

### Dialogue #3: A Dialogue with Coexistence

For my final dialogue, the topic I chose to explore was coexistence. I decided to record both moments where human existence is emphasized, and moments in which natural elements were prominent. Since this was my aim, I chose Western's community centre (the UCC) as one environment for recording. As I walked through the UCC, I noticed that as I passed one group having a conversation, their voices would become louder and more discernible to me, and then as I walked past them and onto the next group, it was now this next group's conversation that took hold of my soundscape. The existence of human sound was a constant in this environment. After this, I recorded a few more environments outdoors. In these spaces, conversely to before, I aimed to find pockets of the Western campus where the sounds of humans were not as prominent, and the natural world had space to speak in its own way. In the absence of voices – including my own, as I tried to stay as quiet as possible—I was able to appreciate how natural elements played a central role in the soundscape.

When I began the process of editing these sounds together, I thought it would be interesting to arrange the sounds in a different way than I had originally recorded them, to emphasize the contrast of the two kinds of soundscapes. I took each of the elements I had recorded and placed them in between sections of the recording from the UCC. Listening back to this recording, I had an important realization. The juxtaposition of these natural environments being cut into the human-dominated one led me to understand that though these soundscapes seemed like opposites on the surface, all the same things were present in both. In the UCC soundscape, despite human voices being the prominent sounds, natural elements were present in every way. The walls, floors, tables, and chairs that allowed for these people to gather and talk were made from earth, the heating that kept them sheltered from the cold day outside came from fire, and air circulated

between them. Through listening, I found more and more connections between the natural elements and the humans in this soundscape, even if the human voices were dominating it. In the natural soundscapes, where water, wind, earth, and fire seemed more prominent to my ear, I could still sense my own human presence within the recording. Though I had aimed to be silent to allow the elements space in the soundscape, I still had interacted with them, nonetheless. In my attempt at silence, I was able to focus on the elements and understand their prominence in the soundscape, but through the ways they still interacted with me, and I with them, I understood our intrinsic connections to each other.

I think that this experience helped me understand last week's reading by Irigaray to a deeper extent. Irigaray explains to us that we (humans) have come to see ourselves as the centre of our universe who may define and classify everything else in our environment on our terms (47). She tells us that understanding the value of silence is essential to shifting this mindset, because through taking a moment to be silent, we completely listen to the experience of another (49) and understand our place as one piece in an environment of coexistence, rather than the centre of a universe that revolves around us. In that first environment, at the UCC, everyone was talking. When I walked away from one conversation, another one took its place. For this particular space, this seemed normal. It would have seemed odd to me to walk into the UCC and find it completely silent. Yet, listening back to the recording in which this environment was juxtaposed with environments in which no one was talking, the importance of silence revealed itself to me. It was these moments of silence, where my recording stopped centralizing the human perspective, that I was able to realize how interconnected we are to the elements that sustain us.

Reflecting on all this, I think that I have come to understand the importance of the ability to sometimes be silent. Though being comfortable with silence seems to go against our first

instinct, as humans in a Western culture – as I said before, it would seem odd to me to walk into a big building like the UCC and hear no one talking – making the active decision to make ourselves silent for moments in time in order to truly listen to the elements that compose our world is essential to our understanding of how we coexist with every aspect of our environment.