

transient: a solo performance of my own design

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Abstract

*transient*: A Solo Performance of My Own Design

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*transient* is a solo performance piece that presents a contemplation on guilt. This performance piece intends to communicate that an individual is not responsible for the cards they are dealt, but they are responsible for how they play their hand.

Jason Treviño

Graduate Thesis - *transient*

Jeffrey Fracé

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The notion and complexity of guilt has called to me as a writer and performer because of my experience growing up in the Foster Care System and my life's journey towards forgiveness for both of my parents, a sex worker and drug dealer who were both addicts. I was moved to focus on a human without shelter for two reasons: my own experience as a member of the unsheltered community in my youth and the unfortunate majority of Foster Care System graduates who are unsheltered within the first year of leaving the system. My process with the show began the moment I was accepted, and I have used the skills I've developed at this school as a writer, performer, and videographer to create this piece.

In the nearly three years at this program, I have been using my training as a generative artist to search for themes and subjects that call to me. My first composition was a performance of the myth of Narcissus and Echo, a story about self-sabotage. My second was a documentary style solo performance titled *Pariah* about a Foster Care System graduate who persevered as an individual without shelter before attending the University of Washington. The third show was an original work titled *Smiles Meltin'* based on addiction's impact on my mother's life and my own. All of these pieces have influenced the writing of this final project, a story about a member of the unsheltered community who has very little left and who is grappling with his own guilt and its relationship to a system that seems to have set him up for failure.

One of the most important lessons I've learned as a generative artist is that I will always need more time than I think. I have come to understand that only 1/10 of what I write will be

good and only 1/100 of what I write will be gold. These numbers seemed daunting at first, but the more I realized how much I enjoyed writing, the less I cared about how much of what I wrote would be in the “final draft.” I began dreaming about this final piece the moment I sat and saw the class of 2018’s solo shows, but the inspiration for it came during my first year when I saw a sign in the graduate lounge reading “Keep Window Closed, Beware Transients.” I had never heard or seen the word ‘transient’ in reference to a person without a home. The word rubbed me the wrong way. I understood intuitively that the term is meant to be more politically correct than ‘homeless,’ but the meaning of the word ‘transient’ is between places, which underplays the reality of living without a home or a place to go. Words have power and while I support moving away from referring to people without homes as “the homeless,” I think that ‘transient’ is harmful in the opposite direction: it subtly and subconsciously allows society to look the other way.

My disdain for the word ‘transient’ became the seed for my inspiration. After deciding that my character would be a member of the unsheltered community, I set out to find a story. My writing process was strongly influenced by three books, *The Power of One* by Louis E. Catron, *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield, and *Story* by Robert McKee, all books recommended to me by the UW faculty. I began by research and observation of people who are unsheltered. I kept a box for articles or pictures or ideas on sticky notes, and when that box was full, I chose a controlling idea for my story: “you are not responsible for the cards you are dealt, but you are responsible for how you play them.” Next, I created a backstory for the character, provided him with a subconscious and conscious objective to pursue, and a myriad of events that would give the character hope and put him under pressure. My intention was for each event to act as a turning point in the character’s life by creating a gap between the character’s expectation and the

character's reality. This script had a total of eleven drafts with changes coming from my own instincts combined with feedback from my colleagues and faculty. Through the show's several drafts it morphed from narrative poetry to an active story that I felt confident I could perform.

Once *transient* was written, I shifted both to the mindset of a director and of an actor. I designed the elements of the show I was responsible for and created a preliminary blocking plan, both for myself and for my Director of Photography. This second part of my process utilized skills taught to me in all of the composition classes we have taken, as well as lessons I learned in director studios that the PATP get to be a part of. My goal was to use the camera in a way that made the audience feel present and a part of the character's day. I collaborated with my lighting designer to help establish the mood of the piece and to utilize the lighting as a tool to establish other characters in the story. While considering the show from this perspective, I was already working to memorize and rehearse my show. The movement of the character was based strongly on the character's need. I drew from personal experience and research in developing the character's mannerisms in relation to his drug and alcohol addiction. I worked to make sure that none of the qualities of the character ever disrupted my diction so much that the character was unintelligible. I recorded several moments of the show from different frames and watched it back to critique and improve upon the performance, using the lessons I learned from all of my performance-based classes here to guide my notes. I used my understanding of performing for the camera to make each acting choice at a scale relative to the distance between myself and the camera lens.

Filming came quickly and I treated the day as another chance to explore the character. I focused on moving through each moment of the script with only the character's needs and wants in mind. After obtaining all the footage that I planned to get, I set to work as an editor. This

process was much easier because of the skills I gained in the Technical Teaching Assistant position that the University of Washington employed me in. I used sound in the video to establish the space the character existed in both physically and psychologically. I learned another lesson about time during the editing process; a moment will take longer when it is performed for the camera than it will when it is read. I knew this was true already, but the difference between my rehearsal runs and the footage edited together was much larger than I would have expected. I did my best to make smart cuts and edits that supported the story I was trying to tell. There was a definite gap between the final product and my initial vision for the piece, but my several generative endeavors in the PATP have taught me to accept my dissatisfaction with the product because I know that I can always continue developing and improving it.

