

Surviving the Solo Show Wilderness: Exploring One-Person Performance Processes through the Metaphor of Wilderness Survival

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At the 2019 National Communication Association conference in Baltimore, MD, seven performance studies practitioners came together to create a solo performance survival guide. The theme for the 105th annual convention was “Communication for Survival.” Our panel was titled, “Surviving the Solo Show Wilderness: Exploring One-Person Performance Processes through the Metaphor of Wilderness Survival.” We hoped dividing the solo show process into seven malleable steps might help a performer’s journey become less about surviving and more about thriving. At the time of our submission, our academic positions ranged from undergraduate student to full professor, and we have each guided, taken, and/or are currently undergoing the one-person expedition. We present this multi-vocal and multi-modal artifact as both a souvenir of that conference panel and as a solo production starter-kit for those traversing and preparing for the wonderful wilderness that is one-person performance.

To assist solo practitioners in navigating the one-person show wilderness, we borrowed a seven-step structure from Dolly Garza’s 1993 Alaskan Marine Safety Education Association manual, “Outdoor Survival Training for Alaskan Youth.” This safety curriculum has been used by instructors to teach young people preparation for circumstances that occur when exploring adventures, nature, and the unknown. Garza’s wilderness instruction manual was created to be a positive thinking first-aid kit for navigating high-stress and emergency situations. Garza writes, “these steps were developed by survival instructors who spent years asking survivors what they did that allowed them to survive an emergency” (22). Chapter two in Garza’s text outlines seven survival steps. Prompted by NCA’s “Communication for Survival” theme, we utilized these seven steps of recognition, inventory, shelter, signals, play, food, and water as malleable metaphors for key stages in the often-stressful solo performance expedition. Experience is the best instructor, and these metaphors provided us the opportunity to shed light on questions and memories that resonated with/in our solo journeys. The written texts and audio recordings in this artifact are close approximations to the narratives we developed for that conference panel. The variety of styles and experiences reflected in

our prompted narratives mimic the diverse possibilities of solo shows. This compiled artifact, however, is not meant to be all-encompassing of solo performance experiences and scholarship; rather, we offer our insights as an approachable starting point to help solo practitioners conceptualize their journeys.

Each solo performance is unique in shape and scope and goals and needs. If solo practitioners “embrace the ambiguity of nomadic practice” (Parrott 312), then a useful metaphor must allow for situational fluidity and for a diversity of solo styles to be conceptualized. As keenly noted in E. Patrick Johnson’s “From Page to Stage: The Making of Sweet Tea,” in contrast to ensemble productions, each solo show presents unique obstacles and reflexive dilemmas. Specifically, since the solo practitioner is often be the writer, performer, and director, they “are the one who has to deal with the consequences of [their] actions within that show” (Pinney 188). In addition to personal and political trepidations broached by Craig Gingrich-Philbrook in “The Personal and Political in Solo Performance: Editor’s Introduction,” there are embedded practical considerations solo practitioners must navigate. These concerns include (and are not limited to) feelings of isolation, mis-recognition of resources and needs, difficulty in organizing multiple production roles and generating support, the ethical and careful embodiment of triggering material, and unforeseen obstacles (like, for example, a worldwide pandemic!) that baffle even seasoned soloists. Breaking the solo performance process into Garza’s seven steps is one way to embrace the adventure and prepare for the unknown.

