

Await

verb

to (eagerly) wait for (an event)

- to wait for a circumstance that is in store for an individual or group

Awaiting

A public durational performance by Ernesto Pujol & Utah artists

I. Introduction: The Local as Global

I am impressed by the culture of Utah. For years, I have lectured publicly on true *globalism*, not as a flattened landscape of sameness, but as a diverse landscape of fascinating cultural differences carefully threaded by the existential similarities of our common human condition. Thus, costumes, props, stages, scripts, and languages may be different, but all the players share the same desire for hope, insight, wisdom, growth, and transcendence in the face of loss and suffering. I see globalism as a quilt of many regional colors and patterns joined by the same moral ethical pursuits in the face of adversity. Nevertheless, this new regionalism is not about landlocked defensive insularity, but about the unique self-critical historical memory and informed creative evolution of a specific place and people as its key asset. Thus, the best of the culture of Utah should be preserved and upheld as the way to connect with the rest of the world.

I am struck by the notion of **waiting** that is embedded in this culture.

1. There is the ancestral waiting of the pioneers, who toiled for what they perceived as a wilderness to become what they envisioned as a garden. However, this effort did not depend solely on them. It also depended on a notion of virtue and its calling on grace. Thus, there was a gap, a surrender—a waiting for the labor to be blessed by the universe.
2. I am also struck by the Mormon faith's culture of waiting, particularly among its many women, on whose lives of service the church has been built; of patiently waiting for the return of a spiritual figure who will transform everything and everyone.
3. I am also struck by the culture of loyal, stoic waiting of Utah's military families with members in Afghanistan and Iraq; waiting for their sons and daughters to come home, not only alive, but in the full dignity of their bodies, unhurt physically and psychologically.
4. And finally, I am also made aware of a counter history of waiting, of refusing to wait any longer, of embracing this land as heaven, as a place of defining stewardship, and of brave individual voices and self-determination.

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I. Project Description

A. Silent Walk

I envision the performance beginning with the individual, as is fitting with the American narrative of democracy and its belief in the power of One: all it takes is for one courageous individual to take a stand. Therefore, approximately 40 performers dressed in white, the color of enlightenment in many cultures, as pointed by Carl Jung in his writings on Active Imagination, will begin to walk alone slowly from different points in Salt Lake City towards Capitol Hill. They may chose to begin the walk where they live, where friends live, from European and Native American historical markers, or to daylight geological and hydrological features, tracing them with their bodies. They will walk through its many streets, avenues, and parks as regular pedestrians. They will not speak, nor act, dance, or gesture. They will walk slowly as citizens who return home from work in a pensive, reflective, quiet, silent way. The only noteworthy quality about them will be that they are dressed in lay/secular contemporary clothing.

B. Gathering Stillness

All the performers will eventually converge silently at the foot of Capitol Hill, by the emblematic wall with the bronze letters of "STATE OF UTAH." They will gather there like a family, a beehive, a collective of unique individuals, with no loss of individuality to the group. At that point, they will wait for the beginning of sunset as they gaze up the hill in perfect stillness with their backs to the city.

C. Ascent & Descent

Once sunset is unfolding, the performers will turn around to face the public and begin to climb the South Steps of Capitol Hill towards the Capitol Building. They will walk up its ramps and stairs slowly, alone or in pairs; as many as the width of the stairs hold comfortably. They will perform the vision of Jacob, of bodies ascending and descending a ladder between earth and sky. The performers, as a projection of the city on the hill, will follow an urban choreography that will create points and counterpoints, parallelisms, coincidences, increasingly complicating the overall human mapping of the night. Indeed, Capitol Hill was chosen because of its monochromatic beauty, its emblematic quality as "the house of the people," and its unique verticality as a metaphor for human transcendence. It is a gigantic Jacob's Ladder.

D. Durational Effect

The performers will ascend and descend the steps of Capitol Hill from sunset to sunrise, all night long, approximately 13 hours. This is what is called a *durational performance*, in which the passage of time is at the forefront of the piece. This is the kind of piece that slows things down, that generates a space for reflection on human existence: Who are we as Americans? Where do we come from? Where are we now? Where are we going? We are waiting for the future, but what kind of future will befall us? Can we name and embrace these hopes and dreams, insecurities and fears, our overall uncertainty, for one evening?

This is a piece where nothing and everything happens; a piece that does not entertain but reminds us of the human need for *silence* and *solitude* away from distractions, of our human right to *reflection*. It is also an unconsumable piece. For who can consume a 13-hour performance? In establishing such a seemingly impossible length, it fights our consumer culture of abundance, storage, and waste by being countercultural, by gently giving us something intangible that we cannot grab, buy, own, put in our pocket, and walk away with. It gives us an experience. We can stay with it all night, in vigil, or we can watch a little bit of it at sunset, visit it again close to midnight, and then rise just before dawn to see it end.

E. Sunrise Closure

The piece will end as humbly and quietly as it began. At sunrise, the performers standing along the steps of Capitol Hill will look towards the city and begin a communal descent, singly, in pairs, or groups. They will gather again at the foot of Capitol Hill, and, after a few minutes of silent stillness, they will start to walk back into the city, each one to the place where they started from. They will drift and vanish like the morning fog, disappearing with the sun.

All the people of Salt Lake City and nearby communities are invited to this free not-for-profit public art event.