My goal is to continue fostering this story because the message and the content are important for people to experience as an audience. I would like to find ways to create more compassion for the character and I will continue studying story structure and storytelling to better invite the audience into the life of this character. I have also learned the crucial nature of meticulous rehearsal for timing, especially considering the strict time restraints of fringe festivals. This process has taught me lessons in writing, directing, and acting that I will carry with me as I continue creating my own work.

transient  
by Jason Treviño

*A man walks in, dragging a leash behind him with nothing attached to it. He wears a Walkman and dances to it. The man enters a crosswalk and narrowly avoids being hit by a car, yanking the leash behind him. He stumbles out of the way and make a gesture to let the car pass. The man sees an abandoned Happy Meal on the ground. He turns and bends towards the food and immediately begins eating it, slowly sinking to the ground. By the time he is seated he is finished with the left-over food. He picks up the box and hugs it to his chest, then throws the box.*

Careful, Oatmeal, smells fun and wonderful, poisoning you from the inside. Don't say I didn't warn you, dog.

Hey, don't look at me like that. I got you out of the way, didn't I? 'Sides, the light was red. That was *not* my fault. None of this is my fault. None--

*The man sees a cigarette butt on the floor. He picks it up and iii) examines it with all of his senses. He thinks better of it and puts its back on the floor, in the same place he found it. Someone approaches.*

Greco, what're you doing back here, what'd I tell you about comin around me, man, this is my spot. Get your greasy head and your stupid cheatin ass games games outta here.

Happy Meal? The fuck I know about a Happy Meal?

What do I look like buying something from you? Do I look like I've got money for that shit?!

Let me stop you there, cuz you're the last person I'm doin any favors for, man. Get away from me. I said get!

*The man holds up a pair of scissors and thrashes them. Greco retreats.*

Showed him, didn't we, pup?

*He begins setting up his space and sings. Someone walks by.*

Spare some change? Feel free to look at the art!

*He goes to his bag and rifles through, looking for canvases. By the time he looks up, they are gone. He pulls out a selection of cardboard paintings and sets them up.*

Have a good day then! A good, free day.

That's okay, we're gonna make a big sale today, girl, I can feel it in my bones. Feel it in my fingas. Feel it in my... toes.

You want a treat, too, dog? Are you begging? Well, better a beggar than a thief. Or is it the other way around? Okay, okay, fine, but this is your last one, all that beggin, you better eat it—

*He turns to give the dog a treat, but she is gone. He gets up to look for oatmeal and heads stage left and then stage right.*

Oatmeal? Oatmeal, where'd you go?

*He kisses for her, panicked. He tries to whistle but cannot. He frantically looks for her.*

Oatmeal, come back girl! Wanna treat? Go for a walk? Oatmeal? Toothbrush Oatmeal? Toothbrush???  
Oat--

*The man sees a diamond on the ground.*

What—You've gotta be kidding me.

*He admires it, inspects it.*

What do you think, dog? This has gotta be what? 3, 4 carats? What'd'ya reckon that would sell for, Oatmeal? A lot of money, I'll tell you that. I'm gonna sell it. I can sell it. I used to work at a jewelry shop, you know, I could get someone to buy this, this is prime time right here, baby, better believe it. Where you stumble, there lies your treasure. We sell this.... We'll be sitting in AC in no time, two steaks right in front of us, girl. You'd like that, wouldn't you?

*A mother and a child walk by.*

Watch and learn.

S'cuse me, ma'am. Ma'am, I'm sorry to bother you ma'am--hey, there buddy, that's a nice cone there--ma'am if I could take a second of your time, I happen to be in the preposterously privileged position to offer you a deal on a diamond today, ma'am, here just look at this, will you just look at it, I'm practically giving it away, just 250 ma'am, I mean, you're practically getting away with robbery, its 2 carats, at least. will you just look at it? 200!

*He stares off after them.*

What are you whining for, huh? That was my first try. Besides, she looked like she was just tryin to be a good mama, anyways. You ever miss something you've never had? You got snatched up from your old lady too, huh? What was she like? Yeah, me neither. Me neither.

*Another man approaches.*

Gilliam! Gill, Gilly, Gill, Gillio.

Good to see you, too. So good. What's this?

*Gill hands the man a bag full of groceries.*

Well, thank, this is... thanks. Really nice of you. But hey, listen. I ever talk to you about that jewelry shop I used to work at?

