiedenen Gerüchen freuen)

¹³ (und immer einen genauen Überblick über das Vorhandene haben)

¹⁴ (ich kann dann auch immer Neuordnungen vornehmen und, entsprechend der Jahreszeit, die nötigen Vorausberechnungen und Jagdpläne machen)

¹⁵ (die häufige Beschäftigung mit Verteidigungsvorbereitungen bringt es mit sich)

¹⁶ (daß meine Ansichten hinsichtlich der Ausnutzung des Baus für solche Zwecke sich ändern oder entwickeln, in kleinem Rahmen allerdings)

¹⁷ (das schönste an meinem Bau ist aber seine Stille. Freilich, sie ist trügerisch)

¹⁸ (plötzlich einmal kann sie unterbrochen werden und alles ist zu Ende. Vorläufig aber ist sie noch da)

¹⁹ (stundenlang kann ich durch meine Gänge schleichen und höre nichts)

²⁰ (dort schlafe ich den süßen Schlaf des Friedens, des beruhigten Verlangens, des erreichten Zieles des Hausbesitzes)

²¹ (ich weiß nicht, ob es eine Gewohnheit aus alten Zeiten ist oder ob doch die Gefahren auch dieses Hauses stark genug sind, mich zu wecken)

²² (regelmäßig von Zeit zu Zeit schrecke ich auf aus tiefem Schlaf und lausche, lausche in die Stille, die hier unverändert herrscht bei Tag und Nacht, lächle beruhigt und sinke mit gelösten Gliedern in noch tieferen Schlaf)

²³ (arme Wanderer ohne Haus, auf Landstraßen, in Wäldern, bestenfalls verkrochen in einen Blätterhaufen oder in einem Rudel der Genossen, ausgeliefert allem Verderben des Himmels und der Erde)

²⁴ (ich liege hier auf einem allseits gesicherten Platz - mehr als fünfzig solcher Art gibt es in meinem Bau)

warm, well nourished, master, sole master over a variety of corridors and places²⁵ ...And the small places, each familiar to me, each distinguished clearly by me with my eyes shut in spite of their complete similarity already by the curve of the walls, they surround me peacefully and warmly, like no nest surrounds its bird. And all, all still and empty²⁶...I and the burrow belong so much together, that I could settle down here comfortably, comfortably in spite of all my fear²⁷...”

Silence, as the absence of sound, as the absence of auditory perception (hearing nothing), in the mind of the master-owner, indicates the emptiness, the absence of movement, the absence of activity, the absence of intrusions inside the private space. It is only this stillness, which tells that the property and one's continuing ownership over it are secured. Silence provides the economic subject with certainty, that it masterly disposes over the property, and over the use of this property, that it can consume it freely to satisfy its desires, to enjoy the things it owns, without having to share with anyone, without anyone threatening to take it away. Only the stillness indicates that this state of privacy is unquestioned. Then, suddenly, there is the turning point in the story, a point at which everything changes. This is the moment, when an unexpected sound, a noise is heard. The noise itself is already an intruder, intruding from the outside into the private space, disturbing and interrupting the free enjoyment of the individual over his possessions (this point, as we remember, was already reflected in reference to Kant). Logically, then, the next phase in the calculation of the subject is *noise-abatement*, a private activity of noise-abatement:

“...for a hissing hardly audible in itself awakes me²⁸. ... I shall, listening sharply to the walls of my corridor, first have to detect the location of the disturbance through experimental excavations, and only then will I be able to eliminate the noise²⁹...Then there would be no noises in the walls, no insolent excavations up till the place itself, then the peace would be guaranteed there and I would be its guard³⁰; then I would not have to auscultate with reluctance to the excavations of the small people, but with delight to something that now totally escapes me: the murmur of the silence in the castle-place³¹”

The attempt, which Kafka's hyper-calculating creature (one that every consistently rational economic subject, every *homo oeconomicus* should do in this

²⁵ (dein Haus ist geschützt, in sich abgeschlossen. Du lebst in Frieden, warm, gut genährt, Herr, alleiniger Herr über eine Vielzahl von Gängen und Plätzen)

²⁶ (und die kleinen Plätze, jeder mir wohlbekannt, jeder trotz völliger Gleichheit von mir mit geschlossenen Augen schon nach dem Schwung der Wände deutlich unterschieden, sie umfassen mich friedlich und warm, wie kein Nest seinen Vogel umfängt. Und alles, alles still und leer).

