

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?

whisper house

for four guests and one empty house

come il tempo è un oceano

A

each measure lasts around 30 seconds each

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
|---------|---|---|--|---|---|
| guest 1 | [30 sec] <i>p</i> whisper to each other |  | walk quietly towards a window, to the door, and back to the window | stare at the door of the room | tap on the window while staring at the door |
| guest 2 | [30 sec] <i>p</i> whisper to each other | | whisper to each other |  | turn on the faucet slightly, turn it off, then on |
| guest 3 | [30 sec] <i>p</i> whisper to each other | | whisper to each other | whisper to yourself | go to the radio and turn it on at a low volume |
| guest 4 | [30 sec] | - | - | - | - |

5

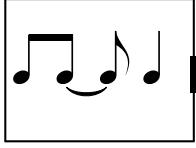
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| | | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|---|---|
| guest 1 | take deep breaths and sway |  | walk towards the kitchen | open the drawers with cutlery | assemble the vegetables for chopping at the table. As if you are not sure which is first and last |
| guest 2 | run your hands through the water then turn off the faucet | | tap on the mirror while staring at the door | take deep breaths, and sway. Blow on the wind | Gather clothes and put them in the laundry basket |
| guest 3 | listen to the radio, and be unsure about what it says | | Clap softly to yourself | walk in a circle around the room, slowly | stare outside the window |
| guest 4 | | - | - | - | - |

| | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---------|---|---|--|---|
| guest 1 | fill the pitcher with water, if it is empty | turn on the electric fan listen to its wind | move through the settings of the electric fan. Leave it on | find the encyclopedia and place it on the floor |
| guest 2 | hum a tune | clap softly to yourself | walk towards the ktichen | stare at the vegetables |
| guest 3 | stare outside the window | go to the laundry basket, and hold the clothes in your arms | dance with the clothes in your arms, softly humming, put them in the laundry basin | fill the laundry basin with water |
| guest 4 | ■■■ | ■■■ | ■■■ | ■■■ |

| | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| guest 1 | connect to the wi-fi | realize you don't know the password. It is not in the encyclopedia | arrange the tsinelas near the entrance | walk towards the table |
| guest 2 | pour some water, slowly | take small sips of water | place glasses on the table |  walk towards the room |
| guest 3 | walk to the kitchen and select plates | place the plates on the tables | watch the glasses being placed on the table and move towards the encyclopedia | turn the pages of the encyclopedia  <i>ppp</i> |
| guest 4 | ■■■ | ■■■ | ■■■ | ■■■ |

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|---------|--|---|---|---|
| guest 1 | rotate the plates on the table | place the forks near the plates | continue rotating the plates then the forks | step towards the room |
| guest 2 | nervously rub hands together | open the door and slide gently | coo quietly into the room as if cooing to something small and just awoken | continue as if cooing to something small and just fallen asleep |
| guest 3 | think about this motive 5 this encyclopedia is from 1991 | continue to turn the pages at your own rhythm USSR would still be here, Chernobyl just happened. It is still covered in ash. | turn the pages knowing now that this encyclopedia is not of this earth | close the book |
| guest 4 | | - | - | - |

B

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|---------|---|--|------------------------------|--|
| guest 1 | walk to the laundry basin | plunge your hands into the still water | wash one piece of clothing | sing a low note into the water |
| guest 2 | move away from the Room, leave the door ajar to allow the pollen in | find a novel | open a book to a random page | trace the gaps between the words |
| guest 3 | walk to the kitchen | open a kitchen cabinet | uncap a spice and smell it | tap a small amount of spice on the counter. you may mix spices |
| guest 4 | | - | - | - |

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|---------|---|--|---|---|
| guest 1 | lift the wet cloth, wringing it slowly and letting the water drip | leave the laundry and walk to the table | pick up the forks and set them down on the table in reverse | pick up the spoons and set them down beside the fork as if magnetized |
| guest 2 | whisper-speak a passage from the book | close the book, then close it again. leave it on the floor | stand near the phone, as if waiting | let the phone ring in your mind |
| guest 3 | draw waves on the spice piles with your finger | walk towards the front door | pick up the envelope use it to fan yourself | scratch the envelope gently. It has no address |
| guest 4 | ■■■ | ■■■ | ■■■ | ■■■ |

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| | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|--|
| guest 1 | ■■■ pick them up again and change your mind | set the knives on the table | there are more knives than either spoons or forks | walk towards the bathroom, but don't interrupt guest 3 |
| guest 2 | ■■■ pick up the receiver | whisper back to the silence on the line | hang up the phone and tap on it | dial any years you remember on the phone |
| guest 3 | ■■■ hold the envelope to your ear, and listen | walk towards the bathroom, stop at the door | Tap on the door but not with your nails | Listen to the door |
| guest 4 | ■■■ | ■■■ | ■■■ | ■■■ |

33

34

each measure from here lasts
around 15 seconds each

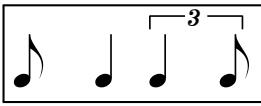
| | | | | |
|---|--|--------|---|---|
| guest 1 II stand in front of the bathroom sink and let the faucet trickle | II stand in front of the bathroom sink and let the faucet trickle | 15 sec | — | — |
| | | 15 sec |  | — |
| | | 15 sec | tap repeatedly 2-3 times then freely improvise | — |
| | | 15 sec |  | stomp and clap repeatedly 2-3 times then freely improvise |
| guest 2 II sit at the table and try to perceive guest 1 and guest 3 | II tap on the table  | 15 sec | — | — |
| | | 15 sec |  | — |
| | | 15 sec | — | — |
| | | 15 sec | — | — |
| guest 3 II walk away from the bathroom and stand in the middle of any room of your choice | II walk away from the bathroom and stand in the middle of any room of your choice | 15 sec | — |  |
| | | 15 sec | — | — |
| | | 15 sec | — | — |
| | | 15 sec | — | — |
| guest 4 II — | II — | 15 sec | — | — |
| | | 15 sec | — | — |
| | | 15 sec | — | — |
| | | 15 sec | — | — |

