

Tekst 8

the back half

Quiet, please

MODERN TIMES ♦ DAVID THOMPSON

“Far from being the mere absence of sound, silences express what no words or sounds possibly could.” Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (1983)

1 **O**ne of music’s most interesting qualities, perhaps a transcendental quality, is its ability to suggest the intangible, to imply and articulate ideas and experiences that lie beyond the reach of language, imagery and mathematics. The prerequisite of all music is silence, and silence, too, has expressive possibilities that defy easy explanation.

2 The Viennese composer Anton Webern produced curiously miniaturised music that underlines a deliberate use of silence as more than a mere absence or zero value. Webern’s one-minute movements evoke tension by implying notes not heard, as if the music had been chiselled away or shaped using a holepuncher. Silent pauses can lend dramatic performance poignancy and emotional charge, and the duration of such pauses can radically alter not only the effectiveness of the delivery, but also its dramatic significance.

3 In many social gatherings, non-verbal interludes can provoke awkwardness and, in some cases, acute anxiety. Much of the best humour relies on a precise timing of silence. Even newspaper cartoon strips use wordless or inanimate frames to evoke meaning and heighten impact. When delivering a punch line it may indeed pay to mind the gap.

4 Urban centres now offer their inhabitants or visitors endless encounters with vibrating air, welcome or otherwise. The freedom to experience heavily amplified rhythm tracks with visceral intensity in the comfort of one’s home or car may be more accessible than ever before, but the cost of this freedom is often paid by others who would rather not have access to that same thump, rumble and hiss.

5 Garbled in the translation from the desert highways of North America to our own small island, the unqualified liberties of car ownership have resulted in sprawling webs of congealed traffic; a crawling visual and auditory litter, punctuated by fits of temper and deranged car-horn semaphore. Police stations have had to evolve specialised nocturnal teams in an attempt to deal with that ultimate aural blasphemy, the car alarm. For city dwellers, few evenings now pass without a shrill and piercing chorus

of tinny, battery-powered tones and electronic whining. The club-goers’ late-night urge for junk food seems to have inspired McDonald’s to furnish some of their garish stop-’n’-troughs with a five-kilowatt PA rig, each one presumably calibrated to the precise decibel level necessary to obliterate their customers’ better judgement.

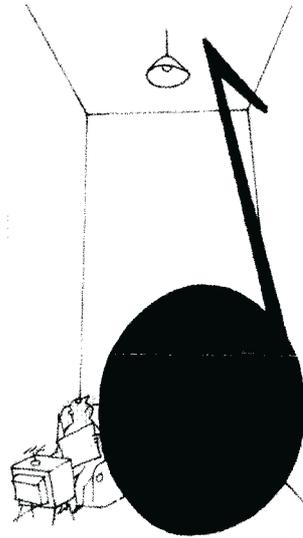
6 It’s far too easy to imagine a near future in which the most luxurious treat would be a weekend spent cocooned in silence deep within some heavily insulated underground bunker, untroubled by the epidemic of monotonous thudding music and its ironic, endlessly re-triggered shrieks of “peace and harmony”.

7 One of Bertrand Russell’s “Unpopular Essays”, published in 1950, includes the prophetic assertion: “A mentally solitary life seems pointless according to modern standards We are suffering not from the

decay of theological beliefs but from the loss of solitude.” As the number of external stimuli vying for our attention increases, occupying ever more physical and psychological space with escalating overstatement and intensity, the freedoms of silence seem largely overlooked. The personal space and isolation required for almost any creative consideration are easily compromised and difficult to reassert.

8 Introspective pauses are uncommon to western sensibilities and, more than ever, meditative moments free from interruption seem pointedly unfashionable. For anyone under the age of 30, subtracting oneself from the buzz of social activity is typically viewed as an eccentricity or sign of alarming maladjustment. One is obliged to be at all times “up for it”. This may help explain the coarsening of judgement now apparent in so many areas of our culture.

9 Brian Eno once suggested that music would continue to spread relentlessly and unchallenged into all aspects of life, becoming ubiquitous background noise. Presumed, unvalued and unnoticed, music would ultimately be “invisible” to the conscious ear. This nightmarish vision of the future invites a number of questions. Exactly what kind of irreparable sensory numbing would be necessary to render even our current pandemonium inaudible? If we are to be immersed in perpetual noise, perversely sedated by endless diversions, will anyone ask: from what are we being diverted?



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■ Tekst 8 Quiet, please

- 1p **22** ■ Which of the following is the point made in paragraphs 1–2?
- A Music can only be appreciated in the absence of distracting noise.
 - B Silence is an integral part of what music is meant to convey.
 - C The effect of silence may last longer than that of music.
 - D The perception of silence depends on the occurrence of sound.
- 1p **23** ■ Which of the following is in line with the first sentence of paragraph 3?
- A Many people are more inclined to remain silent than to speak.
 - B Silence can be an important instrument in human interaction.
 - C Silence in conversations may make people feel uncomfortable.
 - D Silent people may be considered to lack social grace.
- ‘it may indeed pay to mind the gap’ (eind alinea 3).
- 1p **24** □ Leg uit wat, gelet op de inhoud van alinea 3, met deze zinsnede bedoeld wordt.
- De vierde alinea bevat woorden als ‘vibrating air’, ‘thump, rumble and hiss’.
- 1p **25** □ Welke opvatting brengt de schrijver tot uitdrukking met deze woordkeus?
- 1p **26** ■ What does paragraph 5 focus on?
- A Life in Britain being conditioned by the irritating habits of the young.
 - B The effects of overcrowding of the British isles.
 - C The intrusion of noise into many areas of British life.
 - D The irreversibility of the American influence on the way of life in Britain.
- 1p **27** □ Leg uit wat volgens David Thompson ‘ironic’ (alinea 6) is.
- 1p **28** ■ Which of the following is the point made in paragraph 7?
- A Isolation is a recent phenomenon, totally contrary to modern man’s deepest longings.
 - B Modern man has to find new inspiration in order to achieve peace of mind.
 - C The loss of traditional values has caused modern man to hold originality in low esteem.
 - D The preoccupation with leisure is symptomatic of man’s stressful existence.
 - E The strong hold of the outside world on modern man chokes imaginative thought.
- ‘One is obliged to be at all times “up for it”.’ (alinea 8)
- 1p **29** □ Geef door middel van een citaat aan waarvoor men altijd klaar zou moeten staan.
- 1p **30** □ Welk beeld bedoelt de schrijver met ‘This nightmarish vision of the future’ in de laatste alinea?