²⁷ (ich und der Bau gehören so zusammen, daß ich ruhig, ruhig bei aller meiner Angst, mich hier niederlassen könnte)

²⁸ (denn ein an sich kaum hörbares Zischen weckt mich)

²⁹ (ich werde, genau horchend an den Wänden meines Ganges, durch Versuchsgrabungen den Ort der Störung erst feststellen müssen und dann erst das Geräusch beseitigen können)

³⁰ (dann gäbe es keine Geräusche in den Wänden, keine frechen Grabungen bis an den Platz heran, dann wäre dort der Friede gewährleistet und ich wäre sein Wächter)

³¹ (nicht die Grabungen des kleinen Volkes hätte ich mit Widerwillen zu behorchen, sondern mit Entzücken, etwas, was mir jetzt völlig entgeht: das Rauschen der Stille auf dem Burgplatz)

situation), is to *emplace* and *locate*, firstly, the sound as such, its definite trajectory, proceeding from one point to the next, so to speak to *beacon the sound*, that is, to determine and mark its direction (in the reading of Boulez above, the musical significance of these spatializing operation, of this spatializing *dispositif* has already been noticed). By tracing the sound's trajectory, then, the rational subject hopes to be able to locate and deal with the origin of the sound, the intruder, or the leak, the hole, the malfunction in the spatial construction, which is causing the sound (the danger, the *index* of which the sound is). The rational subject, then, must resort to an activity of listening, in which the spatializing operations mentioned could be accomplished. In fact, the subject can do nothing but listen, nothing but listen as carefully and attentively as possible to locate the sound, to locate its place of origin, to estimate its distance, to trace its trajectory etc. The calculating subject, *à la homo œconomicus*, is now the *listening subject*, whose private property, and whose own life even, depends upon his *ability-* and *art of listening* (one that the creature has been exercising for a long time, perfecting the accuracy, the sharpness of distinction-making). Self-protection and self-defense, extending to the ownership as well - central constituents in what Foucault called the liberalist culture of danger - are now dependent on the accuracy, and on the sensitivity of the ear. In this manner, if there is a hierarchy of the modes of sensory perception, organized by the calculative reasoning, we can notice how the primacy is now given to listening instead of the gaze, to audition instead of vision, to the auditory-sonorous instead of optical-visual mode of perception. When the intruder is seen (if it will be seen at all, which is not necessary), it is already too late. The enemy must be located through its sounds without waiting for it to become visible, it must be located already before it shows itself, by the means of listening: listening that seems to conform to the calculative-rational model of *homo œconomicus*, listening as surveillance, listening as risk-calculation or risk-management, listening as technique of the individual self-defense, self-protection etc. However, as the story proceeds, it becomes clear that things are not as simple as this, that the endeavour of a calculative listening is anything but easy, anything but certain of its success. Albeit the creature of the Burrow is quite self-confident at first, it soon runs into difficulties in its listening-activity:

“As I have great practice in investigations of this kind, it will probably not take long and I can begin with it immediately; there are other jobs, admittedly, but this is the most urgent one, it must be silent in my corridors³²...I start the investigation, but I do not manage to find the place where one should intervene, I do make a few

³² (da ich große Übung in solchen Untersuchungen habe, wird es wohl nicht lange dauern und ich kann gleich damit beginnen, es liegen zwar noch andere Arbeiten vor, aber diese ist die dringendste, es soll still sein in meinen Gängen)

excavations, but only at random; naturally that has no result³³...I do not come at all nearer to the place where the noise is, it resounds always unchanged, in a thin sound, with regular pauses, now like hissing, but then like piping³⁴. ...Now I listen to the walls of the castle-place, and where I listen, high and low, to the walls or to the ground, to the entrances or inside, everywhere, everywhere the same noise³⁵... I must go further with my search³⁶...In such situations it is usually the technical problem that attracts me, for example, following the noise, which my ear has the skill to distinguish in all its subtleties...I represent to myself the cause, and now I am on fire to verify, whether the reality corresponds to that.³⁷ With good reason, for as long as a localization has not taken place here, I cannot feel safe either³⁸...And even a noise such as that is by no means an unimportant matter, regarded from that angle³⁹. But whether important or unimportant, I find nothing, no matter how much I search, or rather I find too much.⁴⁰ This had to happen just in my favorite place, I think⁴¹...but soon I stop smiling, for indeed, the same hissing is here too⁴²...”