Well, I did, long time ago, but before I left, I invested in a really nice rock, really good, okay? Look I really wanna get a place of my own, you know that, maybe get some help, like you said. And... and maybe I could give you this diamond and you could give me some cash and...

Well, okay, you can just take me to the places to get the things I need. That's better actually.

Look, how about that girlfriend, man? Aren't you gonna pop the question, or what? Use this diamond. Its 2 carats, at least, on my word. I said I used to work in a jewelry shop, didn't I? Just look at it for me.

Appraised, yeah, I'll go get it appraised with you, hell yeah, let's go right now.

Okay, no problem, boss, it's getting late and places are gonna close soon. Why don't Oatmeal and I just come—

Alright, okay, no, I understand, yeah. 15 minutes. See you in 15, you're changing a life today, Gilliam, saving a life!

*Gilliam leaves. The man watches him leave, then, turning to Oatmeal, mouths "yes" and jumps up and down.*

WHAT DID I TELL YOU GIRL!!!

To think we are important is fooly and follish... To think we are not is worse. Can I get an amen?! Never doubt me again, hear me you scruffy little—

*There are bananas, a bag of apples, and a head of lettuce.*

The fuck am I gonna do with some lettuce?

*The man pulls out some scissors to cut through the mesh bag of apples begins to eat an apple. He finds a bag of chips and begins to eat those, too. He continues searching until he finds a bottle of Jameson.*

Gilliam... Gill, Gill, Gill, you know me so well.

*He opens the bottle and throws the cap.*

Guess I'll have to finish the bottle.

*The man looks into the bottle to see his own reflection. He tries to smile, but it's not right. He tries again and again, searching for just the right look. A car drive by.*

Where's the music at though?

*The man plays Hot Stuff by Donna Summers.*

Ayyy, come on Donna Summers! Yes!!! I LOVE THIS SONG!

*The man's Walkman stops working.*

No, don't go!

*The man tries to get his Walkman to work, but it will not. He takes his headphones out, closes his eyes, and pulls sounds from his environment to build a song in his own head. He dances exuberantly until he cannot go anymore.*

Yes, yes, wars and famine, and prejudice persist, yet does the flow'r cease its pressing through the broken pavement? Why am I here? What were these out for? You want a haircut, girl? Come here, give me that scruffy face.

*He begins to cut the imaginary dog's hair, gingerly.*

What does the sky teach us, girl? That we are small. And what does our heart teach us? That we are big. Which is true? Both. Please come back to me dog. I can't do this without you, girl.

*He puts the scissors next to his bag. Someone passes.*

Good evening, sir, Spare some change? Diamond for sell! 6 carats! Well, have a good night anyways! Good thing Gill's coming back.

*He pauses and picks up the cigarette butt again, considering once more. He puts it back. He begins fiddling with his Walkman again.*

This damn--Honey, can you come help me with this? And some water? Honey?

*The man takes some pills. One big joke:*

I miss you. I miss you so much. I miss you so much I wanna cry all night long. I miss you so much I wanna cry all night long every night for the rest of my life. I miss you so much I wanna cry all night long for the rest of my life until I die and then I wanna cry some more. I wanna flood my grave until my coffin spews back up and floods the whole wide world. I miss you so much.

Wait. Wait. Wait. No no no no no. Please no, please come back, honey, HONEY?! Please, no, what is, why, not again, not again, Oatmeal? Honey? Honey, will you come here, please? Fuck. What is this? Get away from me! GET OUT OF HERE!

*Jumping in front of his bag of food.*

THIS IS MINE!

*The man goes to his bag and pulls out a band, which he ties around his arm, tight. As he begins to slap his arm, a police siren chirps in the distance. The man immediately freezes and quickly moves to gather his paintings and clean up his mess. He throws a hat over the tin can and hides the diamond cup in the grocery bag. He is suddenly stone cold sober and hyper-articulate.*

Hello, officer. No, sir, no problem. Well, I am sorry about the noise, I just learned that my wife left me. No, no she left me three years ago, but I just learned it again. The sign? No, no sir, I didn't see the sign. Yeah. I can read. I'm sure you know what it says. It says, "No Loitering Allowed, Beware Transients." Okay, okay, yes sir, I'll head out. Mmmhmmm. Alright, yep, I'll be gone. God bless you, too.

*Shouting towards the police siren:*

Want me to "vacate," pig, remember my fucking face next time.

Transient. Can you believe—pft. I know what transient means, it means "between places." BETWEEN PLACES. You go to one place or another, you are a transient. Where are we going, girl? Where are we going? I know the truth and I am so alone.

*Someone walks by.*

Spare anything? Feel free to look at the art. Diamond!

*They keep walking and do not even acknowledge the man.*

Or me, you could at least fucking look at me, man! Don't, that's so addictive. Where's Gill?