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|--|--|---|---|---|
| guest 1 II  | II splash repeatedly 2-3 times then freely improvise | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| guest 2 II — | II — | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| guest 3 II — | II — | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| guest 4 II — | II — | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |
| | | — | — | — |

0:00

⁴¹ each measure from here⁴¹ lasts around 30 seconds⁴³ each

44

| | | | | |
|---------|--|---|---|---|
| guest 1 | II [30 sec] turn off the faucet and walk slowly out of the bathroom | pace across the house before moving to the door of the room | gently knock on the door of the room as if it were lucky to do so | mutter facing away from the room. realize there is no internet. this house is not connected to anything |
| guest 2 | II [30 sec] rearrange a few items on the table randomly | rotate the plates as if spinning vinyls | Hum a low note, maintain it through breaths <i>p</i> | stop humming and rub your face and arms and body as if a violin |
| guest 3 | II [30 sec] go to the nearest source of glass | breath into the surface of the glass, and slide your finger on it | find some medicine, and gently let the pills flow inside like a rainmaker | walk towards the the bathroom |
| guest 4 | II [30 sec] — | a — | — | — |

C

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| | | | | |
|---------|---|---|--|--|
| guest 1 | II mutter facing away from the room. realize there is no internet. this house is not connected to anything | leave the door of the room ajar and walk away | walk towards the shell | hold the shell and tap on it |
| guest 2 | II walk away from the room | walk towards the laundry | fold the clothes as loudly as you can <i>f</i> | place the folded clothes in the laundry basin filled with water <i>p</i> |
| guest 3 | II walk in circles inside the bathroom | turn on the shower | turn the shower on and off | Wash your face |
| guest 4 | II — | — | — | — |

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| | | | | |
|---------|--|--|--|--|
| guest 1 | Listen to the shell this sound is part of the music | pretend to whisper a story into the shell about the way clouds pass | walk towards the table and place the shell on it to act as a centerpiece | Go to the floor and pick up the dictionary |
| guest 2 | gently lift the folded clothes from the basin letting water drip | find a place to hang the clothes and hang them | take a broom and sweep the floor | sweep in small circles as if stirring small hurricanes |
| guest 3 | Take a toothbrush and brush your hair with it | Brush the mirror where your hair is. | Brush the walls going in small circles | leave the brush and turn the faucet on and off |
| guest 4 | | - | - | - |

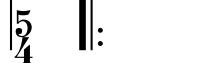
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55

56

for the next four measures
repeat 2-3 times then improvise until
15 seconds have passed

| | | | | |
|---------|---|---|---|---|
| guest 1 | place the dictionary on the table. this is the meal. | move the dictionary on the plate until it feels right | examine what's on the table, make adjustments for the meal |  15 sec turn the pages |
| guest 2 | leave the broom and go to the table | spill any remaining water from the glasses on the table at the sink | examine what's on the table, bring a pitcher of water |  15 sec pour water into the glasses |
| guest 3 | leave the faucet off and go to the table | prepare the table and guests for the meal | examine what's on the table, make adjustments for the meal |  15 sec use the table objects as percussion |
| guest 4 | | - | - |  15 sec |

57

58

59

60

guest 1

drum on the dictionary

guest 2

clink or tap any glass

guest 3

tap the table

manipulate any table object

guest 4

flip through random parts of the dictionary and speak softly a word there

whisper inaudibly about the weather and how we can recover from this economy

listen and respond in short humming sounds to guest 2

| | | 62 | 63 | 64 |
|---------|--|---|---|--|
| guest 1 | | show guest 2 the dictionary and sing some definitions | turn pages after each name guest 3 recites, as if looking for their definitions | stand up and sit on another chair. repeat until this measure is finished |
| guest 2 | | clink softly on a plate to accompany guest 1 | make a call to the ediacaran. let them know. | stand up and sit on another chair. repeat until this measure is finished |
| guest 3 | | bring the vegetables from the kitchen to the table | counter clockwise, starting with your position, softly and slowly whisper the names of the objects on the table | stand up and sit on another chair. repeat until this measure is finished |
| guest 4 | | - | - | - |

| | D | | | |
|---------|--|---|--|---|
| | 65 | 66 | 67 | 68 |
| guest 1 | II stand from the table and walk to the kitchen dragging yourself | fry an egg | continue to fry the egg | the egg will gradually bloom into seismograph |
| guest 2 | II sit on any chair around the table and take deep breaths | sit on any chair around the table and take deep breaths | go to the glass garden | realize it is fed by the moon. |
| guest 3 | II whimper into the room as if to something frail and ill | whimper into the room as if to something | allow the wind to gently shut the door | listen to the walls |
| guest 4 | II | - | - | - |

| | 69 | 70 | 71 | 72 |
|---------|---|---|--|----------|
| guest 1 | II walk towards the room, and join guest 3 outside | whisper and hum to nothing in particular | whisper and hum to nothing in particular | - |
| guest 2 | II walk back into the house | walk towards the room, and join guest 1 and 3 by the door | whisper and hum to nothing in particular | - |
| guest 3 | II whisper and hum to nothing in particular | whisper and hum to nothing in particular | whisper and hum to nothing in particular | - |
| guest 4 | II | - | - | wake up. |

73

guest 1



—

guest 2



—

guest 3



—

guest 4



in the Room,
whisper as if
still dreaming.