Even the most attentive and systematic, the most carefully exercised, sort of listening cannot succeed in what is the urgent task, that is, the spatial operation of emplacement or location, and beaconing of the noise. Despite the listener's effort, as the story tells us, the auditory perception - even with the help of vision - does not relate the sound to any place at all, to any delimited region even, or to any delimited sector of the space. The listening cannot determine the sound in terms of spatial coordinates of points, fixed intervals, and clear-cut lines. Neither can the listener determine the location, or the direction of the sound, in the relative terms of *nearer* or *farther*. The perception of the sound's movement, its activity, its' taking-place, evades the determinacy of place, and univocal direction. The “right place” and “right direction” of the sound cannot be found, having the result that the investigation itself has no *proper place* of beginning. The question of the right location, and the direction to proceed remain unresolved, remain undecided, so that the investigation can only begin *at random*, at a random place and into a random direction, with no certainty of knowledge at all, if it is to begin at all. The noise, and the threat related to the noise, intrudes in the same manner from everywhere and into everywhere, inside and through all the parts and partitions of the spatial complex. There is an activity, an event, and dynamics at play, one that penetrates through the enclosures of the private space, but one that appears to penetrate equally

³³ (*ich beginne die Untersuchung, aber es gelingt mir nicht, die Stelle, wo man eingreifen müßte, zu finden, ich mache zwar einige Grabungen, aber nur aufs Geratewohl; natürlich ergibt sich so nichts*)

³⁴ (*ich komme gar nicht dem Ort des Geräusches näher, immer unverändert dünn klingt es in regelmäßigen Pausen, einmal wie Zischen, einmal aber wie Pfeifen*)

³⁵ (*ich horche jetzt die Wände des Burgplatzes ab, und wo ich horche, hoch und tief, an den Wänden oder am Boden, an den Eingängen oder im Innern, überall, überall das gleiche Geräusch*)

³⁶ (*ich muß weiter suchen*)

³⁷ (*bei solchen Gelegenheiten ist es gewöhnlich das technische Problem, das mich lockt, ich stelle mir zum Beispiel nach dem Geräusch, das mein Ohr in allen seinen Feinheiten zu unterscheiden die Eignung hat...die Veranlassung vor, und nun drängt es mich nachzuprüfen, ob die Wirklichkeit dem entspricht*)

³⁸ (*mit gutem Grund, denn solange hier eine Feststellung nicht erfolgt ist, kann ich mich auch nicht sicher fühlen*)

³⁹ (*und gar ein solches Geräusch, das ist in dieser Hinsicht eine gar nicht unwichtige Angelegenheit*)

⁴⁰ (*aber wichtig oder unwichtig, wie sehr ich auch suche, ich finde nichts, oder vielmehr ich finde zuviel*).

⁴¹ (*gerade auf meinem Lieblingsplatz mußte dies geschehen, denke ich*)

⁴² (*höre aber bald zu lächeln auf, denn wahrhaftig, das gleiche Zischen gibt es auch hier*)

into and through each and every division of the space. Anywhere the owner of the burrow goes, the noise is already there, it has already intruded there, encountering the owner again and again. The noise spreads, the danger spreads, the enemy spreads, so that there is no partition of the space that would be safe, no partition or segment that would remain intact. Yet, although the noise-intruder is encountered everywhere, it is never apprehended fully and totally as present, it is never seized *hic et nunc* in this or that location, in this or that room. Although the noise is encountered everywhere, although the danger is encountered everywhere, nothing is really found, that is, no present, no identifiable cause, no origin, no determinate object or agent, into which the sound and the threat could be traced back. Here or here, this or that direction, this or that region, in both of these, and yet in neither of these, always remaining undecidable and unresolved between the alternative spatial coordinates.