Each author in this solo show first-aid kit also offers an audio recording of their assigned wilderness survival step. Since each piece was developed to be heard, we recommend listening while reading. Garza writes, “the first and most important step” to making the most of an unknown experience is recognizing the totality of the journey, and articulating the stakes inherent to the project (22). The first step of solo performance survival, **recognition**, is the honest acknowledgment of production goals, vision, scope, ethics, tensions, risks, and potential challenges. Christopher C. Collins expands on this prompt in “An Incantation from the Wilderness.” The second step, **inventory**, addresses the resources available and potential show needs, ranging from skills, methodology, environment, self-reflexivity, technology, production roles, crew needs, checklists and calendars, and what still needs knowing. This step addresses the inquiry, “*what do I have, what should I do?*” (23). Tracy Stephenson Shaffer expands on this prompt in “The Nuts and Bolts of Inventory.” The third step, **shelter**, locates the spaces, people, and dressings that help shape, support, and provide refuge for the solo practitioner. Shelter is “anything that protects you” (24). Andrea Baldwin expands on this prompt in “Step 3: Seeking Shelter in Solo Performance (A Handout).” The fourth step, **signals**, indicates strategies employed to reach audiences and others the show might benefit, including members of the discipline, a department, and the local community, as well as those cast in crew roles. “*Hey! I need help over here!*”

(30). Josh Hamzehee expands on this prompt in “Help! There is a Bear in the Theatre!” **Play**, the fifth step, refers to the engagement, experimentation, evolution, adjustments, successes, and struggles of the rehearsal process. Integral to play is maintaining “a positive mental attitude” (35). Julie-Ann Scott expands on this prompt in “The Playful Body in Repetition.” Step six, **food**, is the dialogic engagement of performer sharing knowledge with an audience. For a solo performer, “different types of foods are available” (36). Natalie Garcia expands on this prompt in “Performance À La Carte.” **Water**, our seventh step, stands in for the afterlife of the solo performance; how it lasts through research, travel, artifacts, gratitude, in novel ways, and memory. Garza writes, “we can only live a few days without water” (31). Eddie Gamboa expands on this prompt in “After the Flood.”

Step 1: Recognition

The first step, recognition, is the honest acknowledgement of production goals, vision, scope, ethics, tensions, risks, and potential challenges. Christopher C. Collins expands on recognition: “The decision to embark on the journey of solo performance is often difficult to define. Performers face many questions that can impede or delay the choice to start the solo show process. The following text addresses how performers recognize the call to performance and how such a call may arise through symbolic associations and embodied knowledge. Recognition is often individual and ephemeral; therefore, I use a poetic form to address these moments' ambiguity and complex nature. The act of recognition exists in the relationship between consciousness, unconsciousness, and somatic experiences. When all three align, they present the Kairos of when performance calls.”

“An Incantation from the Wilderness”
Christopher C. Collins

» listen at liminalities.net/16-4/1-recognition.m4a

The solo show begins

with recognition.

An incantation

from the wilderness.

Recognition

is the pestering awareness of a needling thought,
an idea gone awry,

unleashed from the box,
continuously circling
back upon
itself.

Recognition
bubbles up
like a blister,
the idea
incessantly
grinding
against
the heel of a boot.

Recognition
is the thought,
the festering idea decomposing,
as a new knowledge sheds its winter skin
and recompose itself again into language
or image
or sound.

Recognition
is always
already
there,
waiting to be found
in
a thorny
thicket
of choices.

It is the right place for an artist,
this wilderness
of the mind.

Recognition
is compelled by connection,
created by circumstances
from which you arise.

Out of hardship
grew
muscle and sinew

wrapped around thighbones,
just so you could walk.

The labor of life
bequeathed you with this tongue,
just so you could talk.

Recognition
asks for wings,
black feathers,
and a flock.

Only you can set it free
or drown it
choking
at the dock.

Recognition
is acceptance.
The impulse to create,
to produce *life*.

An inflection point of Kairos

recognize
you are in
the right moment.

recognize
you are at
the right time.

*Recognize,
it beckons you.
Follow it.*

Recognition
is right
when the idea
sparks
the hair
to stand
static
at the back
of your neck.

Recognition
is right
when the germination of this *something*
keeps emerging out of *nothing*.
You can feel it

resounding
ricocheting and reverberating
throughout the cavity in your chest.

Recognition
is right
when it arrives

like succulent lips,
the thought

drips
saliva
from the interstices of your cheeks
salivating into puddles in your mouth.
You can taste the sweetness of this awareness.

