

Sturm und Klang

by [Antoni Campese](#) (March 2025)



Summer Afternoon, Clandeboye Ave. (Jack Beder, 1981)

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. –1 Corinthians 13

“No more a quiet corner of the earth there be”

Call me an old-fashioned, cantankerous crank, but I like to wake up of a morning to perfect stillness, as if the world

were quietly born anew. Most mornings, what I actually experience sounds like the undertaking of demons drilling their way back to Hell. The air is often filled with any number of rackets in the neighborhood, including blowers, mowers, chippers, and chainsaws.

I chose to live in a neighborhood of late Victorian homes backed by tall pines, the street lined with large oaks, and while falling short of stately, it retains a slightly shabby charm. When I moved here, I thought the street came with an equally antique quietude. I was proven wrong.

All those trees have to be branched, pruned, trimmed, sometimes felled. Usually they are taken down as a result of storm damage and the vicissitudes of age. When a grand old oak goes down in the vicinity, I grieve. Sometimes it is necessary. Other times, it's just some leaf-hating oaf.

I really do not understand the preoccupation older folks (so-called "Boomers") have with eliminating leaves. Back in the day, dads and often the kids used to rake leaves by hand. It was a Zen experience to draw along the crisp leaves, their earthy fragrance wafting through the cool dry air. Then we piled them up and they would be burned or mulched. Apparently this simply will no longer do. Today's Boomer hates leaves and gets his Zen jollies blowing them about with an industrial grade monster blower. It is not clear where the Boomer wants to put the leaves, as long as not one remains on his property.

God forbid a leaf fall on the perfectly pedicured lawn. It is like an omen of apocalypse enumerated in the Book of Revelations. And it devastates property values.

Then, oddly, the leaves are fastidiously bagged and picked up. Why mulch them back into your yard when you can feed the grass with chemical fertilizer? Such logic is why, even though I myself qualify as a cantankerous old crustacean, I completely understand the disdain younger people have for these old farts

at play.

In Summer, a lawnmower is always running somewhere. It's not that it takes so long to mow a single yard, but everyone has grass, lots of it, and lawnmowers are so loud, they can be heard blocks away. Maybe the real problem is not the mowers but grass itself. Grass is evil. It requires an excessive amount of fresh water and yields really nothing except a boring green carpet.

Finally we consider perhaps the most evil noise of all, the back-up beep. I understand that this is needed to alert bystanders that heavy equipment is reversing course—that's a real hazard. But these days it seems equipment is programmed to beep during normal operation. For instance, bucket lifts beep as they are lifting. What is the hazard of which this warns us? Is this not what we expect the device to do, lift things? Now we hear this incessant sound emanate from all manner of vehicle, like transport vans. The proliferation of beeps wrecks what little quiet remains.

"Progress argues for a noisome world"

Forget the changing of climate. I'm talking about a veritable catastrophe of constant noise. Not Sturm und Drang, but Sturm und Klang, "storm and clamor," as it were.

Of course, I concede the utility of these machines. They save much time and effort. To some, these contraptions are probably a necessity (for example, if one has joint problems). I don't blame my neighbors for making life a little easier. But it seems all this honking, sirening, blowing, droning, sawing, auguring, and general cacophonation has gotten entirely out of hand. A general thoughtlessness has crept into society.

It is not just infernal machines, it is everything. Here we could learn from Roger Scruton's seminal essay, "The Tyranny

of Pop” (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06mv4js>). He deftly describes the Hell that we now inhabit, one which Dante might have named the Bolgia of Cacophony.

There is noise everywhere and all the time, and everyone makes it thoughtlessly. Why do we feel the need to fill spaces with sound? It seems any sound will do, as long as we don't have to endure silence. It started with elevator music, muzak in the department store, pop in the mall, then it jumped from the public to the personal and portable.

Lads shoulder resonant boomboxes while riding bikes; lasses play music on phones; and then there are the loud, public one-sided phone conversations. “I'm at Lowe's,” some guy will announce in Lowe's. Imagine if he didn't have the phone; we would empathetically understand he's a mental patient channeling other dimensions. Is he any less incoherent with a phone?

I also suspect some of these lawncare fanatics might be hard of hearing and do not much care. The deafness is probably the result not only of age, but also prolific use of their infernal racket traps.

All of us have become accustomed to the drone of lawnmowers. The mad idea of mounting a gas engine on a ground-facing propeller just to trim grass has been around since early in the previous century. Before that, lawns were cut with push mowers, which make barely any noise.

But just as we've become acclimated to lawnmowers, we now accept the ubiquity of blowers, not only to tidy up leaves, but to clear dust and debris, and of late, to blow snow. Now the droning is heard year round.

“I find myself again within me quietly”

In the peaceful moments left to us, we need to take stock and consider: Have we not polluted the still air with racket? Why do we not seek peace and serenity? And while efficiency is desirable, have we not become indolent and rude in our quest for ease?

Yet I would be an oaf if, after so much ranting, I did not propose an alternative to all this noisy progress. It is radical, for there is nothing more radical than tradition.

It's highly unlikely we'll fall back on push mowers, but electric mowers are a remarkably quieter alternative. In fact, now that battery technology has improved, electric offers a viable and quieter technology for powering garden tools. Yet we can go even further.

You might have heard of the leaf rake. You might even have one among Grandpa's garden tools in your shed, left over from bygone days. Please refrain from apoplexy, but I suggest we use these ancient tools: the leaf rake to rake leaves, the snow shovel to clear snow. Yes, I know it's more fun to blow it around, but in doing so, we pollute our environment in a most destructive way. We shatter precious quiet.

As I mentioned, we now feel a weird need to fill spaces with sound. This need to chase away silence makes me suspect we're simply filling an emptiness within. And ironically what's missing is stillness. It is what we need most, and we are banishing it by trying to compensate with gibberish and noise. If we would just stop for a while and accept the stillness, we might find quiet within and without.

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Antoni Campese writes about culture, technology, and

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