

A Little East of Jordan
[The Geography of Healing]

A performance in multiple parts based on 2 Kings 2:21

Written/Devised/Choreographed by Patrice Miller
with crowd-sourced original text,
and some text from George Bataille

Commissioned by Spark and Echo Arts

Dedicated to wonder-worker Kelly Coviello.

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[Geography of Healing] is a performance piece in multiple parts including text, theater, and dance.

Each audience member is given a small amount of salt, and some water.

A black or white board is used in Part Four, but may be substituted with posterboard and markers, etc.

Part One: Intention

Part one is a silent audience participation segment. Stated in the program or elsewhere in audience view is the following:

This is a piece about healing.
Think about your healing,
think about your body, your home, your country,
and how you would live in it if your were healed.

Part Two: Themes on a Variation (The Sands)

A modern dance solo.

video link:

Part Three: Ritual (Salt Water)

(Spoken by the performer who danced).

Actor One

Me, I exist -- suspended in a realized void -- suspended from my own dread -- different from all other being and such that the various event that can real all other being and not *me* cruelly throw this *me* out of a total existence. But, at the same time, I consider my coming into the world -- which depended on the birth and the conjunction of a given man and woman, then on the moment of their conjunction.

There exists, in fact, a unique moment in relation to the possibility of me -- and thus the infinite improbability of this coming into the world appears. For if the tiniest difference had occurred in the course of the successive events of which I am the result, in the place of this *me*, integrally avid to be *me*, there would be an "other" - George Bataille, On Sacrifice

(May interweave this quote into dance?)

This is where we talk about ritual. I may have tricked you. By being here, you have entered into what people like Bataille like to *liminal* time. And that's because we are in the middle of something. Because by entering this space, and sitting a chair, and clapping at the end you are performing a time-honored ritual of our people.

But that's not the ritual we are talking about. Each of you has been given some water and some salt. I am sorry, it is not sacred salt from the Himalayas, but we are going to make it sacred by thinking about

our healing and putting it in the water. Not right now. Or not necessarily right now. You don't have to do it now. You can do it when you feel like making the change. When something speaks to you or maybe when something stops speaking to you. Maybe the dance already did that, then you should move your salt into the water.

By doing this, we are taking a single act of a prophet named Elisha and making it a ritual.

We are increasing its density, and raised its boiling point. It is bigger, it will remain in its current state a little longer. We are extending the life of the water. We are creating a small ocean. We are creating an inhospitable environment for many types of bacteria.

We are purifying our own water.

Part Four: Process

Actor Two and Actor Three enter, bringing with them a black or white board, with writing instruments.

Actor Two

Hi. I am Me. I am the outsider who watches your rituals, your plays, your weddings, your social media self-construction. Because of this exile, I am comfortable giving you salt and water, I am confident it will have meaning to you, real or contributed, immediate or progressive. I know that makes you, as a group, tick.

Actor Three

I am also Me. I am the skeptic who still can't figure out what "healing" means, and if this performance is the right way to deal with any of this.

Actor One

This is the part where we talk about process.

Actor Two

Where I forget about rituals, prophets, and source materials.

Actor Three

And think only of the bear.

Actor One

Why the bear?

Actor Two

addressing the audience

This piece, *A Little East of Jordan*, is an artistic reaction, an illumination of sorts of 2 Kings 2:21.

Actor One

in a Biblical voice

“(And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said,) Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren (land)”

And when Elisha was done with the salt water miracle, he set out on foot.

Actor Two

And was teased by some *youths*.

Actor One

Forty two of them.

Actor Three

And cursed them. With a bear. A she-bear that mauled them.

Then, Elisha kept walking.

Actor One

The rest is silence.

Actor Three

Except it's not.

Actor Two

Process is noisy. Caffeinated, dislocated.

Actor Three

No one really wants to hear about process. They didn't come to hear about art being made.

They came to see it. Made.

Actor Two

It's worse enough they have this salt and water to deal with --

Actor One

I actually thought the salt was nice.

Actor Three

I still don't understand why this piece isn't about the bear.

Actor Two

The bear doesn't heal anyone. It's the anti-structure.

(Beat)

It's the undifferentiated monster, the dark mirror of humanity.

Actor Three

It's almost like Elisha didn't know what he was capable of.
It's a warning.

Actor One

Don't expect good things?

Actor Two

Don't trust a prophet?

Actor Three

Choose wisely. Heal wisely.

Actor Two

Can anyone really do that?

Would we be standing in a theater if we were able to do that?

Look, in a liminal space, like where we are right now, or where Elisha was when he was confronting those youths, the participants of a ritual are caught in a double bind. Right now, we are sending confusing messages to the audience: "You are here for a show about healing" "We now interrupt this show to talk with you about process and undermine the confidence of performance". Elisha was a wonder-worker, a healer, but he was also a prophet, so he was bound to get rid of those youths. Maybe, in a way, he was purifying the soul of the community after purifying their bodies.
Or maybe healing is chaotic and impure, requires a little sacrifice.