*The man checks his wrist for a watch that isn't there. He continues drinking from the bottle.*

Fuck "Transient," "it's okay to look the other way." No. Call me instead by what I am, a homeless man. Or better yet, a man without a home. Or how about my fuckin name, I mean could you imagine.

*The man crosses downstage. Someone approaches.*

Please, ma'am, I just need a bite to eat. Just something for me and my dog, ma'am, I split it between the two of us. I'm just looking for help, to get some help. Thank you so much. If you'd like to look at some art to trade, feel free...

*But they are gone. He checks his tin can and pulls out 1 quarter and 3 pennies. He sees the cigarette butt and picks it up.*

Free.

*He puts it in his mouth. He pulls out a lighter to try to light it, but it won't work. He swallows the cigarette butt.*

Free like a stock-still sparrow staring at the open door of its cage. Fly away, bird, fly away. There are chains on me.

*The man moves back to the grocery bag. He pulls out an apple and starts to chomp on it, then throws it in the air out of boredom.*

Hehe, you like that girl?

*He pulls out another apple and tosses them back and forth, then adds a third with a flourish and begins to juggle, exuberantly.*

Everybody gather round, come one, come all, for the show of a lifetime!

*He drops one, and playfully kicks it. He brings out another apple and rips it in half. This elates him. He goes through the bag of fruit and destroys it all like a madman. He finishes with the head of lettuce by throwing it in the air and punching it into a confetti like explosion. He drops to the floor and begins a ritual with Oatmeal, chasing her, jumping around like a madman. His laughter escalates and he rips his paintings in half and throws down the trash can. He holds the diamond cup in his hands and raises the scissors to stab himself in the chest. Greco approaches again, interrupting him. The man stands and hides the diamond behind him.*

Greco, I swear to God, if you don't get out of my face, I'm going to chop your greasy hair off and shove it up your—

Don't play with me, man, I am literally walking on an apple right now, I am not in the mood for you.

Who told you? Who told you that?

Man, get out of here with that, you don't have 300—

*He stops, a little dumbfounded.*

Look, this is at least a 2 carat diamond, man, I used to work at a jewelry shop. I did! I was sweeping floors, but I was surrounded by diamonds. 300 aint gonna cut it. Yeah, whatever, see ya.

Wait wait wait wait, Greco, okay, yeah let's talk. What about 350, can you do 35- No yeah no okay yeah whatever you say, 300 will do, man, 300 is good. Let me see it.

This is for real? Why--

Dondo's diamond, what's Dondo's diamond doing on this corner?

He gave you this money? Oh... well, tell him I said he's welcome. Of course I took care of it.

A game? I mean, yeah, sure, what's ten bucks when you just became a hundred-aire, right Oatmeal? Huh, oh oh it's nothing, sorry, yeah, let's play.

Yeah, yeah, I'll play for a little salt. But we're playing with my cards this time.

*The man rubs his arm. He runs back to the tent and grabs his cards from his bag. He downs the rest of the wine and watches him deal the cards. He picks up his hand and can't hide his excitement. They play out the hand. What the audience sees as a flash is a full game.*

Yes, eat it greaseball! YES!

*The man takes a small bag.*

You bet your ass I'll play again.

*They play again.*

BOO-YAH. OOOWEEE we are eating tonight, girl, Yes!

Hey, hey, pause. Where you going? Come on, Greco, Greco, Grecco, hold on a hot minute. Let's play again.

Well, can't you break it up?

Fine, fine, yes, all in, whatever, I'll bet the 3, fine. I'm on a streak.

*(To Oatmeal)* Like takin candy from a baby.

*They play again.*

Wait, hey, come on, wait. Come on, you played me again, these cards are rigged. Come on, Greco, don't do this to me, man, I messed up, look at me, I'm drunk. Hey, I've got kids, man, don't take that money from me, please. You played me into playin that way and you know it.

*The man picks up the same stick he brandished earlier.*

Greco, get your ass back over here, man, don't make me—

WOAH. Woah, okay, put that away, man, I don't want any trouble with that, you're good.

Yeah, thank you. Thanks for letting me keep what I won. Thank you. Yes. Yes. Yes. Have a good...

*Greco leaves.*

Gilliam? Hey, Gill. Oh... Oh no, that diamond was fake, man, I did you a favor and just went and got it appraised, wasn't worth the steps I took to get there, that shop must have scammed me or something, I don't know.

I said that's what happened, you don't trust me?

You know what Gill, why don't you go--

Look, I lost the diamond, man. I let it slip away. I'm sorry.

Yeah... yeah, I got carried away with the food. It's my fault. It's all my fault.

Have a good night.

*Gill leaves. The man looks at the leash. He pulls it towards him and wraps it up around his hand.*

I miss you. I miss you so much.

*He looks at the heroin. End of Show.*