

Bloody tractor.

May 23rd 2001, Vale of Belvoir, Leicestershire. It's a warm, sunny Wednesday afternoon and I'm in my studio reading a book on the History of Elizabethan England. The Earl of Leicester writes his last letter to Queen Elizabeth 1st and signs it 'I humbly kiss your foot'. I think about that wondering whether I should sign my emails in a similar fashion. Then a tractor trundles passed my studio and the noise breaks my concentration. This was the point when I became aware of the intrusive and destructive power of noise and in particular the engine.

Six years on and there is significantly more traffic rumbling outside my studio. I know when the busiest times are for traffic and symbolically the umbilical chord between me and nature is severed from 7.30am to 8.45am and again between 4.30pm and 6pm. I can't hear the birds anymore at these times. I can't hear the trees rustling in the wind. This may seem trivial because I could always play my sister-in-laws 'sounds from nature' cd. But, once I lose touch with nature I lose touch with what it is to be human and the phylum that reaches through to our ancestor's is cut. It is like the family album of photos has been slashed.

Knowing human's relationship within nature is fundamental to understanding what it is to be human. Dislocation from nature dislocates our understanding of the seasons in nature, the seasons in an individual life and the seasons of generations. Death becomes a feared end not a matter of fact moment in the season.

From 2006 to 2050 the sound of traffic builds like white noise. My ability to think is badly affected. Stillness has gone. I am 93 years old, still have my faculties but am ready to die.

The village I have lived in for 60 years is now a north London suburb. The concept of village no longer exists. People commute to Jupiter to see the countryside. I don't want to go. I am not a stick in the mud. It is just that I remember what it was like to see the night sky with stars revealing their light from hundreds of thousands of years ago. I remember hearing the delicate hum of dragonfly's wings – not the digital version. I noticed that the latest edition of the Oxford English Dictionary doesn't have the word 'silence' in it.

The constant humming of engines and motors has suffocated this nations thinking. The Labour Government (which has been in power since old Mr Blair entered office) has technical research centres throughout the major suburbs like Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. My grandson William is more in touch than I am and tells me what he thinks is happening. Nobody really knows and we have to be careful about discussing these sorts of things. Every household has CCTV cameras within it. Television broadcasts all are produced from the 'Telecommunication for the People' network. William is very sceptical about their motives. He is an artist. As part of his art he disguises himself as people with different occupations so that he can have access to situations that aren't normally available.

William disguised himself as a digital white noise engineer and has entered one of these Technical Research Centres – set up by Winston Churchill (I don't expect you to remember him). Last week William visited me on his twenty-cylinder hover bike for some Dundee cake and tea. He told me that he saw the latest television's which are due out next April. They all hum at an oscillating frequency between 75 and 105 ghz. This is the addictive frequency for the human brain – the frequency where a semi hypnotised state is induced. There are sensors on each television that detects whether someone is in the room and turns on automatically. The volume is low to start and slowly builds. The frequency of the brain's electrical patterns are received and the white noise output is altered to gain maximum affect.

Maximum effect is the point where the brain seizes to function independently. At this point any brain is completely receptive to whatever the television program conveys. It is no surprise that Labour is still in power. The nation is powerless to do anything about it. There are a handful of

artists and scientist who are like bandits and have so far escaped the effect of the noise on our ability to think.

2090. My Grandfather Jo passed away peacefully a year after he wrote 'Bloody tractor'. I miss him so much. But in a way I am pleased he hasn't seen how much worse things have become. The use of noise to quash individual thinking has spread and become more endemic and sophisticated. Now light is also used to great effect. The white noise street lamps replaced all old-fashioned sodium streetlights. Every twenty metres we receive another dose of 'white hum'. They have developed the lights to flicker at just the right speed so it traumatises the brain – this is how they use to torture people in the olden day's back in the twentieth century. Please don't tell anyone where you received this information. I am already living underground in a small colony of maverick artists and scientists. We live in a disused sewage plant. The scientist among our community have devised special glass eyes that protect us from the street lights and ear baffles which have tiny speakers which play back noise at a frequency of –75 to – 105 ghz – this results in silence. The baffles look like human ears and snap snugly over your own. We lost several members through battery loss in the early days which resulted in them suffering from 'brain burns' instantly. They were taken to the 'Dysfunctional Units' which are scattered throughout the city. I say city because that's what Britain has become.

My daughter Sophie has left Britain to try and find some peace where she can think. She is still young and so idealistic. But I had to let her go. She is twenty-two an

To whom it may concern.

My name is Sophie Fairfax. I am living in the city of France in a disused underground tube network. We eat rats and drink oil. I am fearful for mankind. I have no wish to live. The noise makes my life unbearable. All of Europe, as it was, is now a blanket of noise, flickering light and concrete. We scavenge what we can, but this is too bleak for me to sustain. I am tired and am going to hand myself over to the EDU (European Dysfunctional Units).

I love my father William and mother Lotte. I am sorry that I have no more strength.

God Bless.

Sophie.

This letter hit me hard. Slowly I am aware of the arms of two friends around me. They hold me tight and tell me we must keep fighting. I sob and sob. We stay in a close huddle for several minutes. Then I ask them for some time on my own with Sophie. They quietly leave. I look at Sophie and hold her hand. I hadn't noticed earlier but there is something else in the heel of her shoe. A razor blade. I pick it up and kiss Sophie's forehead. My season of a life has come to an end. I hold her hand with my left hand and the wrist facing upwards. I place the sharp blade down on my vulnerable looking pale wrist.

William pressed hard and sliced quickly.