The most serious threat facing the creature of the burrow, as it is vividly depicted by Kafka, is that there is nothing that would, really, *face it*, that there is nothing that the creature could encounter as an object placed in-front-of, across determinate distance. The real threat is that the noise is encountered *everywhere and in no-place*, only in its evasive transition and transgression in-between the places and rooms, in its penetration and spreading from one to the other. One could also say that what is thus depicted in the story, is precisely the listening subject's becoming *immersed* in the sound (instead of facing it as an object in space), immersion which allows no fixed, centred, linear perspective relating the perceiving subject to an object perceived, immersion in which the sound does not occupy a space, no longer has a position in space, but generates the space itself, or *is* the space itself. What this means for the calculating subject of possession and - defence, the creature in its burrow, is its' being immersed in danger, its being immersed or absorbed in and by the enemy, while the latter no longer allows itself to be objectified at all. In other words, actually, the intruder does not intrude by occupying, by emplacing itself inside the private space, but instead it intrudes by immersing and absorbing the inhabitant, that is, it intrudes by becoming-space, by spatializing or spacing, by surrounding the subject instead of facing it. At least, this is one way of reading Kafka's depiction on the undecidability, the *aporia* to which the calculating subject, the subject of ownership, is exposed in its encounter with the noise. The ultimate, *real threat and danger* in the story, turns out to be the fact that the sound, the threat and danger it carries, are placeless and implaceable, unlocateable, *atopic*.⁴³

⁴³ To be noticed, this is already long before the introduction of the conception of the immersive *acoustic-auditory space* by Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, beginning from the 1950's (cf. Edmund Carpenter et al. 1959, 26-

However, that the danger is *atopos*, this is precisely something that the calculating creature *cannot* and *must not* accept, for to accept it would mean to accept the fundamental failure of its basic attempt to calculate, to accept the ultimate limit of its calculating reason. Furthermore, it would have to accept also the existence of dangers and risks surpassing the very possibility, the very field of the rational risk- management as such. It would mean to give up the very attempt to take care of, to defend and protect oneself and one's property. In terms of Foucault, this would be a departure from the liberalist culture of the danger, a return back to the Apocalyptic, "archaic", irrational, passive, and overwhelming experience of danger and terror, represented by the immersive, sonorous-auditory sense of danger. All this would be a radical deviation from the most basic norm and normativity of the liberalist individual subject, from its constitution in the model of *homo oeconomicus*. All these serious problems the calculating creature has to face and deal with in its confrontation with sound and auditory perception, in its confrontation with its own ears. To maintain its identity determined in terms of *homo oeconomicus* (as the hyper-calculative creature in Kafka's story), the subject must begin anew its attempt to localize and beacon the noise. After a failure, the investigation must be re-enacted again and again, until the sound is finally localized, until it is without doubt located at its proper place, at its proper position, at its determinate distance, so that further measures, plans and strategies can be made on its account. Hopefully, then, the danger would finally eliminated, and the secure state of emptiness, tranquillity and silence of the private space, the intactness of the property and ownership, will be returned once again. The alternation of failures and new efforts becomes an unending process, kept going by the possessive-calculating obsession of the subject, its economical obsession, and its ever new confrontations with the unlocateable sound.

As the attempt to emplace and locate the noise runs into difficulties, so does also the related, more extensive but equally obsessive attempt to *identify* the nature of the sound, and consequently, of its cause, that is, to reveal the nature of the threat (what it is, what is its species etc.), and this in terms of certain knowledge, i.e. *not* mere (theoretical), *a priori* assumptions, hypotheses or speculations, but certainty based on the revelation of the cause in empirical observation:

27; McLuhan 1967, 14-32, 45, 56-57, 63-71; McLuhan and Fiore 1967, 44-45, 48, 50, 61, 68, 111; McLuhan 1989, 35-70).

