

At the beginning of our performance *When will the September roses bloom?* Last night was only a comedy, no sooner do we start the action than Bryan Saner enters to announce that we are missing the beginning. This announcement is followed by 55 seconds of silence in which those of us on stage wait motionless for the time to pass.

As part of our effort to approach the idea of repair, *September roses* attempts to perform incompleteness, to force a kind of fracture that does not automatically heal itself. Goat Island performances have always played with time and perception, but whereas in past pieces we may have done this by using repetition and duration of action, in *September roses* we are using empty space, silence, and dislocation. Our task is to make clear that irreversible rupture has taken place. And yet our theatre is not a theatre that dramatizes rupture. Rather, it examines states or conditions that are the evidence of this rupture. By this I mean we are not going to show you the way it was rent, only the evidence of that rending.

If we are in a state of disrepair, then something must be missing. Missingness equals loss and in turn equals mourning. We stop everything to absorb the loss. A moment of silence. Two minutes of silence. Let us observe a period of silence for our fallen brothers, for the murdered girls, for the countless millions who have suffered. Silence is a prayer. An offering. A gift. But also: because words cannot express my anguish, because I am at a loss for words, because I can't think, because it demonstrates the void I feel, because it is a sacrifice.

There is a healing quality to silence—especially group silence performed willingly. Why then is it a provocation in performance?

A book can present a blank page. A film can freeze on a single frame. Music can cease suddenly. But it must be impossible for bodies in front of an audience to stop time or to alter it or to stop the forward motion of the piece before it has come to its conclusion and the performers have left the space. Yet with the participation of the audience we make this attempt. In a work-in-progress performance in Bristol, England, there were several missing scenes. In the moments in which we stood still without moving or speaking the audience began to feel an assortment of altered states. In the post-show discussions, some people expressed discomfort with the pauses in action. They were holes in the performance, a breach of etiquette, a social gaff, maybe even an amateurish inadequacy. Because it was a work-in-progress some people thought that the blank spots were temporary. Others described their feelings about the holes or voids in the performance in terms of visceral experience, as something they had fallen into. For those who were paying close attention without blinking, the empty moments became the blank page on which they projected a kind of mental afterimage.

Human beings hear echoes. We see absences. It seems that we are always striving toward wholeness. A mending process begins the moment our skin is broken, as an automatic process of the body. It does not require thought. The brain/eye duet that produces images where they are not is what allows the still pictures of the cinema to appear to move, and allows us to miss the space between the stillness that is void. Our nature is to patch the gaps. Our entire organism is working to fill in the voids that we encounter, or to distract us from them, to instill a comfortable sense of continuity.

I met a man who is writing a book about waiting. He says that waiting is the most terrifying thing that we do. He defines waiting as a time when a person is doing nothing at all. You are not truly waiting if you are, for example, in the doctor's office reading a magazine while you wait for an appointment. He says in this case you are reading a magazine. If a person is truly only waiting, he claims, it is a terribly destabilizing existential crisis. We are faced with questions of our own existence and the nature of being if we do not have something to distract our minds from them. Busy hands and busy minds are protection from idle moments in which we might begin to doubt or fear. This is why the doctor's waiting room has magazines.

I'm on stage, waiting. No magazines. I sit still and try to soften my gaze. The tiny hairs on my face are ecstatic. They straighten out from my face and waver in the air around my head. I am not allowed to move: to scratch to twitch to sigh. It's just a piece of time, a duration, a moment of blank. In these moments, doubts creep in, questions, queries, desires: have we lost control of the performance? Yet also in these moments we are being watched more closely than before. Small signs become important, the quivering of the flesh, the pumping of the blood, the rise and fall of breath, the effort to remain still, the impossibility of the attempt, the readability of our faces, our postures, the futility of our intentions, the interconnectedness of people in a room, the multitude of death we represent in the form of our ancestors, the reality of our collective survival after years of struggle.

In 1985, John Cage wrote a piece for piano called *ASLSP*, or *As Slow as Possible*. It was supposed to last twenty minutes or so, but for years musicologists have deliberated over just how slow "as slow as possible" really is. Right now a performance of it is taking place in the German town of Halberstadt that will take 639 years to complete. The performance began on September 5, 2001 and is scheduled to last until 2639. Since the composition begins with a rest, the first year and a half of the performance was in silence. The first chord began to sound on February 2, 2003. On July 5, 2004 two more notes were added. An organ was specially made for this performance and the keys are held down by weights. The John Cage Organ Foundation agreed on the figure of 639 years to correspond with the number of years since the construction of Germany's first single-block organ.