

The Problem with Silence

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The problem with silence is that it is not a problem. Silence is the complete absence of sound and the state of abstaining from speech. Words such as quiet and muteness evoke similar meanings. For many, however, it is synonymous with unease, threat and awkwardness. Yet, silence has played a significant role in humanity. The dramatic pause, the rest in music and the moment of silence for the dead are only some examples. However, though silence has been granted a position of great importance in the past, it is disquieting to see how much it is being attacked in the present day by the very being that has perpetuated its effect throughout the passage of time: man.

Perhaps one of the most openly disturbing and recognizable disrupters of silence is the entertainment interrupter. Be it a movie, a play, a symphony, a painting, this person will invariably start babbling, thus ruining the effect that the combination of art and silence impresses upon the human race.

The entertainment interrupter is the most widely acknowledged and hated form of the despiser of silence, but certainly not the only one. More common to our days is the social butterfly. With the impressive growth spurt of technology that facilitates and enables man to communicate with those around (and not around) him it seems as if we should constantly engage in active communication with others. So wherever and whoever the social butterfly flaps to, silence will be disturbed. Perhaps for fear of running out of life and dying, this specimen feels the need to talk constantly on a long bus ride (rendering the option of dosing off or merely looking through the window as unconceivable), find it impossible to wait in silence and even dare interrupt someone's reading for the sake of small talk and awkward conversation.

In the depth of the soul, the social butterfly is terrified of silence and so, instead of facing the problem, it covers it up with words. But there are those who, despite their good intentions, think they see fear in the eyes of those who might simply enjoy the quiet. To the psychologist, silence is a serial killer. Being silent appears to be reason enough to regard anyone as 'troubled', socially awkward, a misfit. On one occasion, I was sitting on the floor of one of the hallways at school reading a book (which could have simply been a book for English class). Someone seemed to think this was apparently very odd behavior and so this person squatted down as if I were a small child and asked me whether I was alright.

Sometimes, silence is there to make us feel uncomfortable, to expose, to make us think (even about those things which we purposely shove to the back of our minds), to leave us alone with ourselves, to make us reflect. More often than not we are afraid of it and so, we resort to words.

Speech is the modern-day bully of silence, constantly harassing the quiet solitude that is so desperately needed (though not always wanted). As human beings, we thirst for interaction with other members of our same

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species; we speak to quench this thirst, though unable to strike a balance, we frequently drown in the sea of our own conversation. Never underestimate the awe-inspiring power of silence.