

# Distance

*for performer and cassette player*

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## Performance Space

- To be performed in an intimately-sized space, one which possesses no physical stage that would create separation between performer and audience (such as an art gallery, loft, large bedroom, living room, etc.) The walls surrounding the performer should be bare, and apart from the cassette player and 3 objects (detailed below,) nothing else should surround the performer (unless related to lighting.)
- Audience should be seated, either in chairs or, ideally, on the floor in front of the performer, with enough space to allow the performer's movement.
- Lighting is contingent on the performance space, but should be fairly dim, with just enough light for the performer, cassette player, and objects to be seen by the audience.

## Stage Props

- Used portable cassette player with built-in speaker.
- A cassette tape.
- 3 objects placed in a row in front of the Performer and Cassette Player:
  - A fragment of paper, frayed at the edges as if torn from a larger sheet. The side facing upwards should contain a few lines of writing, but should not be visible to the audience
  - A set of two small stones of differing colors and textures.
  - A picture frame lying on its back, its photograph barely visible to the audience

## Preparation of Cassette Tape

- The reader of the dialogue must be an individual other than the performer.
- The cassette should contain only the dialogue and sound specified for the cassette player in the piece. The dialogue should generally be recited in a rather calm, detached, and undramatic manner, yet not completely devoid of emotive qualities either.
- Enough time must be placed between each segment of dialogue to allow the actions of the performer to develop organically and unhurried.

Lights fade in.

Cassette Player placed stage right on floor, empty and switched off. The three objects lined up in a row in front of the performance area: fragment of paper stage left, set of stones stage center, picture frame stage right.

Grasping cassette tape in their right hand, Performer slowly enters from side stage, gently and awkwardly shuffling their feet as they walk, their focus on the floor in front of them. As they approach the cassette player, Performer stops and looks at the cassette player. After a brief pause, Performer gently crouches down, opens cassette player, and enters tape.

After pressing the play button, Performer rises up and gently walks stage left of the cassette player, then crouches down and gently kneels down on both knees, hands resting upon them.

Pause. (≈ 30 seconds)

**Cassette:** Begin.

Performer slowly looks around at their surroundings before raising head to look into the audience. After a few moments have passed, Performer lowers head and stares at the floor.

**Cassette:** Tell me again. What do you see?

Performer leans forward over the fragment of paper lying in front of them. After pausing for a few moments, they slowly grasp the paper with their right hand and lift it off the floor to inspect the writing.

**Performer:** Missing. (Turns paper around to see the back, notices it's blank, turns paper back around, gently lays it on the floor. Hand returns to lap.)

**Cassette:** And this?

Performer slightly turns head stage right and looks down at the set of stones. After pausing for a few moments, Performer hesitantly reaches over and grasp the stones, one in each hand. Performer then holds each stone directly in front of themselves, slowly examining each stone with their eyes, while preserving the space that separated the stones on the floor.

**Performer:** Distance. (Brief pause, slowly places stones back on floor in original position.)

**Cassette:** (softer than before) And this?

Performer slowly turns head stage right and looks at picture frame, then lowers head and stares at floor. After a long pause, face still directed at the floor, Performer slowly shuffles their body over and re-enters a kneeling position beside the Cassette Player.

Once there, Performer slowly reaches over, grabs the picture frame with both hands, gently pulls it against the floor, and rests it upon their knees. Both hands gently hold the sides of the frame, keeping the picture out of audience's view. Performer looks down at picture in silence, right thumb gently and intermittently stroking the side of the frame. (≈ 30 seconds)

With a faint tremble, Performer gently places picture frame back on floor, and pushes it to original position in front of Cassette Player, then rests hands together in lap, head directed downwards.

**Cassette:** Look.

Performer slowly lifts head and turns to look at the bare wall, stage left. After staring at the wall for a few moments, Performer looks down again, then slowly stands up, their body turns to face the direction of the wall.

**Cassette:** Walk.

After a brief pause, hesitantly, Performer slowly takes a few steps towards the wall, then abruptly stops, frozen in position. Performer lifts head up and stares at the wall. After a few moments, Performer lowers head, and begins walking again until they reach the wall.

Performer gradually kneels down before the wall, slowly feeling the surface of it with both hands, as if trying to find a way through. Their eyes examine the wall, their mouth subtly moving, as if trying to speak.

**Cassette:** (gently, as a whisper) Listen.

Performer ceases movement. With both hands pressed against the wall, Performer gently presses right side of face against the wall, directed towards audience, and closes eyes. Inhales through nose slowly and audibly, holds breath for 5-10 seconds, exhales slowly and audibly. Remains frozen in position, eyes shut, silent.

**Cassette:** This has all happened before, hasn't it? Do you remember? (Pause)

Again, returned to this moment. Again...alone...in this moment. Consumed and exhausted...by the endless entanglements of forms. (Pause)

Though perhaps there is still something left...one last...whimper of memory...left untouched. (Long pause.)

It's winter. (Pause.)

A rather desolate shore, further out to the west. (Pause.)

Leaden clouds hang low in the sky, cradling the surrounding world in their shade, as distant streaks of pale sky gently dissolve into gray. Diffuse constellations of stones blanket the sands, as the shoreline is endlessly traced and re-traced by the incoming tide. One still remembers the numbing sensation in the fingertips, and the lingering smell of moisture in the frigid air. (Pause.)

But you were not alone in this place. (Pause.)

No. (Pause.)

You were not alone in this place. (Pause.)

Gradually, you see another slip into focus. Crouched down upon the shore with a set of stones nestled in her hands. You kneel down behind her and rest your head upon her shoulder as the wind rustles her hair, strands of hueless amber softly grazing your cheek. You both sit in silence, watching stones disappear into the ocean, as if being forced to inhabit separate planes, like the celestial bodies' yearly passings. (Pause.)

Together, you both sit in silence, each of you knowing this moment will end, each of you secretly believing it won't. (Long pause.)

But don't mind me. (Pause.)

This has all happened before, hasn't it? Do you remember? (Pause.)

But was it you? (Pause.)

Or were you someone else?

*Performer opens their eyes. After looking into the distance for a few moments, Performer lifts their hands and face off of the wall, and carefully stands up. Performer turns around and slowly walks back towards the objects, freezing in position behind the stones, head looking down at them.*

**Cassette:** Can you feel this?

*Performer crouches down, and picks up the stones, one in each hand. With hands cupped together and the stones nestled inside of them, Performer stands up and begins to slowly walk away from the stage area.*

**Cassette:** (softer) Can you feel this?

Performer suddenly stops, and pauses. They lower head to look down at the stones, and after a few moments, gently fold their left hand over their right, the stones hidden inside. Hands grasping one another, Performer then lifts their head, and looking forward, resumes walking until they disappear into the darkness behind the audience. Silence. (≈15 seconds)

Cassette: (faint, distant whisper) End.

Complete stillness until cassette player shuts off.

Lights slowly fade to darkness.