Actors One and Three give her a round of applause?

Actor Three

Feel better?

Actor Two

A little.

Actor One

Do you want to explain how we got here?

Actor Two

Yes.

Actor One

When I first conceived this piece, I decided I wanted to crowd-source text. I called it crowd-sourcing because the data was being given freely for the sake of the project, and the call was open to all who wished to participate.

*Sound cue: A series of social media updates - Facebook, Twitter, etc.
Actors Two and Three reach for their phones, updating, scrolling throughout this section.
Actor One attempts the solo from earlier as Actors Two and Three walk around with their phones, updating the board. Hashtags are written on the board more manically over time, eventually crowding it.*

Actor Two

But I kept getting distracted from this. At first, it was Syria's civil war. It was #trending. Then Ukraine. Daisey Coleman. Ebola in West Africa. Gaza. The Harlem house raids.

Actor One

Keep going. Just keep going.

Actor Three

More Gaza. Bring back our girls. Rape protests in India. Gamergate.

Actor One

Just keep going.

Actor Two

Still, more Gaza. Ferguson.
Perpetual Ferguson.

Actor One

My heart is breaking, and I'm afraid to tell you how much it is breaking because I know our griefs are different. I do not want to bargain for what part of our pain is mine and what part is yours.

Actor Three

I thought about Elisha and the forty two young men that bear mauled them as video after video, status after status, tweet after tweet came through to my Queens apartment.

Actor Two

If there were fewer voices maybe we'd be able to hear each other. I listen a lot. And say very little.

Actor Three

Look, let me just say one thing and get it out of the way. It's not that I don't believe social change or healing is possible, but I feel like it is so rare that we as humans are ever able to change one another's minds. With a hashtag. The cacophony is too much.

Actor One

My silence is born of fear or shame. The only person I seem to never be able to forgive is myself. I wear my regret like a seatbelt, protecting me from further injury.

Actors Two and Three turn off their phones.

Actor Two

Still, the telling of stories requires witnesses.
By submitting our observations to a larger conversation we are bearing witness to ourselves and to others. Even in one hundred and forty characters.

Actor Three

Sharing stories is a necessary and sacred act. Healing is a performance, and performance is process.

Part Five: Performance

Actor One

This is the part where we perform.

Actor Three

Finally.

A. The Sands.

Actor Three recites the poem while Actor One and Actor Two move and dance. (link to original performance:)

Actor Three

A neutral space, a pathway of
sanitary metal walls and cool air where
nothing is touching me, and no one is interested in me.
No one is there.

Sometimes I deliberately go back and
retrace steps that I know lead nowhere.
I can't climb and cheat to see my way to the center.
I walk every step of this journey.

Walking takes its toll, and I sit a lot.
I take a lot of breaks.
Stillness - stagnation -
time doesn't exist here.

The body is like a rag doll in this place.

The place itself is trying to push me out
I walk every step of this journey.
I can't climb and cheat to see my way,
a bigger force comes from within.
Being here is like watching a flower grow
while driving away from it,
I walk every step of this journey.

Ozone Layer.

The borders are liquid, they shift and change.
Tiny sub-atomic particles rotate in the same direction,
no matter the distance they are separated.
I can't climb and cheat to see my way,
I walk every step of this journey.

There are different places in this land.
A seascape of rocky Atlantic waters, where
the waves strike the land with a fervor
and angry ecstasy. I witness their fury,
but know I am safe on the sands.
Like a beach in a box,
no one is here.

Walking takes its toll, and I sit a lot.
Plant myself with all of my might to stay.

Maybe it's through water.
A cleansing bath of tears
followed by the stillness
of exhaustion and emptiness.

Instead of refilling the well with salt and sand,
new waters spring forth.
The tainted taste in the air and
on my tongue changes to sweet softness.

I search for a talisman but
if you remove the rocks, they cut you.
But know I am safe on the sands.

I start wearing armor, and

underneath the plate mail (perhaps)
or leather guards (maybe)
or long sleeves to keep off the mosquitoes (most often)
the little cuts start to heal.
The guards stay on a very long time.
They stay on so long it becomes part of my skin.

I deliberately go back and retrace steps,
I can't climb to see my way.
Walking takes its toll.

I settle by the shores of a large lake.
It is so vast that standing at the edge,
its horizons fill my peripheral vision.
I sit back on the hard rock,
watching the moon reflect off the pools
that were left on the rocks from the waves.

Small creatures swim in the temporary ponds,
and the moon trembles in response.

The body is like a rag doll in this place.
The place itself is trying to push you out
I walk every step of this journey.

In my pockets I find a deep blue stone.
It looks like cheap glass, but
it is the color of the sky reflected
off the water reflecting again;
An orchid that will wither as
we leave its grounds,
but the fragrance will linger;
The sands, still caught on my clothes,
I will find them months from now
in odd corners where they have carried.
Reminders of wind and oasis.

- B. Voice recording of a man reading second narrative. Staging/dance.
Italics indicate the recorded text. Non-italicized text is spoken live.

