

**Speaker**

Based on the exhibition *Sounds of Silence* at the Museum for Communication in Bern, Switzerland, you are now listening to: Silence. A Story About Nothing.

By Bettina Mittelstraß and Jascha Dormann.

For the full sound experience, we recommend wearing earphones.

**Speaker (female) which is "The Silence"**

If you add up all the sleep disturbances caused by noise, then noise is said to cost Europeans around 903,000 healthy years of life.

So what does that mean?

> *SOUND*    *Frogs, sporadic*

How do you mean? I don't get it.

Who even says that?

The World Health Organisation. U-huh.

Yeah, and why not then 903,042? Whatever...

> *SOUND*    *Kindergarten > increasing sound of civilisation*

What is noise?

The sounds of others?

Not all noise is noise.

But I don't want a kindergarten in front of my window!

Hello?

### **Original tone (O-tone) – person (male)**

*Straßenlärm ist eins, das ist etwas, wo... Straßenlärm ist so ein klein bisschen was Regelmäßiges, wo nicht so Spitzen sind, wo einen aktiv stören. Aber es gibt auch so Sachen wie in der Tram zum Beispiel, wenn die Tramtüren zugehen, dann pfeift es. Das macht sicher Sinn, aber das ist meistens so unsäglich laut, am morgen früh, dass es da zu künstlichen Beeinträchtigung wird.*

### **VOICEOVER**

*Street noise is something regular. There are no peaks of loudness to actively disturb you. It's different with trams. They whistle when the doors close, for example. That is indeed sensible, but in the mornings it's very loud and annoying.*

### **Silence**

Noise is a political topic.

### **O-tone – person (male)**

*Oder Handtrockner neuerdings auf WC's, wo einfach das Geräusch oder einen Lärm machen, wo einfach eine Beeinträchtigung sind, wo man sich dann einfach mehr Stille wünschen würde, von den Spitzen her.*

### **VOICEOVER**

*Hand-dryers in public toilets also make an unbearable din.  
You'd be grateful for more peace and quiet in this situation, too.*

### **Speaker (male)**

Church bells every 15 minutes at night – that's an imposition!

### **Speaker (female)**

But I don't want a kindergarten in front of my window!

### **Speaker (male)**

Ohropax vobiscum! Peace be with your ears.

**Speaker (female)**

Psst, schhhhh

> *SOUND Snow*

Because snow soaks up sound waves.

> *SOUND Snow*

Can you hear me?

Hello.

Don't say anything.

What year is it?

Silence is everywhere.

Here, here. Here.

Where am I?

Here, hello?

Here, hello?

Here, hello?

Can you hear me?

> *SOUND Snow*

**Speaker (female)**

What is noise?

> *SOUND Snow*

Noise disturbs

**Speaker (male)**

Ahh....

**Speaker (female)**

Silence, what is it?

Saying nothing?

Doing nothing?

Pausing?

**Speaker (male)**

Äh... "It's ..... (stammering...Pause mit Atmen oder äh oder...)

I collect ....

**Speaker (female)**

Oh, it's not that easy!

**Speaker (male)**

...a certain kind of (einatmen) leftovers" (so to say) (Äh)

„What kind of leftovers?" asked Humkoke.

(Oh, hm) Silences. I collect (ähmmm)

silences."

**Speaker (female)**

What's that all about?

**Speaker (male)**

– or sigh (einatmen) or take a breath,

or there is absolute silence. (for example..)

**Speaker (female)**

How long is this going to go on for?

**Speaker (male)**

I don't throw that away, (lachen) I collect it.

**Speaker (female)**

Until you lose the plot.

And what do you do with the scrap?" (einatmen)

**Speaker (male)**

„I splice it together, (Pause) and play back the tape then I'm at home in the evening.

**Speaker (female)**

Silence is a longing.

**Speaker (male)**

There's not much yet, I only have three minutes so far - but then people aren't silent very often."