As it hastens

Heart
beats,
constricts
fingers,
grinds down
teeth bones,
peels
eyes wide open,
in the dead of winter,
or the middle of night.

The vision speaks your name
and you dream your waking life.

Recognition
is right

when it
“un-tames,
reifies
and wakes up the parts of our lives
that have been put to sleep
and calcified by habit” (Bogart 61).

Recognition
is the single

solitary
sonic boom
of an idea

echoing out into the cosmos,
and yet,
the idea

itself,

alone,

rattles your bones
and chants
It must be done
It must be done
It must be done
It must be done
It must be done
It must be done
It must be done
It must be done ...

Step 2: Inventory

The second step, inventory, addresses the resources available and potential show needs, ranging from skills, methodology, environment, technology, production roles, crew needs, checklists and calendars, and what still needs knowing. Tracy Stephenson Shaffer expands on inventory: “Once one knows that “what” and “why” they want to perform, they should ask themselves “how” they will do it. My nuts and bolts discussion starts at opening night and moves backward to the production meeting before the very first rehearsal. How does one get from point A to point B? From research to devising to building a support system of crew members and trusted colleagues, I offer a few tips about taking stock of one’s resources and the process of making the performance happen.”

“The Nuts and Bolts of Inventory”

Tracy Stephenson Shaffer

» listen at liminalities.net/16-4/2-inventory.m4a

There are seven steps of survival: recognition, inventory, shelter, signals, water, food, and play. I am given inventory. I go “meta” at first. Why me for inventory?

What do I *have* that makes me the person for this step in the solo show? Years of experience. A few of my own solo shows under my belt. I directed two solo shows. Advising solo shows as faculty at Louisiana State University. Serving as the Producing Coordinator of the HopKins Black Box theatre for 12 years and leading the Director's meeting all those years at our orientation. Okay.

Inventory. It could mean your route or alternate routes to production. It could mean the condition of the materials of production—you, the space, the support, the script or idea. You have to get from Point A “no show” to Point B “show.” What do you *have* and what do you *have to do* to get there?

Let's go backwards. Set a date for your premiere. You might have to get it accepted somewhere—your space, a space on your campus, a conference, a festival. I personally would not travel the show to a conference or festival without some preliminary audience. AND LET'S STOP THERE. EYES! You need additional eyes, for this solo SHOULD NEVER BE *SOLO*. It could be so much better with additional eyes. Of course, eyes are a synecdoche for the feedback from another experienced person, preferable a seasoned performer. While we're at it—get yourself two. Let's call them Elyse & Ron or Michael & Ruth. Line them up. Make a date. And not the day before you open. Backwards from the premiere—two weeks before that—show them what you've got. LISTEN TO AND INCORPORATE FEEDBACK. Two weeks before that, BE OFF BOOK. Play with your performance—think about costumes, props, staging, pace, tropes (what I'm calling anchors lately), moments that you return to that ground the performance and communicate your message and aesthetic. It could be as simple as a gesture or phrase, as complicated as a scene played out twice—repetition with a difference.

But you can't do any of this without a real inventory. Two weeks before that (or more), answer these questions: How much time do I have? How much money do I have? How much support do I have? What are my production needs? What are my technical needs? How will I handle my publicity? Do I have any colleagues or friends or loved ones who might help me achieve my goals? How can I compensate them? How much discipline do I have? Can I memorize an hour or an hour and a half? (Never go past 90 minutes; let's trust John Gentile's in-depth research on the one-person show.) If I can memorize 60-90 minutes of text, how long will that take me?

And this is the absolute minimum. Six weeks. Sometimes prep for a solo show should take a year and six weeks. Or to pass consummate performer and mentor Mary Frances HopKins' math down to you: one hour of rehearsal for every minute performed, a 60 minute show = 60 hours of rehearsal. This stuff is the nuts and bolts of the process. It's not very sexy. It's more planning and organization than creativity, but just as important.

