



My Search for Silence

by Mary Ince

The waiting is killing me. This is the second year I've applied for the Outer Cape Artists in Residence Consortium (OCARC) program. They said my proposal of drawing silence in the Dunes was an intriguing one, but, last year was not to be. I'm hoping this is the year.

I had pretty much figured that this would not be my year either, when an email from the head of OCARC came offering Margo-Gelb Dune Shack for two weeks in either September or October. My Choice. Yippy! I chose September because I thought it might be a little warmer. Okay, now I can set the wheels in motion for my new journey. My mind is a swirl of activity just thinking about it.

Well, today is the day, September 14. I don't think that I've ever embarked on a journey (adventure) where I have been so unsure of what I will experience.

After being dropped off at Snail Road in Provincetown, I am picked up by the four wheel drive Peaked Hill Trust (PHT) truck, with its deflated tires, to begin the journey out into the National Seashore dunes of Provincetown.

Even though I have seen pictures of the dunes, their magic and awesomeness are overwhelmingly beautiful. Upon arrival at "my" shack: Margo-Gelb (aka Boris), I trudge my gear up the hill to claim my stay for the next fifteen days. I am reminded that there is no running water or electricity out here.

After settling in, I plant myself in a low beach chair on the front porch in the shade with a view of the yellow/green grasses against the dark indigo blue of the ocean. It's too early to sense the silence that I am seeking. There is a gentle cool breeze blowing, so I can hear something going on. I can only imagine what a gale would sound like.

It is my first evening of what, I am sure, will become a comfortably cozy feeling shelter. But tonight I feel spare. My routine of watching the news, then having dinner, after which I watch my favorite TV programs or read, is broken. Even though I am tired, the thought of going to bed when the sun goes down at 4:00pm makes me feel guilty. I am going to read until 7:30pm.

It is 6:30am, my first full day at the dune shack. I feel ready to jump into my search for silence!

There seems to be quite a bit of wind on top of "my" dune. The grasses and sea reflect this; as does the decimal of sounds they emit. It is still mid September and the air temperature is warm today. Fishing boats number about twenty seven. Planes from the nearby airport are about six today. There they go, stealing my silence.

Aside from my search for the silence, and drawing, my daily routine consists of filling two gallon jugs with water from the hand pump down the hill, sweeping the shack of lots of sand, doing occasional hand laundry, filling the kerosene lamp, washing its globe, and making very simple meals.

I brought all of my own food for these 15 days. Whenever the weather cooperates, I sit on the porch at dusk with a glass of wine and watch the sun go down. I watch the sea as late returning fishing boats reveal their tiny specks of deck lights as they head back to Provincetown harbor. It is dark now. I am feeling happy that everyone is home, enjoying their family.

Tonight, I awake to what sounds like a motor - a car, a truck – I can't identify it. I get up to investigate. Seeing nothing, I go back to bed. Then, out of the North comes a very large low flying helicopter, bright lights and all. Well, at least now I can say that my hearing is quite good. Good enough to keep searching for the allusive silence.

Column1 ends

I am finding it very difficult to "hear" silence. The sounds are more constant and intense here than at my home in the woods of Eastham. I expected it to be really quiet here. I hear the birds, waves, wind, planes and boats more intensely here in the dunes. The silence of my surroundings seems to be one of the hardest to hear. Maybe I will need to change how I envision silent sounds.

Today I am shack-bound by a storm. I 'm reading a great book that I can't put down. BINGO! All of a sudden I notice quiet. Shocking quiet. I look outside: no wind, no rain. Just gray clouds, dark gray sea with little or no disturbance. The storm that just passed now reveals itself in a sky with streaks of various shades of mauve, gray with subtle pinks, whitish gray above light blue on the horizon. Still the silence persists. Grasses move ever so slightly. We'll see what the wind will do tonight, and what tomorrow brings.

This morning is a new day full of sunshine, warm yellow/orange. Beautiful dark indigo of the sea meets various shades of cobalt of the sky. I keep thinking about

the silence I am supposed to be drawing. Maybe I'm looking in the wrong places; listening to the wrong sounds. Oh, I just had an "aha" moment. I think there are different degrees of silence - different marks - or lack of them. I'm going to explore this idea.

I start thinking about my ongoing series of morphing images from the past years. The search for silence reminds me of this. In the morph series, the external is drawn into the internal. The internal appears to be far more chaotic than the external. Eventually one wants to get back out to the external. Yet, isn't it the external that is producing all the noise? Is this saying that we are more uncomfortable with the chaos of silence? Does it create chaos in us? For me, as I look for silence, I am becoming more and more anxious and frustrated.

I am now halfway into my Dune Shack residence. Today I am feeling creative and connected to my subject. I just completed a drawing that was lots of fun and seemed more in tune with a sense of silence.

Still, I am having trouble "hearing" silence out here on the cliffs. I have started thinking again about my Morph Series in conjunction with the silence drawings I have done up to this point. It is becoming more and more pronounced how they echo each other. I keep coming back to an image of chaotic noise surrounding a hole of nothingness, which looks just as chaotic.

Still searching. I am realizing that it is wonderful to be totally self-absorbed - experiencing my surrounds as I see fit. Right now, I am sitting on the north side of my shack watching the dune grasses as they send their ever present yellow-green shuttering waves of fluid motion toward the indigo sea.

The back and forth of the grasses - Ah! I observe the point at which the grasses change direction. I can feel a sensation of silence at that point. Yes, that's it! As in a Buddhist teaching: Silence, along with the attention it fosters, is our anchor to the present, to the here and now.



I feel I am on to something. I'm thinking, I'm thinking. Redefine silence in relationship to its surrounding sounds. There's potential in the spaces between: letters, musical notes, words, waves, flowing grasses. Space can be shaped by

the silences in and around it. Now I have a direction to explore.

My exit out of the dunes proves to be a very powerful one. As we leave the soft, slow world of sand and silence, I am met with the thunderous swishing sounds of the man-made world. Cars rush by; tires whip up a way-too-loud noise. People are talking, laughing, making noise.

I take huge gasps of air to try to calm myself. I am having a panic attack. This is

something that I've never experienced before. Scary! I am asked if I want to drive home by my friend who picks me up. I can't drive. I don't trust myself.

It has taken me several weeks to regain my footing in this other world of senses.

In the dunes I was desensitized of external noise and simulation. I have now been drawn back into the morphed circle of chaos.



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