**Speaker (female)**

Now listen carefully: "Solitude has two advantages: firstly being with yourself and secondly not being with others." *Laughs*, oh God, yes! I'll remember that saying! *Laughs*

> *SOUND – At the top of the city*

**Speaker (female)**

But how calming noise can also be – pleasant and familiar.

**Speaker (male)**

Noise. [*Lärm*, the German word for noise, comes from "alarm", from the Latin *ad arma*, to arms!]

> *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti „Zang Tumb Tumb“ - ...*

**Speaker (male)**

„We want to sing the love of danger, (...) We want to glorify war - the only cure for the world -, (...) We will sing of ... the nocturnal vibration of the arsenals and (...) the gluttonous railway stations devouring smoking serpents; (...) great-breasted locomotives, puffing on the rails like enormous steel horses with long tubes for bridle and the gliding flight of aeroplanes whose propeller sounds like the flapping of a flag and the applause of enthusiastic crowds.“

> *Erstürmung von Lüttich am 7.8.1914 inszeniertes Hörbild 1915 (erste Minute)*

**Speaker (male)**

30<sup>th</sup> June 1916. Verdun.

Today, the British fired 375,000 shells. On a single day. The hospital is crammed with trembling bodies. Young, strong men – trembling uncontrollably at the slightest sound. What is that? How can I help the soldiers? They’ve survived the slaughter but the storm of shells has broken their bodies and souls. The English call this trembling “shell shock”. In Germany, they speak of “severe war-tremors”.

**Speaker (female)**

Space. Eternal silence.

Hello?

Are you trying it out?

What do you think?:

Being silent!

Not moving.

Turning to ice.

> *Cracking of ice*

**O-Tone person (female)**

*Ich hab mich auch gefragt, ob man sich mehr Stille wünscht. Ich glaub, die muss man sich nicht wünschen, die muss man sich holen.*

Voiceover

*Can you actually wish for more silence? I think you have to get it for yourself.*

**Speaker (female)**

She's staying silent?

I think she's listening quietly.

> *Sound, the Kalahari at night*

Somewhere in the savannah / 8 in the evening

One of the quietest places in the world is in Minneapolis: the echo-free test chamber at Orfield Laboratories. This is where Harley Davidson tests the acoustics of its engines.

**O-tone person (male)**

*Ich hab es mega angenehm gefunden, weil still ist. Ich empfinde Stille als angenehm.*

VoiceOver

*I find silence comfortable*

**Speaker (female)**

Silence is everywhere

**O-tone person (female)**

*Der Raum hat sicher einen großen Einfluss drauf, wie dass man Stille wahrnimmt. Vor allem eben wenn man nicht still ist, sondern eben was sagt - da gibt der Raum natürlich enorm Orientierung.*

VoiceOver

*Space has a big influence on the perception of silence. If someone speaks, in other words they're not being silent, space provides orientation.*

**Speaker (female)**

*So there's also silence in the anechoic room?*

**O-tone person (male)**

*Also wir sind eigentlich nicht mit der Erwartung gegangen, dass das ein stiller Raum ist. Sondern dass da einfach der Schall, wo'n ich mache oder wo andere Leut machen, absorbiert wird.*

VoiceOver

*The expectation of this space wasn't that it's silent, but that it absorbs the sound of others.*

*> FIGARO with hall / door / soundproof*

**Speaker (female)**

*Sound needs a space in which to unfold.*

**O-tone person (male)**

*Das ist auch für mich recht ähnlich gewesen wie auf einem großen weiten Feld wo keine Mauern drum rum stehen, sondern der Schall einfach ins Nichts verschwindet.*

VoiceOver

*For me, that was like being in a big, wide field without walls. The sound disappears into nothing.*

**Speaker (female)**

*Huh? What's that? I don't hear any echo. Sound without echo? Ooh-er – the death of sound. That's unbearable. My voice sounds totally different! Hm, hello? Whoa. No! Can I*



get out of here?