“But it is this very remaining-the-same of the noise in every location that disturbs me most, for it cannot be made to consist with my original hypothesis⁴⁴ ...There still remained the possibility that there were two noise-centres, that up to now I had been listening only at a good distance from the two centres, and that while I became closer to the one centre, its noises did increase, but as a result of the decrease of the noises of the other centre, the overall result remained always approximately the same for the ear⁴⁵. I almost already believed, when I listened accurately, that I could recognize, if only very unclear, differences of clang, which conformed to the new hypothesis. In any case I had to extend the experimental area much farther than I had done until now⁴⁶. Hence I descend the passage downwards all the way to the castle-place and begin to listen there. - Strange, the same noise here too⁴⁷. Now, it is a noise produced by the excavations of any sort of negligible animals, who have disgracefully exploited the time of my absence⁴⁸...But perhaps, this thought creeps into my mind as well, I am dealing here with an animal that I do not know yet. That would be possible⁴⁹ ...But it surely would not be a single animal, it would have to be a great flock that had suddenly fallen into my territory, a great flock of small animals⁵⁰ ...Do I have perhaps a new certain view about the cause of the noise?⁵¹... then one cannot indeed make any a priori assumptions at all, and one must wait until one maybe finds the cause, or it shows itself⁵²... the force of imagination will not stay still, and I actually keep on believing - it is useless to deny it to myself - that the hissing originates from an animal, and not at all from many and small, but from a single big one⁵³ ...dangerous beyond all possibilities of representation⁵⁴ ...I merely assume that the beast, by which I do not at all want to claim that it knows about me, is encircling me, it has probably drawn several circles around my burrow already, since I observed it⁵⁵”

Thus, we can see, what takes place, when the relentless *will to know* of the creature confronts the sound it hears: further *aporias*. There is already the *aporia* as to the quantity of the sound, as well as to the quantity and size of the intruders, of the enemies: no certainty, no decision, no solution can be reached whether there is one or many sounds, and whether there is one gigantic intruder or a multitude of small ones, a great beast or a swarm of tiny insects. The obsession to know, to attain the truth about

⁴⁴ (aber gerade dieses Gleichbleiben an allen Orten stört mich am meisten, denn es läßt sich mit meiner ursprünglichen Annahme nicht in Übereinstimmung bringen)

⁴⁵ (es bestand doch die Möglichkeit, daß es zwei Geräuschzentren gab, daß ich bis jetzt nur weit von den Zentren gehorcht hatte und daß, wenn ich mich dem einen Zentrum näherte, zwar seine Geräusche zunahmen, aber infolge Abnehmens der Geräusche des anderen Zentrums das Gesamtergebnis für das Ohr immer ein annähernd gleiches blieb)

⁴⁶ (fast glaubte ich schon, wenn ich genau hinhorchte, Klangunterschiede, die der neuen Annahme entsprachen, wenn auch nur sehr undeutlich, zu erkennen. jedenfalls mußte ich das Versuchsgebiet viel weiter ausdehnen, als ich es bisher getan hatte)

⁴⁷ (ich gehe deshalb den Gang abwärts bis zum Burgplatz und beginne dort zu horchen. - Sonderbar, das gleiche Geräusch auch hier)

⁴⁸ (nun, es ist ein Geräusch, erzeugt durch die Grabungen irgendwelcher nichtiger Tiere, die die Zeit meiner Abwesenheit in infamer Weise ausgenützt haben)

⁴⁹ (aber vielleicht, auch dieser Gedanke schleicht sich mir ein, handelt es sich hier um ein Tier, das ich noch nicht kenne. Möglich wäre es).

⁵⁰ (aber es wäre ja nicht ein einzelnes Tier, es müßte eine große Herde sein, die plötzlich in mein Gebiet eingefallen wäre, eine große Herde kleiner Tiere)

⁵¹ (habe ich etwa eine neue bestimmte Meinung über die Ursache des Geräusches?)