To look at my life through an historical eye, one could say I have been dealing with loss from almost the very start.

My father was killed in a tragic plane crash while serving on active duty in the US Air Force. My father died on a routine mission. There was bad weather upon the initial descent. They hit a mountain. Grazing the top, causing the plane to careen over and roll down the opposite side. It was, according to local Spanish newspapers, a terrible sight. Almost everyone onboard was killed.

I was four.

Actor One

I am thinking of Ferguson. I am thinking of St Paul, Los Angeles, Florida. I am thinking about how impossible it is to draw maps of the present, let alone the past.

I remember sitting on the lap of the Air Force Priest as he comforted my family.

I am told I played with his hair.

Actor Two

I am thinking of a mattress being carried across Columbia University's campus. I am thinking of the thousands of women whose rape kits go unprocessed, I am thinking of how scared I am now about what happened years ago.

I didn't know what I was missing, for the most part, and so, didn't miss it.

Actor Three

I am thinking about how easy it is for all of us to point to outside, elsewhere, other places, people.

I am thinking about blaming the moon, the weather, the changing winds for our own shoddy navigation.

It always seemed as though the family were secretly still sad.

Actor Two

I am thinking about #yesallwomen and wondering why I am still afraid at parties, at home alone, in the subway car, in my bed.

I never learned anything about my father.

I wrote a poem called "Memories never lost or found" in it were the snippets of things I thought I remembered about my father. I thought that was that. And I grew up.

Twelve years of drug and alcohol abuse.

Actor Three

These things, they are too much for me.

Especially when my heart and soul are still broken from a long time ago.

I completely lack a compass.

Actor One

I am thinking about silence. How I crave it, especially in the midst of information binging, needing more clicks, more bites, more evidence that somehow justifies my sadness and rage. How silence comes when I need it least, when I am about to act, how it can be ice and a chokehold, or a tenderness and freedom.

I got sober in 2001.

I was seeing a therapist for what I thought were issues related to my being a better boyfriend. Well, low and behold at the end of a few months I was in a pool of tears admitting that I missed my father.

Actor Two

This feeling of losing my country, my body, my home.
How can I act when I am constantly losing these?

So I grieved.

Actor Three

I don't know how to grieve something that is happening.
That keeps happening.

I looked into the plane crash. I have learned that it was routine on long missions to be given uppers in order to stay awake for the required amount of time to complete the mission. I have learned that the misreading of the altimeter was due to the fact that the cockpit crew were, in effect, high.

Actor Two

I need the miracle of a slate wiped clean, of erasing all the fingerprints of men who put their hands on me when I was a piece of clay, shaping my desires and expectations, my fears.

Actor One

Of eradicating borders and deconstructing history.
The miracle of escaping my mind.

Actor Three

I am thinking about all of the excuses we apply to the misuse of power, especially our own.
The maps we purposefully misconfigure to maintain our isolation.

A big part of healing and grieving is the ability to know when to step back and allow the person to do the healing and grieving themselves. A shoulder to cry on is a very special thing, but once that shoulder isn't there, then we are left to figure out how to cope with loss and pain on our own.

Actor One

I need the miracle of adaptation, to occupy the past and present until they are wholly mine.

Actor Three

But those miracles don't exist. I need the space where I am the miracle.

Actor Two

I am thinking of a young prophet who had to witness the destruction of his miracles.

I am thinking of silence. I am thinking of the silence that accompanied Elisha
as he continued his journey.

Actor One

Destruction gnaws deeply and thus purifies sovereignty itself. The imperative purity of time is opposed to God, whose skeleton is hidden behind gold draperies, under a tiara, and behind a mask: the divine mask and suavity express the application of an imperative form, giving itself as providence for the management of political oppression. But in divine love the freezing gleam of a sadistic skeleton is infinitely unveiled. George Bataille.

Actor Three

I am thinking about the silence we crave and the silence we let dominate, about our power to make witnesses of each other as we display our power, about making witnesses of ourselves.

Does it need to be said? Does it need to be said by me? Does it need to be said by me now?

The actors exit briefly to get some water.

Part Six: Exit

The actors reenter.

Actor One

Me from Myself — to banish —
Had I Art —
Impregnable my Fortress
Unto All Heart —

Actor Two

But since Myself — assault Me —
How have I peace
Except by subjugating
Consciousness?

Actor Three

And since We're mutual Monarch
How this be
Except by Abdication —
Me — of Me?

Actor One

This is the part where we wonder if it worked.

Actor Three

Did the power of theater happen?

Actor Two

Did you all put the salt in the water?

Actor Three

Or have we failed?

Actor Three

This is the part where we conclude that healing has no geography because it is a reaction to this world.
Because it is weather and water, not a destination or even a journey.

Actor Two

The part where we say it takes something you never knew you had and it takes using that thing in a
previously unimagined way.

Actor One

The part where we tell you that we invite you to use that salt water you have in any way you imagine.
Gargle it next time you have a sore throat, put it in your neti pot, make some pasta, throw it in the sea.