**O-tone person (male)**

*Ich hab das etwas beklemmend gefunden die Stille, obwohl Stille an und für sich was Angenehmes ist, aber das Maß von Stille und dass - das fokussiert einen so auf sich selber, man hört Geräusche, die in einem existieren und die sonst übertönt werden, und das Außenleben ist wie ausgeblendet*

*VoiceOver*

*I found this level of silence oppressive. It focuses you on yourself. You hear sounds in yourself like never before while the outside is blanked out.*

**Speaker (male)**

After a while you hear your own blood roaring.

> *Tattoo studio*

**Speaker (female)**

And there's supposed to be silence here now?

**Speaker (male)**

Do you really believe that the forest stays still and silent?

**Speaker (female)**

What does that mean, now?

**Speaker (male)**

Silence is a longing.

**O-tone person (male)**

*Ich habe mir grad überlegt, wo kann man Stille überhaupt finden, - und ich glaub, es gibt so zwei drei Orte -*

VoiceOver

*Where can you find silence?*

*There are a few places –*

> Cowbells

**Speaker (male)**

I'm telling you: cows *suffer* from the noise of their bells! One day, this will scientifically proved!

**Speaker (female)**

Cows? Feeling disturbed? Getting ill from the sound of bells?

Silence is a longing

**O-tone person (male)**

*Zum Beispiel der Wald. Das hab ich auch erlebt, wirklich Wald weit weg von irgendwelcher Zivilisation und so ...*

VoiceOver

*Forest, for example, far away from civilisation*

**Speaker (female)**

The light of the refrigerator streams into the night. It's 1.30am on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

The police catch him in the dining hall of a summer camp, in the US state of Maine.

Caught stealing. After 27 years. The legendary thief. 40 break-ins a year: food, gas bottles, clothes, detergent. Radio, earphones, books.

Finally.

The thief with velvet feet, the mysterious Hermit of North Pond: arrested.

Christopher Thomas Knight lives in silence for 27 years. Winter and summer, in the woodland of Maine. Alone. Undiscovered. Protected by boulders, fir trees and a tent. Carefully shaved. Every morning.

It is silent around him for 27 years. He leaves the din of humanity behind him – in the late summer of 1986. As the reactor exploded in Chernobyl. A young man. 20 years old. Goes off. His mother doesn't report him missing.

For 10,000 nights, Christopher Knight now operates in shadows. Clever, tenacious, healthy. He listens to a lot. Looks at little. Lights no fire. Leaves no footprints. Almost never walks in the snow. Doesn't speak. Greets another person only once. A hiker. With a single word: "Hi."

The silence of the forest night settles uneasily on people who live in noise. Not so with him. It makes him feel light. And free.

The forest dweller is pale when they drag him back into the world of human beings. He almost doesn't survive jail. Barely speaks. Yes. No. Please. Thank you. His silence shakes everyone.

Then he's free to go. Just never into the woods again. Has to live with his mother, who never searched for him.

As for the insights gained from his hermitage, he shrouds them in his on-going silence.

**Speaker (female)**

(Laughs) you're right – I *talk* all the time!

I'm already silent. Right NOW.

> *Rain on the pontoon / Door opens and closes...*

**Speaker (female)**

Where am I?

Imprisoned. Isolated.

**O-tone person (male)**

*Stille würde ich wahrscheinlich eher, früher unangenehm empfinden als Ruhe. Also Stille kann ja auch sein: ich wach am Morgen auf und ich höre plötzlich überhaupt nichts mehr. Also ich hab mein Gehör verloren. Also das wäre sicher unangenehme Stille. Aber wenn ich würde am Morgen aufwachen und es würde nicht das Tram oder der Lastwagen und so weiter vorbeifahren, dann würde ich das als angenehme Ruhe empfinden.*

VoiceOver

*I'd find silence rather uncomfortable compared to tranquillity. If I suddenly woke up one morning and couldn't hear anything, because I'd lost my hearing – that would be uncomfortable silence. But if there are no lorries driving by in the morning, that would be pleasantly tranquil.*

**Speaker (female) (sings)**

> Hush, hush, hush, for the little child wants to sleep

Hello? Mum?

Beautiful silence, dreadful silence – that's the issue here.

> *Wellness with GONG*

**Speaker (female)**

925 rules.