Step 3: Shelter

The third step, shelter, locates the spaces, people, and dressings that help shape, support, and provide refuge for the solo practitioner. Andrea Baldwin expands on shelter: “When creating solo performance, the journey is long from quietly writing alone, to speaking it aloud, and to finally staging it and bringing it to life. How do you negotiate the when and where to seek the space to work and show versus quietly tweaking and creating? While this question varies from artist to artist, the choice to seek and find space for rehearsing and for performing comes from the liminal space of preparation.”

“Step 3: Seeking Shelter in Solo Performance (A Handout)”

Andrea Baldwin

» listen at liminalities.net/16-4/3-shelter.m4a

Shelter—locates the spaces and people that help shape, support, and provide refuge for the solo practitioner.

- I. First step, **Process to pause (for space and for breaks)**—Taking the time to write and speak, it’s really important. Solo work is *Hard*. Because there is no one to blame if things go wrong, no cast member who missed their cue, no director that doesn’t ‘get you’, it’s all *you*. And that can be Horrifying. So taking the time to write and speak your work, allows you to be in conversation with it, in dialogue.
 - a. **Write**—in freestyle, and in timed sessions. Or even just write in your brain. A mentor of mine used to say, “even if you are not writing, you are still writing, Hopefully.” Because you are thinking about it- just as long as all of that thinking makes it to the page. Write in pieces or in long, singular, Kerouac-like paragraphs if that’s what you need, but, do something to get it on the page. Even if it is ugly. Get it on the page.
 - b. **Then Speak**—Once you have words and ideas documented somehow, speak them aloud. Walk around in your home space and read them out loud, because your voice changes from page to performance. Speak them into existence, and if you feel brave enough, record yourself speaking it into existence- and then listen back to it. Familiarize yourself with your work and your words as they become alive for performance.

c. **Step away and break for inspiration and/or rest**

- i. **Take a break**—Let your brain congeal. Let other texts inspire you and form the performance when you are away from the script. Sometimes, when we are by ourselves we get so enraptured by words, so enraptured by getting it right for ourselves that we sometimes forget that other things can inspire us even in the process. Take a break! Let that inspiration happen for you. And then, of course...
- ii. **Let others hear it out**—Our work is precious to us, but it is important to let it go. Find a colleague or friend you trust, and let them read it. Don't be stingy- allow them to see it. They trust you, and you trust them. A separate set of eyes may catch things you've missed or offer fresh perspective. Send it to them, give them a week with it, (and take a break while they do that), and let their feedback lend aid, or give you the validation you need to go on. Sometimes it doesn't have to be critical feedback- sometimes it should just be, "YAY! You finally put it on a script." And that's really productive too.

II. **When to show and when to not**

- a. **When to show** (the script, or run throughs)- I like showing when I am 1/3 of the way in. If I am not off book or holding a script in my hand, If I am a third of the way in when I show a human, if you will, even if I'm on track- I can regroup if it's at 1/3 of a production. Remember your, 1/3 may be different than mine, do what works best for you. Also...
- b. **I like showing when it's tough, and when I'm proud of it**
 - i. **When it's tough**—I know it's because I know that I feel selfish, as an artist. I know that I am nervous because I am doing something risky. I find someone I trust and I show them the tough parts. So they can help me if I am struggling. Or they can cheer me on. And then I also like showing when I am.
 - ii. **Proud**—when I know it's good. When I know I've hit the mark. Because yes, I do want someone to help, "gild the lily" if you will, but I want someone else to see. That what I am doing is powerful.

- c. **Showing for sense making**—Part of the showing when in rehearsal is for validation and also under the guise that no show is truly ever solo, even if you are by yourself, that support and feedback helps the production.

III. **How space varies for the performer**

- a. We all know about place and space, but adjustability is a constant reminder. Especially if you are going to travel a show or not travel a show.
 - i. If you are in a **large or unique space**—How do you make moments in your show feel intimate in space that feel vast?
 - ii. If in a **small space**—How do you best use the space to make your show effective? How do you use the space to your benefit?