⁵² (dann läßt sich von vornherein wohl gar nichts annehmen und man muß warten, bis man die Ursache vielleicht findet oder sie selbst sich zeigt)

⁵³ (die Einbildungskraft will nicht stillstehen und ich halte tatsächlich dabei zu glauben - es ist zwecklos, sich das selbst abzuleugnen -, das Zischen stamme von einem Tier und zwar nicht von vielen und kleinen, sondern von einem einzigen großen)

⁵⁴ (über alle Vorstellbarkeit hinaus gefährlich)

⁵⁵ (ich nehme nur an, daß das Tier, wobei ich gar nicht behaupten will, daß es von mir weiß, mich einkreist, wohl einige Kreise hat es schon um meinen Bau gezogen, seit ich es beobachte)

the sound, agitates a relentless generation of ever new hypotheses, as well as ever new attempts to verify these, always turning out to be unsuccessful. The result of the endeavours is always only the indecision, the uncertainty or hesitation as to the truth or falsity of an assumption. The creature, in its encounter with the noise, is unable to verify or falsify any of its hypotheses, one or the other, but is instead taken into an oscillation back-and-forth between the mutually exclusive presumptions on the intruder's "species", its shape and form and so on (perhaps it is encircling me). The more attentively the subject tries to listen to the noise, the more uncertain, more insecure it becomes.

Finally, there is no more rest, and no more security at all, only the obsessive attempt to know, to attain the truth concerning the sound, the noise, and its leading to the *aporias*. Now, this occupies all the time, and all the forces of the creature, making it impossible for it to focus on anything else at all, that is, also to perform the usual daily tasks, all that it actually should be doing as homo *æconomicus*, to take care of its property. Instead, the subject is totally occupied by the unsuccessful attempt to grasp, to apprehend the sound with the hypotheses, and by the elaboration of alternative, ever more grandiose and laborious plans to attain the certain knowledge and truth about the noise (plans that always turn out to be unsuccessful, efforts that turn out to be only so much time and energy wasted). With the repeated failures to grasp the intruder comes the doubt, whether the whole spatial construction has been built in vain, incapable of offering any security and defense:

"... now I can neither wander, nor look around, nor rest⁵⁶...I will now alter my methods. I shall construct a regular and big trench in the direction of the noise and not cease from constructing before, independently of all theories, I find the real cause of the noise. Then I shall eradicate it, if that is within my power⁵⁷...The noise seems to have become louder, not much louder, of course, here it is always only a matter of the subtlest differences- but still a little louder, enough for the ear to recognize it clearly. And this growing-louder appears like a coming-nearer; still much more clearly that you hear the becoming louder, you literally see the step that brings it closer to you. You leap back from the wall, you try to survey at one glance all the possible consequences that this discovery will bring with it. You feel as if you had never really organized the burrow for defense against attack⁵⁸ ..."

⁵⁶ (ich kann jetzt weder wandern, noch umherschauen, noch ruhe)

⁵⁷ (ich werde nun meine Methode ändern. Ich werde in der Richtung zum Geräusch hin einen regelrechten großen Graben bauen und nicht früher zu graben aufhören, bis ich, unabhängig von allen Theorien, die wirkliche Ursache des Geräusches finde. Dann werde ich sie beseitigen, wenn es in meiner Kraft ist)

⁵⁸ (das Geräusch scheint stärker geworden, nicht viel stärker natürlich, hier handelt es sich immer nur um feinste Unterschiede, aber ein wenig stärker doch, deutlich dem Ohre erkennbar. Und dieses Stärkerwerden scheint ein Näherkommen, noch viel deutlicher als man das Stärkerwerden hört, sieht man förmlich den Schritt, mit dem es näher kommt. Man springt von der Wand zurück, man sucht mit einem Blick alle Möglichkeiten zu übersehen, welche diese Entdeckung zur Folge haben wird. Man hat das Gefühl, als hätte man den Bau niemals eigentlich zur Verteidigung gegen einen Angriff eingerichtet)