**Speaker (male)**

„If you will have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips that they speak no guile !“

**Speaker (female)**

Oh no-no-no-no-no,  
Can I get out of here?

**Speaker (male)**

But as for coarse jests and idle words or words that move to laughter, these we condemn everywhere with a perpetual ban

> *Wellness music*

**Speaker (male)**

"The spirit of silence ought to lead us at times to refrain even from good speech."  
„And let absolute silence be kept at table, so that no whispering may be heard."

**Speaker (female)**

"Go away. Leave me alone. I'm warning you! You're the one it happens in. You're the one it happens in. You're the one it happens in. You're the one it happens in. For the last time: get away from me! That's enough. You're the one it happens in. You're the one it happens in. You're the one it happens in...."

**Speaker (male)**

„O mother: O the one true you, you who (...) took it all on yourself, saying: don't be afraid. It's me. You who deep in the night had the courage to be this stillness for the one who was afraid, who was dying of fear. You stike a match and already the sound is you."

**Speaker (female)**

Silence loses its deliciousness if it's the only thing you have.  
The result is loss of self. A lack of will, a ruined soul. Pray for a sound.

**Speaker (male)**

„pray, not in a loud voice but with tears and fervor of heart."

**Speaker (female)**

„O mother: O the one true you, you who (...) took it all on yourself, saying: don't be afraid. It's me. You who deep in the night had the courage to be this stillness for the one who was afraid, who was dying of fear. You stike a match and already the sound is you."

**Speaker (male)**

„And if anyone should be found evading this rule of silence,let her undergo severe punishment."

**Speaker (female)**

"Mum?"

It can be dreadfully silent in the silent night.

The human brain needs stimuli to function. Shielded from all sensory impressions, it starts to regress. It's known as "white torture". Collapse of the psyche. Thoughts without context. Delusion. Hallucinations. Panic.

**Speaker (female)**

*Hello*

*Whoa. No!*

*No, no, no*

*Can I get out of here?*

*> Airport*

**Speaker (male)**

Welcome on board our flight

Please make sure that you're sitting up straight for take-off. Sitting up straight!

And follow our instructions.

**Speaker (female)**

What's next, then? Have you forwarded the latest process optimisation figures...? Of course I have! ... *(types, irritated)* Starting off well...

Hey, can't you be any quieter? This awful cawing. Hey, neighbour – Zurich stopped burning a long time ago. The protest was in the 80s!

**Speaker (male)**

For your own personal experience of peace, switch off and: please lean back NOW.

Lie back and experience our modern noise-cancelling service! We synchronise you with yourself, and you fly relaxed to the yoga festival in a rare, natural location. Get to know each other on free medicinal-herb walks. Discounts for last-minute bookers of anti-stress massages and the isolation tank. Try out: the spirit of silence.

> *Unfasten belt on the plane*

**Speaker (female)**

Finally there.

> *Holiday sound with kids.... no translation ...*

**Speaker (male)**

I was once standing at a fountain, drawing the water in silence.

A person came and watched me.

I continued to draw the water.

**Speaker (female)**

"What meaning do you see in your life of silence and meditation?"

**Speaker (male)**

"Now – look into the fountain. What do you see?"

**Speaker (female)**

"I can't see anything."

**Speaker (male)**

"Look again into the fountain! What do you see now?"

**Speaker (female)**

Divine silence? Are you serious? This is driving me mad.

> *SOUND of the fly...*

**Speaker (male)**

"When I drew the water, the water was restless. Now the water is still.

That is the experience of silence and meditation: you see yourself....

**Speaker (female)**

That's enough! To draw energy, people need calm!

Goddammit-goddammit

**Speaker (male)**

Wait a while longer.

**Speaker (female)**

And for calm they need energy.

**Speaker (male)**

"Look again into the fountain. What do you see?"

**Speaker (female)**

I'm silencing you already.



**Speaker (male)**

"That is the experience of silence and meditation. If you wait long enough, you see... (the reason of all things)

**Speaker (female)**

Please be quiet now and listen to me!

"I see the stones at the bottom of the fountain."