Again, there is no one else but you up there. The space for performance, large, small, or unique, leaves opportunities for the solo performance to use it to their advantage to best communicate their message. Always leave a little wiggle room for adjustment.

Step 4: Signals

The fourth step, signals, indicate the strategies employed to reach audiences and others the show might benefit, including members of the discipline, a department, and the local community, as well as those cast in crew roles. Josh Hamzehee expands on signals: “Gathering audiences to attend a solo show can be difficult because there are often less people associated with the production. During *Burnt City: A Dystopian Bilingual One-Persian Show*, I wanted to reach Iranians in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As you might guess, Persians are not the most dense demographic in “the Red Stick.” Prompted by Step 4: Signals, I explore how I approached this objective, and why sending signals to select audiences should be about more than just getting bodies inside the theatre. Questions of reciprocity, rapport, and concept articulation must be considered.”

“Help! There is a Bear in the Theatre!”

Josh Hamzehee

» listen at liminalities.net/16-4/4-signals.m4a

Hello?

Is anybody... out there?

Does anyone have time to help me?

Does anyone want to watch me?

Does anybody else care about what I am doing?

Aw, crap, is that a bear? Where did I put that flare gun—

Surviving the solo performance wilderness is a familiar experience for me. A positive thinking first-aid kit for high-stress and emergency situations would have been useful when initially embarking on my solo journeys. I have performed three full-length solo shows and toured around solo pieces. Sending signals to audiences, community members, and seeking assistance is imperative to not only a great turnout, but avoiding the potential isolation of the solo show process. You do not want to have done all that work, but then realize you are performing for trees! Much like being alone in the wilderness, stress is magnified as much signal-sending falls on the solo practitioner, who is often also the writer, director, performer, designer, and any and every other role that necessitates attention and problem-solving. Publicity and recruitment can often fall off a cliff! Of course, depending on the type of show, there are unique needs, so in broad strokes I will provide some signal sending strategies.

First, gathering audiences. How do you get all the woodland creatures to come out from behind the trees and listen to your siren call? Gathering audiences to attend a solo show is a practical difficulty because there are less people associated with the production, and time is the hottest commodity. Compiling crowds begins with identifying goals and practical concerns. Write out questions and make lists! How many seats would fill capacity for the show's run? What are categories of reach, like: Social media, print, digital, television, visible areas in the community, university PR, who do you know? What are your resources in terms of video, poster, and promotional design? A few recommendations: A Hootsuite account to double-dip your social media posts, a clear press release that can be easily re-purposed will save you time, having high-res photos of interesting shots because outlets will ask, and getting on this earlier than you think. Key publicity markers I note when considering a six-week solo rehearsal schedule: Six weeks before, three weeks, ten days, three days, day before, and the day of. Of course, each solo undertaking is unique, so make sure your calendar is useful to you!

Second, accessing community members. During my premiere run of *Burnt City: A Dystopian Bilingual One-Persian Show*, I wanted to reach Iranians in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As you might guess, Persians are not the most dense demographic in 'the Red Stick.' I began by making a list of the areas of community contact: Departments, classes, on-campus organizations, off-campus groups, arts

collectives, influential community members, friends-of-friends, Persian restaurants! This process allowed me to locate LSU's Iranian Student Association, attend gatherings like Persian New Year events, and connect with new Persian friends who *also* showed up to the show. Accessing community members should not be about filling up your seats, filling up your seats should be a byproduct of engaging new people! A recommendation: Nothing can substitute face-to-face interactions and word-of-mouth (especially when those people are Persian and the words are in Farsi—If you know anything about Persians, Persians love Persians and Persian things!). From my experience, if I have genuine conversations with people about things other than the show, about stuff they are interested in, they are more likely to be interested in the show than if the show was all we focused on during our short time together.

