

## **On Still Point: Meditations on Silence, Solitude, and Social Sustainability by Elyse Pineau: An artist's statement from videographer Jason Hedrick on the collaboration**

Jason Hedrick

In the summer of 2021 Elyse Pineau asked if I was interested in shooting some video of her in her garden with her dollhouse. She had dreamt a few ecstatic images, with mutual friends and intriguing accoutrements traveling in and out, and perhaps consciously thinking of my penchant for leaning into surrealist impulse, wondered if we might elaborate on her visions in what I know to be one of the most personally fulfilling spaces for her—aside from the stage and the classroom—her lovingly tended garden.

To talk about the project that eventually came about via this collaboration, I need to tell the story of how I've had the pleasure of observing Elyse over many years: as a student, as an audience member, as an actor being directed by her, as a director attempting to guide her on stage, as a conversation partner, as a fellow

---

**Jason Hedrick** is a playwright, theatre director, and film obsessive who is currently completing his doctoral thesis on the intersection of film and performance studies in the department of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. He directed the Dr. Jerry Weston Mathis Theatre at Sauk Valley College in Dixon, IL between 2001 and 2011. He has produced work with The Greylight Theater Collective, the Marion Kleinau Theater of Performance Studies at SIUC, and the Christian H. Moe Lab Theatre at SIUC. His plays include *Vanya on the Plains*, *4 FILMS*, *The Final Chapter of Nic Carter: The Price*, Kurt Vonnegut's *The Euphio Question*, and *The Big Jason Hedrick's Tennessee Williams' Cat on a Hot Tin Roof Show: The Play That Never Was*. In 2018, *Vanya on the Plains* was published in *Text and Performance Quarterly* and received a "World Premiere" in September at the Artistic Home in Chicago. He is currently working on a play about cult deprogramming called *Sing Sing Sing*.

You can see more about his work at: [jason-hedrick.com](http://jason-hedrick.com) or follow his film blog EC-STATIC at [jason-hedrick.blogspot.com](http://jason-hedrick.blogspot.com)

lover of great sentences and films. I first encountered Elyse in her Storytelling class at Southern Illinois University in the mid-90's, where I realized there was an art to designing a course, as well as embodying one. Elyse is a fierce kinetic force in the classroom, and anyone who has had the privilege of taking a class with her will immediately conjure in their memory the controlled fury of gestural pedagogy, rooted by a deep knowledge of literature, performance, and the stage. She took the vague impulses I previously had on stage and gave me a reason to focus them, to take them seriously. She taught me how to place a chair in just the right place. She taught me how to think about movement on stage in a more focused way, how to distinguish between when language or performative impulse might lead you from one moment to the next, from upstage to down.

In the intervening years my passion for examining the boundaries and fluidity that bind the live and mediated stage has culminated in various projects that attempt to create questions and deepen our consideration of the evolving conversation between the two in performance studies. The long arc of these projects includes early endeavors to weave photo imagery and video into the tapestry of one of Elyse's many epic novel adaptations for the Marion Kleinau Theatre, Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*. In the years following, I was privileged to play various roles in bringing a few of Elyse's novelistic adaptations to the stage, and through working with her in courses and on stage built a skill and passion for adaptation and staging that I've been fortunate enough to pass on to students and audiences as an educator and theatre maker. When I returned to SIU and the Kleinau to do my doctoral work I began a new journey with Elyse, directing her as a performer in two productions of my own — *The Final Chapter of Nic Carter: The Price* in 2014 and *Vanya on the Plains* in 2017 — and rediscovering her abilities as a performer and learning from her once again in the context of those collaborations. Through all this we both made room in our schedules to take in films and engage each other in discussions (preferably over some good Italian food), building a mutual appreciation and understanding of each other's highly particular engagement with filmic frames, particular performers and styles, always building on a conversation that extends out of our years of working through movement and language and story in rehearsals.

*Still Point* marks a significant shift for me in our ongoing conversation, one that happens amid a pandemic that finds us all reassessing ourselves, our creative tools and voices, our stillness or incapacity for it. The piece would be a vital reflection on this period were it just Elyse embodying those words on stage, without my input, but the way in which I was allowed to build on the work became a much-needed moment of creative inspiration. It begins with a vision of a dollhouse in a garden and is then cultivated by Elyse into a poetic reflection of time and social responsibility that was then shared with me, and within a few days I had mapped out some margin notes that guided us toward a series of specific shots or visual passages that we discussed, nudged, and eventually began creating in her garden. Not unlike Elyse's garden, this video constitutes an

exploration and a performative journey of its own. On this journey, I encounter Elyse in the frame in an entirely different manner than I encounter her as a teacher or a performer. As we followed our creative impulses in the July heat, bringing different physical elements in and out, making small shifts and edits and discoveries as we go, the observation becomes more about the encounter of Elyse in the everyday, which engages me in that it's entirely estranged from all of our previous work. It becomes a fascinating process to see Elyse in partial close-up, as a contemplating face or eye, or at a distance as she performs without her mind on performance.

It was my intent to accentuate the rhythm of Elyse's vocal performance by using black space to punctuate and expand the collaborative capacity of the viewer. The slow-motion passages hopefully augment the various negotiations and frustrations with time, both personal and historical, that I connected with most in the piece. The images in *Still Point* are all shot and edited by me, aside from the images of the "Black Lives Matter" rally in Anna, IL, that appear in the final section. The slow-motion frames in this final section are designed in a way that feels highly personal and evocative, as I come from a similar small town in Illinois and understand how progress can seem like an aching slow drift of time, particularly when it comes to an awareness of racial justice. I thank Elyse for giving life to yet another fulfilling creative opportunity, and I commend all who took to the streets to demand change, especially in those rural areas where making yourself politically visible can feel so necessary and risky.



*This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike International 4.0 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA*