

# whisper house

*A performance, a document, a ritual.*

## What is whisper house?

---

**whisper house** is simultaneously a sound composition, a piece of literature, a fictional document, a performance art piece, experimental theater, a conceptual art piece, and a ritual. It is designed to function as any, or all, of these practices.

### As Composition

The piece explores sounds created by the "Guests" as they make sounds mediated by the house through space and distance. An audio recording is a viable iteration of this work.

### As Literature

A poetic, experimental, visual-musical text that can simply be read. Its surreal instructions act as gestures of speculative fiction or magical realism.

### As Fictional Document

An artifact from an imaginary world, akin to the *Codex Seraphinianus*.

### As Ritual

The act of reading or performing the text constitutes a ritual. Its impossible acts resemble Zen koans or are like spiritual actions performed by practitioners.

### As Performance Art

Focuses on actions performed by participants within the site of the house. A video recording is a viable form.

### As Theater

An extended scene wherein actors portray the Guests.

### As Conceptual Art

The idea itself, enacted only in the mind, is the work. The surreal instructions are "impossible instructions," intended to be held in thought rather than performed, reminiscent of Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit*.

*"There are many instructions in the piece that are surreal, impossible, or invisible. Participants may interpret these as they wish—omitting the impossible, enacting them symbolically, or holding them as internal affective gestures."*

## Performance Notes

The piece features four performers, referred to as **Guests**.

- The fourth Guest will not act until the very end.
- Guest 1 begins with a phone or laptop.
- Guest 3 begins with an encyclopedia.
- Unspecified details are left to the performers' interpretation.

*Location Requirement:* Must be performed in a house. There should be at least one room with a door and a doorknob.

## Materials Needed

### Books & Paper

Encyclopedia (Guest 3)

Dictionary & Novel

Envelope

### Kitchen & Dining

Frying Pan & Egg

Pitcher, Water, Glasses, Plates

Cutlery (Forks, Spoons, Knives)

Vegetables & Spices

### Household & Personal

Landline Phone (Guest 1)

Radio & Electric Fan

Laundry Basket, Basin, Clothes

Broom, Shell, Medicine/Pills

Tsinelas (Slippers) & Toothbrush

## The Audience

If performed, the audience may be the performers themselves. Alternatively, the audience may be located anywhere in the house, separate from the performers. This may be filmed, and the audience might be the watchers of the video.

## Program Notes

## CONCEPT

whisper house imagines a household vigil where individuals must constantly check on something—or someone—quite fragile. Like a holding pattern of care, they must move through the house gently, checking in on the fragile presence while trying not to disturb it.

The experience of this gentle vigil stems from four personal experiences regarding the thresholds of life and death.

**The first inspiration** comes from the slow decline of our family cats. Suffering from feline immunodeficiency virus, their health degraded in a slow, predictable fade over months or years. It was difficult to discern the right moment for euthanasia; they would dip in health and then recover, prolonging the uncertainty. In their final weeks, my family of four would take turns peeking into the room of the dying cat. We confined them to a single room to monitor for changes, always ready to call the vet. I remember thinking I didn't want to bother a creature that was already suffering. Being gentle, careful, and checking one-by-one seemed the only right thing to do. We would wait, hoping they could hang on until morning for a house call, avoiding the trauma of physical transport. We did this for four cats, each passing a year or so apart during the pandemic.

**The second inspiration** is the memory of my own sicknesses as a child. I remember people drifting in and out of my room, speaking softly, attending to me. Someone needed to check in constantly, yet the household had to keep running. Lying in bed, slightly delirious with fever, I heard the house through

a filter: the distant sound of ironing, the sizzle of frying food, the opening and closing of doors and windows, footsteps. These sounds were my only connection to the world, and I often wondered if my cats' experience of dying was similar to my experience of being sick—listening to the house from a distance.

**The third experience** relates to my grandfather. When I was young, he suffered from cardiovascular issues and strokes. He drifted in and out of the hospital. At home, house helpers, my parents, or my aunt would sleep in his room to react to any nightly emergencies. It was an intense vigil that continued even when he was hospitalized. I visited him weekly for two years until he passed. sometimes I would just sit in the room with him—a silent presence.

**The final inspiration** comes from the birth of my significantly younger siblings. They were so tiny, kept in a cradle in a quiet room. The dynamic was much the same: they required constant attention. During their afternoon naps, we took turns peeking at them to ensure they were safe while we continued our chores. We moved quietly, sneaking in to retrieve items or just to look. Always quiet. Always gentle. In many ways, this was not so different from the vigils for the sick and the dying.

*"So, this is what whisper house tries to embody. There's a presence in the piece of something fragile, at the cusp of life and death, but it's not necessarily specified. It is just something fragile."*

The piece can be interpreted as the soundscape from the point of view of the

fragile, or from the point of view of the caretakers. I remember during those vigils, I had to stay attentive. I would find small, undemanding activities to feel productive, or simply to focus on something else so I wasn't obsessing over the situation. I needed to be occupied yet flexible, ready to make the correct action when the time came.

### This piece asks questions

I leave many things open and unexplained because I want this piece to provoke inquiry.

Who are the audience, really?

What is the house?

Who—or what—is really being cared for?

What is fragile here?

Why are the Guests "guests"?

How many characters are in this piece?

What is being performed?

Where is this taking place?