... the reason of all things."

> *Techniker*

*Okay, das haben wir, danke.*

**Speaker (female)**

(blblbl ...) So I am going to the Savoy, then

*Tummy rumbles from Speaker (male)*

**Speaker (female)**

*Was that a woodpecker?*

**Speaker (male)**

Yes

*Judith laughs*

**Speaker (female)**

And now?

> *Door*

**Speaker (female)**

Room 513. Breakfast from 7 to 11am. Good. Peace, finally.

What's that?

Oh that's irritating.

Not a quiet room at all.

Where's that coming from?

There's still something there...

(Groans) How do you turn the TV on?

> TV comes on / Wimbledon

**O-tone person (male)**

*Ich denke, Stille hat mit dem Raum zu tun, aber es hat auch mit ganz viel anderem zu tun, ob man was als still oder als ruhig empfindet - der Raum, wo ist man? Je nachdem...*

VoiceOver

*Silence is about many other things, too: whether you feel something is quiet or calm or not, depending on where you are.*

**Speaker (female)**

Quiet please

**O-tone person (male)**

*Ist Stille auch etwas, wo man wie aktiv kann wahrnehmen? Als Gefühl. Ist das einfach das Fehlen von Lärm? Oder ist es etwas Eigenes?*

VoiceOver

*Can silence be a feeling? Is it the absence of noise or something in itself?*

**Speaker (male)**

Quiet please

Silence. From the Latin word *silentium*: Keeping quiet. Noiselessness. Soundlessness.

[The German word for silence, *Stille*, also means stillness.]

**Speaker (female)**

So what? These are mainly states of absence: Not loud. Not noisy. Not moving. But the question is: what does silence mean? Why do people seek such a state?

> SOUND

**O-tone person (male)**

*Ich denk es hat auch mit der eigenen Stimmung zu tun, wo man drin ist, wie fühlt man sich? Was ist in einem, was macht man? Ist man gehetzt, ist man gestresst, ist man selber ruhig, still, abeg'fahre?*

*VoiceOver*

*It is related to one's own mood in any case. What's going on inside you right now? Are you restless and stressed or calm and balanced?*

**Speaker (female)**

The calmer it is AROUND us, the louder it gets IN us.

**Speaker (male)**

If it were only once totally silent.  
If happenstance and vagueness  
hushed and the neighbouring laughter,  
if the sound which my senses make  
won't keep me so from being awake-:  
Then I could in a in a thousandfold  
thought think yourself to your edge  
and possess you (only as long as a smile)  
to donate you to all that lives  
like thanks.

> Sound arises in concert hall: 4'33 / Murmuring

**Speaker (female)**

John Cage. 4 minutes 33 seconds. I've always wanted to hear this...

> *Clapping*

**Speaker (female)**

How – when's it starting? Listen, it's already begun. Yes! Yes, that's it.

You can't go out now. You'll miss the best of it.

Can you please sit quietly for a bit longer? And enjoy it? Thank you.

> *Clapping*

**Speaker (female)**

You say he's resting *in* himself?

But he didn't get a chance to speak.

Somewhere in the savannah

3 in the afternoon

Anyone seeking silence needs leisure.

Set off. On your path to silence.

**O-tone person (male)**

*„Umgekehrt ist es eben so, dass das Laute oder das Leben dürfte nicht totenstill sein.*

*Also das gehört zum Leben, dass man etwas hört und dass es tönt“*

*VoiceOver*

*Deathly silence isn't necessary. Hearing something, and that it has a sound,  
is part of life.*

**Speaker (female)**

Odysseus, "Well listen now to what I - the royal Circe - tell you (...) Next you will come to the Sirens who beguile all men that approach them (...) with their limpid song.

> *Sound of Sirens from The Odyssey*

Plug your comrades' ears with softened beeswax lest they listen, and row swiftly past. And if you must hear, then let them first tie you hand and foot and stand you upright in the mast housing, and fasten the rope ends round the mast itself, so you can delight in hearing the Sirens' voices.