Finally, gathering support for show needs. Going along with the solo trek is all the stuff: Props, costumes, sets, lights, odd jobs, coaching, crewing. Gathering folks committed to helping you realize your vision is essential. The solo show only needs to be solo on-stage. Off-stage, solo shows can be as collaborative and influenced by as many bodies as ensemble productions. A few recommendations: The time of others is valuable so clear expectations are essential, we must consider what do these individuals get out of the experience (can you offer credit, unique opportunities to learn a skill, any compensation, bonding), and how might you show your appreciation through reciprocity and gratitude (like exchanging their labor for your labor in a future project). Also, to grow as solo performers, we need outside eyes. I recommend creating a similar six-week timetable as publicity for trusted folks to come audience, coach, and provide suggestions.

Above all else, like with 8:00 a.m. conference panels, it's not the size of the audience, it's the connection made with those attending. Signals admit solo shows are not complete without others. And evading being eaten alive by the process is much easier when others are present to help handle the unexpected bears!

Step 5: Play

Play, the fifth step, refers to the engagement, experimentation, evolution, adjustments, successes, and struggles of the rehearsal process. Julie-Ann Scott expands on shelter: "The final script is never really final. Performance is never stagnant. Embodying the words after they were transferred to the page is messy, beautiful and empowering, but so messy. How long the show is depends on the venue, the audience, the goals of that particular performance exchange. So, it keeps changing. It changes with a trusted friend's feedback. From an audience's unexpected response. The feedback of a formal director (if someone is comfortable changing a show you wrote and will perform)—the director is such a warm, supportive, yet careful relationship. Helping realize 'my show'. Memorizing words on a page... or maybe just 'knowing it.' That's another conversation. Should

I try it another way than I intended when I wrote it. Maybe. It can become something different than I meant it to. The rehearsal process of the solo show isn't solo."

"The Playful Body in Repetition"
Julie-Ann Scott

» listen at liminalities.net/16-4/5-play.m4a

Play comes when it is time to embody the script
Of course the script is already from *a* body
a human body
Your human body brought those words to the page
but now it's time to shift them *back* to the body
To incorporate them into the flesh, limbs, and muscles of the performer who is
also the writer.
From the steps across the stage, to the shift in scenes
To the twitch of the mouth *at that moment*
to the *chosen* tone for *that* line.
You wrote it to embody it and now It's time
But it will change during this playful process
And then it might change back
which is another change.
It might change when enthusiastic friends and family members ask for the story
And because it is your story and a story that you want to share
You do.
And *they* have ideas and they may be good ones.
So you rewrite.
You change it because that idea for that line *was* funny.
I had some of those additions.

And then
I asked a trusted colleague
a performance artist, an actor, and an accomplished director
Someone who knows the process
And he offered to come out of his sabbatical to help me

because we all need other performance folks to make this play happen.
He watched me perform
and he saw where the script had been disrupted by well-meaning, uninvited col-
laborators.
He took out *all* of my friends' and family members' ideas
even though I *never* told him where they were
and that they were not mine.
It's not that they weren't good.
They weren't part of *this* particular performance.
This performance that was written *by my* body, to be performed *by my* body.
He reminded me to trust *the story my body created to share on stage*.
Be sure while you play that you trust yours.

And then, the repetition starts.

Remember:

PRACTICE MAKES HABIT, NOT PERFECT

If you don't like it when it *isn't* said *that* way you meant it to be said
Go back, repeat it the *right* way.
At the same time, *YOU* wrote it, so it's okay to change it if it sounds just as good
or better that new way you keep saying it.
If that dropped line or paragraph isn't missed. Drop it for good.
If you don't miss it, they won't either.
It's your story. Trust what matters to you.
Keep building it, line by line into your memory.
Do it out loud and in motion. *Hearing and doing it etches it into you*.

Also, Trust your memory.

It takes time but it *will* happen.
Even at that moment when your chest feels tight from unconsciously holding your
breath searching for a phrase
And your stomach feels heavy and light at the same time with simultaneous dread
and urgency
Keep. At It.
You'll remember it.
Move through chunks, beats, scenes.
However you want to slice it up, to piece it out, to pack into your embodied
knowledge
do it.