The perception of the becoming louder of the noise only brings with it the menacing sense of the coming-closer of the danger, still offering no knowledge about what it is, where it is exactly, how close it is, and from which direction it is approaching. The noise is all the more threatening precisely because it remains alien and unknown. It is a stranger, an uninvited guest entering into the space of privacy while remaining radically anonymous, while not revealing its identity, moving around and making one aware of its movement in the private space without “telling” who or what it is, or even where it is exactly, *hic et nunc*. The noise is a stranger that has already entered, that has already intruded, that is, always too soon, without name and identity, before allowing the owner, the master of the house and property to ask for its name, and to recognize its identity. The noise, as it is depicted in the story, is a stranger arriving, and having-already-arrived, having-already-entered unexpectedly, before and irrespectively of permission, without waiting for anything like of a contract, or anything like a granting of rights to take place first.⁵⁹ Besides, there is the immersive, the absorptive, the all-penetrating quality of the intrusion. In the end, we are told in Kafka’s story, the sound leads the creature into an *aporia*, in which the very elementary difference between the proper - and the im-proper, the basic determination of property and the relation of ownership as such becomes uncertain and undecidable. Perhaps, the creature begins to question itself, it has in reality been all the time (without knowing it) inside someone else’s burrow, perhaps it has itself intruded inside the private space of someone else, violating someone else’s property, being itself the parasite, the thief, whom the other, the real owner, has been all the time observing, listening, trying to locate, detect, seize, and eliminate. This is, I believe, the final and the most essential *aporia* in Kafka’s tale, one that most fundamentally interrupts the existence of the calculating *homo æconomicus*:

“...Now, I could not have expected such an opponent. But apart from its peculiarities, what happens now is still only something that I actually would have had to fear always, something against which I should have always made preparations: someone arrives⁶⁰...Perhaps I am in an alien burrow, I thought, and now the owner is burrowing his way toward me⁶¹ ...But perhaps the beast is digging in its own burrow, then I can not even dream of an agreement. Even if it should be such a peculiar beast that its burrow would tolerate a neighbour, my burrow does not tolerate a neighbour, at least it does not tolerate an audible neighbour.⁶²”

⁵⁹ This reading comes close to the problematics of *hospitality*, as it is discussed in Derrida (2000).

⁶⁰ (Nun, einen solchen Gegner habe ich nicht erwarten können. Aber abgesehen von seinen Eigentümlichkeiten ereignet sich jetzt doch nur etwas, was ich eigentlich immer zu befürchten gehabt hätte, etwas, wogegen ich hätte immer Vorbereitungen treffen sollen: Es kommt jemand heran!)

⁶¹ (Vielleicht bin ich in einem fremden Bau, dachte ich, und der Besitzer gräbt sich jetzt an mich heran)

⁶² (Aber vielleicht gräbt das Tier in seinem eigenen Bau, dann kann ich von einer Verständigung nicht einmal träumen. Selbst wenn es ein so sonderbares Tier wäre, daß sein Bau eine Nachbarschaft vertragen würde, mein Bau verträgt sie nicht, zumindest eine hörbare Nachbarschaft verträgt er nicht).

The creature of Kafka's *Burrow* - whom I have taken above as the representative of the economical subject, of *homo œconomicus*, is, one hand, obligated and stimulated by its very constitution, by its very economic calculability, into a constant hypersensitivity, hypersensuality, hyper-responsiveness, and hyper-reactivity, in its perception of its environment, of its milieu, of its habitat, of every movement, of the slightest variation taken place therein. In the encounter of the creature with its own ears, with the noises it hears, the very obsession of calculation, finally, drives the creature into the state, where it comes to very borders of its form of existence, as the economic subject: the more it listens, the more sensitive it becomes, the more carefully it attempts to take care of its property, all the more it becomes passive, irrational, and loses its mastery over its property and over itself. The sensitivity, required and encouraged by the very constitution of *homo œconomicus*, turns out to lead to the dissolution of *homo œconomicus*, this happening "with the help" of the ear. Consequently, the problem of the ear, the problem of audition, the problem of sound - as I have attempted to underline these through reading Kafka's story - are also problems of the liberalist governance (and perhaps of neo-liberalist governance in particular). The utmost maximization of the milieu-sensitivity and milieu-responsiveness, the optimization of the risk-sensitivity of the economical subject produces a creature who is, so to say, *all ears*. However, as we have seen, this *listening creature* is one in whom the hyper-sensitivity turns into *in-sensitivity*, the hyper-reactivity and hyper-responsiveness turn into incapacity to respond or react. Hence, through the very perfection of *homo œconomicus*, a creature is born which is no longer *homo œconomicus*, a creature that can no longer be governed by the liberalist-environmental modes of control. And, in the story of Kafka, the locus of this vulnerability is to be found in the ear.

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