> *Sound of Sirens gets very loud / breaks off > muffled*

**Speaker (male)**

Ohropax! "Noise is like silence, it appears, when you've got Ohropax in your ears!"

> *Sound of Sirens, dull.... Let the effect sink in*

**Speaker (female)**

I wanted you to quieten down, but now please talk to me again!

**O-tone person (female)**

*Also mir dünkt, die Lärmbelastung ist manchmal schon recht hoch in unserer Welt. Ich empfinde das manchmal schon als Problem. Wenn ich am morgen will ausschlafen und der Straßenlärm irgendwie dann doch stört. Gleichzeitig ja, denke ich, ja das ist etwas, wo (...) viel auch mit meiner Einstellung zu tun hat: was stört mich, was stört mich nicht. Ich könnte wegziehen, wenn mich jetzt der Straßenlärm mehr würde beeinträchtigen. Es gibt auch Möglichkeiten - ja...*

*VoiceOver*

*The level of noise pollution in our world is already rather high. I see that as a problem: if I want to sleep in in the mornings, I'm disturbed by the noise*

*from the street. But it's also about one's own personal attitude: what bothers me, what doesn't? I mean, I could also move away, if the street din were to bother me too much.*

**Speaker (female)**

Salve, Seneca! Do you have a moment for me?

**Speaker (male)**

Sure. Always for you, Lucilius

**Speaker (female)**

I'm conducting a survey on noise pollution in ancient Rome. You're a philosopher –

**Speaker (male)**

Yes?

**Speaker (female)**

So I imagine that you need peace and quiet to think – but you live directly over the baths. Isn't it too loud for you?

**Speaker (male)**

When your strenuous gentleman, for example, is exercising himself by flourishing leaden weights; (...) I can hear him grunt; (...) Or perhaps I notice (...) the racket of the man who always likes to hear his own voice in the bathroom, or the enthusiast who plunges into the swimming-tank with unconscionable noise and splashing.

**Speaker (female)**

Well - You must have iron nerves or deadened ears if your mind can hold out amid so many noises!

**Speaker (male)**

„I assure you that this racket means no more to me than the sound of waves or falling water (...).“

**Speaker (female)**

How so?

**Speaker (male)**

„I force my mind to concentrate, and keep it from straying to things outside itself; all outdoors may be bedlam, provided that there is no disturbance within“

**Speaker (female)**

Indeed. For of what benefit is a quiet neighbourhood, if our emotions are in an uproar?

**Speaker (male)**

Think of the unfortunate man who (...), that his ear may be disturbed by no sound, (...) tosses from this side to that and seeks a fitful slumber amid his frettings! He complains that he has heard sounds, when he has not heard them at all.

**Speaker (female)**

The reason?

**Speaker (male)**

His soul is in an uproar; it must be soothed, and its rebellious murmuring checked. You need not suppose that the soul is at peace when the body is still. Sometimes quiet means disquiet.

**Speaker (female)**

Is it not sometimes a simpler matter just to avoid the uproar?

**Speaker (male)**

Accordingly, I shall change from my present quarters.

**Speaker (female)**

Erm, yes... so there it is. Vale, Seneca. And please record your expertise "On Quiet and Study" for posterity. You know, 2,000 years elapse and the problem is still the same.

**OUTRO**

**Speaker (male)**

Silence. A Story About Nothing.

**Speaker (female)**

Speech is platinum and silence is granite. Oh no, of course not. It's garnet. Laugh...

*VOICE OVER to this: (Woman) The relevant saying is the following one: that you can overdub! And then keep Judith's laughter!*

**Speaker (female)**

A closed mouth catches no (flies) lies, Oh sorry. I mean ties.

**Speaker**

Based on the exhibition *Sounds of Silence* at the Museum for Communication in Bern, Switzerland, you heard:

A feature by Bettina Mittelstraß and Jascha Dormann

A performance of John Cage's *4'33''* by the State Orchestra in Stuttgart, conducted by the General Music Director Cornelius Meister.

The speakers were: Judith Hofmann and Sebastian Rüger

A production by *Idee und Klang Audio Design*, Basel, 2019