And then you'll know it.
And once you do you will be able to speed through, refresh quickly before you take the stage again. It's part of you.

Of course, it still changes.
It changes with venue necessity.
The tech might not be able to do what you had planned.
It had to be a certain length or emphasize a certain aspect for this particular space and invitation
So you revise again and again and again.
You may add a scene, a scene that becomes necessary for a particular moment in your evolving message.
You may grow out of a scene. It may not be necessary anymore. So it's cut and replaced.
The revision, the repetition, it never ends.
But we performers know that the play, is never *really* finished.
Even if we forget. We still know.

Step 6: Food

Step six, food, is the dialogic engagement of performer sharing knowledge with an audience. Natalie Garcia expands on food: "The audience plays an integral role in performance. They are the fuel performers need to push through and endure. Audiencing a solo show is a unique process given that there are no ensemble members for the performer to "feed" off of. With this, the performer must decide what role they want their audience to play. Will the performance be interactive? If so, how do you gain consent from the audience members? How do you push through when they are not reacting as anticipated?"

"Performance À La Carte"

Natalie Garcia

» listen at liminalities.net/16-4/6-food.m4a

I like to imagine the solo show process to be as difficult and frustrating as the question that we all dread, "So, where should we go out to eat?" In theory, it's a simple question yet we always find ourselves in conflict. Maybe you really want to try that new Mexican restaurant that just opened up down the street, but your friend thinks that anything that's even slightly seasoned is too *spicy*. It's starting to get cold outside so someone else suggests that we go get Pho, but inevitably

there is that one person in the group who is so picky that their diet mainly consists of chicken fingers. Alright, someone throws out the idea of keeping things simple and going for a burger, but someone else just had burgers for dinner last night. You see where I'm going with this.

The decision on what to eat is rarely an easy one. We can think of food as knowledge that we give to the audience. So, how do we decide what knowledge we want to share? Is there anything that is off limits? How in-depth do we go? Will the audience care? Perhaps the first step is figuring out if you're ready to share this food with the audience. Maybe this particular dish is a little raw and it needs some more time to cook. Maybe the recipe isn't quite right, and you have to go back and rework it. Or maybe it's your signature dish and you've been waiting years to find a good group of people to share it with. Wherever you are it's important to remember that you are in charge of the story that you tell, of the dish that you serve.

Another way we can view food is as fuel for the performer. Given that there are no ensemble members for the performer to feed off of, the audience plays an integral role in solo performance. They can help the performer push through and endure. Sometimes they can be the make or break between a good night and a bad one. So, how do we decide what role we want the audience to play? Is the performance interactive? If so, how do we gain consent from audience members? And, arguably the most important question, how do you push through when the audience isn't reacting as anticipated or at all?

Step 7: Water

Water, the seventh step, stands in for the afterlife of the solo performance; how it lasts through research, travel, artifacts, gratitude, in novel ways, and memory. Eddie Gamboa expands on water: "Sidestepping the presentism often associated with performance, the traces of a show produce an afterlife that compels further performances that require attention. While the end of a run offers a definitive temporal distinction, it fails to account for the repetition, adaptation, examination, and abandonment inherent to performance practice—in other words, we imagine the performance as product rather than a still active process. Through my own experience in restaging solo performance after the loss of a show (and in the face of the loss of a colleague), I discuss how to nourish a show in its aftermath, and how the aftermath of a show is a necessary nourishment for the performer and their varied collaborators/audiences."

“After the Flood”
Eddie Gamboa

» listen at liminalities.net/16-4/7-water.m4a

After the Flood—Performance. Water. Survival.

And then there is stillness. To imagine a show is to be caught in a current, one that pulls you in just as hard as it pushes you back. What little sense of direction you have never seemed to matter until the show is over, and you find yourself adrift. You remember, in this stillness, that water was once refreshing. Perhaps it is when you press down into soap and water as you scrub away the final traces of the mess you made. Or perhaps it is when you wipe away the stage makeup, or just the grime of a performance space, or just need to stand underneath a shower head for fifteen minutes because you finally get some time to get your skin wet and listen to music without having to think where this might fit into your show. Or perhaps it is in the days, weeks, months ahead when you see a document on your computer, or walk by a door with a new flyer, or when you think of an empty office that you can't barge into anymore – and you realize the show is still afloat.

Despite the promise, the fantasy, of ephemerality, something about a solo show lingers. A drip that demands some kind of attention. A trickle that asks if we should stage it again in another venue—a performance festival, or a conference; another university, or just another classroom. A steady stream of new choreographies, a different piece of writing, another joke, a different light that makes the show branch out, bloom in different ways. Another current. What we find is repetition, adaptation, examination, abandonment: in other words, we find performance as process. What we find is the temptation to break the dam, to start another flood. Before we do, we must remember what made us leap into the water in the first place: we needed nourishment. The show can be nourishing, even in its afterlife.

Take the performance home—share it with those who inspired it. Let new collaborators fill it with a talk back. Write down what it was, and not just what you said it would be. Get feedback—you'll never be big enough to hold all this water without it. Try something new. Make something entirely different. The show is over—let that stillness inspire you to move aimlessly until you find a current. Take a sip...say a line, make a face, the tiniest gesture, the simplest reference. You'll find that you are carrying so much of the show with you, even now.

My first solo performance was a part of myself that was set adrift when we lost him. He gave me and three others an incredible opportunity to create something, and we were all floating along: publish the piece and a reflection in a

journal, take the show on the road, we'll all get together someday. And then I received a phone call. "I'm so sorry nobody told you. We hadn't even thought...we aren't even thinking...we can't even think...but you probably already heard. John is gone." All he left me was a prompt. It was refreshing.

The end of that show was also the end of this show and will be the end of the next show. A process that flows, taking shape in whatever container we happen to be at the moment. I already hold it differently. You'll find that you are carrying so much with you, even now. Performance as a process is the water we carry with us, always changing even when it appears to be perfectly still. Always refreshing.



Biographical Notes

Josh Hamzehee is the Production Coordinator for University of Northern Iowa's *Interpreters Theatre*. He is a performance scholar->practitioner who engages in critical ethnographic methods, spoken-word roots, and remixed performance techniques. Recent projects include *Burnt City*, *Baton Rouge SLAM!: An Obituary for Summer 2016*, and *The Departed: A Reality Show!*

Andrea Baldwin is a Lecturer at the University of Houston—Clear Lake. Her research explores pedagogical experiences in spaces outside of the classroom and genealogical embodied mentoring in the academy. She has a background in Performance Studies with an interest in storytelling, adaptation, and rhetoric.

Christopher C. Collins is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Missouri State University. He received his doctorate in performance studies from Southern Illinois University. His current research examines the intersections of posthumanism and environmental communication.

Eddie Gamboa is an Instructor of Communication and the Director of Forensics at Governors State University. Their work has appeared in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, and the upcoming anthology *Queer Nightlife*.

Natalie Garcia received her B.S. in Environmental Management from the University of Houston—Clear Lake. As an undergraduate, she wrote and performed in a solo show about Ecofeminism and the disconnect between humans and nature. Currently, she is an MA candidate at Louisiana State University in the Department of

Communication Studies. Her research is primarily focused on Environmental Performance and Queer Theory.

Julie-Ann Scott is a Professor of Communication and Performance Studies at the University of North Carolina Wilmington where she directs UNCW Performance Studies. Her research and creative work focus on personal narratives of marginalized embodiment, performance ethnography, and performance pedagogy. Her book, *Embodied Performance as Applied Research, Art and Pedagogy* is published with Palgrave MacMillan.

Tracy Stephenson Shaffer (Chair and Professor, Department of Communication Studies, Louisiana State University) is a scholar/artist who produces research on the stage and on the page. Along with the creation/direction of almost twenty original performances, her research has appeared in outlets such as *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *Global Performance Studies*, and *Theatre Annual*.

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