

This is the visual summary for *A Singular They*, by Toby MacNutt.

Sections in this document, using headers: set description; description of Toby; and show content, broken down with timestamps by each solo and transition between solos, covering costume, apparatus/props, and movement qualities. Individual piece titles are not shown on the video, so pieces here are numbered. There are eight pieces in all, plus title card, transitions, and credits.

Set Description

The stage has a black, slightly glossy marley floor. In some shots, the underlying concrete can be seen around the edges. The backdrop is black fabric, extending upward out of frame. The ceiling is much higher than can be seen, allowing aerial apparatus to disappear upward when not in use. No aerial equipment is visible at the start.

On the stage are several set objects that remain onstage throughout. In the front left is a gray wooden cube, 2' on each side. A single spoked wheel leans against its front face. On top of the box is a dark wooden stool about 3' high with a rectangular seat, positioned side-on.

In the back right is a grouping of objects. There are two stepladders, one 6' and one 3' tall, both natural wood. The taller ladder is the center of this cluster of objects, and leaning against its left side is another spoked wheel. A black rope dangles over its top step. The shorter ladder is to the right. In front of both ladders is a black wooden cube, 18" on each side, on small caster wheels. Various bits of tape mark the floor around the three objects.

The camera angle is rarely full-width, instead staying focused closer to Toby. Set pieces come in and out of view, sometimes taking advantage of the camera angle to get prop changes ready without being seen. These changes are noted in transition descriptions.

Description of Toby

Toby is a short, white person, with broad shoulders. They are nonbinary and use the personal pronoun "they" or "them". Their dark hair is balding and buzzed very short, nearly gone. They have a short dark brown beard and are wearing minimalist makeup, with their toenails painted a dark purple. They have multiple piercings in each ear. In some costumes, their body hair and/or their tattoos are visible. The blue heron tattoo inside their left forearm is almost always exposed. Their disability is generally considered invisible unless they are using mobility aids, though certain details of their movement are indicative of their underlying instability: strange alignment or positions, wobbliness, and effort/exhaustion.

Costumes are described as they occur in Show Content.

Show Content

Title card, 00:00-00:08

Text reads: A Singular They, Toby MacNutt, www.tobymacnutt.com, Work In Progress, August 29, 2020, In conclusion of a residency at the New England Center for Circus Arts, interrupted - but not cancelled - by the covid-19 pandemic

First piece, 00:09-05:11

Apparatus/set/props for piece: forearm crutches, floorspace, cape
Lights come up on Toby in child's pose on the floor at center stage. They are wearing a huge, sparkly cape spread out around them in a nearly perfect circle. It is glittery silvery purple with iridescence in pink and blue that flashes in the light. They ripple into motion as the piece begins, slowly coming to life under the fabric.

The cape is attached at its front edge to each of Toby's forearm crutches, which are a battered navy blue that blends in to the background and the inner black fabric of the cape. Toby moves the cape with the crutches in sweeps and flourishes, and as they rise and move around the stage on the crutches, the cape swirls and follows.

Movement is repetitive, floaty, twisty, taking advantage of the contrast between rigid crutches and swishy fabric, and the ways the fabric hides and reveals Toby's body. Underneath the cape, they are wearing a dark shimmery fabric unitard, with geometric yellow knee pads, and black hip protection shorts. Frequently, only their bare feet and bald head are visible outside the cape.

They finish standing at center stage, crutches planted in front of their feet, leaning on the crutches on their elbows so their hands are free to open out of the cape, then disappear, open, disappear, several times, until finally disappearing and dropping their elbows so the cape falls fully shut as the music fades out.

Transition first to second, 05:12-10:58

Toby walks to the back of the stage, and carefully removes the sparkly cape, detaching it from the crutches. They lay the cape down along the back of the stage, and place the crutches down alongside it, parallel. Then they walk slowly and carefully, wobbling a little, to the cluster of ladders and box as the music begins.

They open the box and crouch beside it, pulling various items out of its golden interior and tossing them onto the stage in front of it: some shoes, fabric items that are shiny or ruffly, a rainbow belt, socks, a dress shirt, green pants, a teal wig, a few indistinct small items, khakis, a length of pale yellow fabric. They close the box and sit on it to survey their collection.

Toby braces themselves and stands, leaning over, hands on knees, to walk through the items, looking and nudging them with their feet. Sometimes they pick something up and move it

or put it on, or sit to rest. They put on a blue dress sock, a cornflower blue button-up, the khakis, and the other sock. They gather everything into a pile except a pair of brown dress shoes, which they take down to the front of the stage to sit and put on. Once the shoes are on, they move from sitting to hands and knees as if to crawl, and then they are stuck as the music fades out.

Second piece, 10:59-16:21

Apparatus/set/props for piece: no apparatus, central floor

Toby is “stuck” at the front right of the stage, on hands and knees, as if glued to the floor. They fight their way free, twisting and folding and bending around themselves in uncomfortable-looking positions, freeing one hand at a time, then kneeling, getting more and more frantic. Their hands make various shapes of number and symbols as they move more and more intensely until at last they sag sideways and sit casually, smiling out at the audience. “Am I making you uncomfortable?”

They travel back along a diagonal, with tumbling, acrobatic movement on the floor, eventually scooting to center back near the crutches and ladders, and kicking their way back to standing. They arrange themselves upright deliberately, fixing their shirt, and squaring off in confrontation. “Am I making you uncomfortable?”

Back to the floor, rolling and building momentum, getting stuck, fighting free. The earlier stuck, frantic motion repeats, but even faster and harder. Their hands make shapes until they cover their face and Toby curls forward, rocks, hiding their face. “Am I making you uncomfortable?”

They gently unfurl, and move around the floor in more thoughtful, fluid motion, tired and breathing hard, eventually pulling themselves back to standing, with effort but not aggressively, facing right.

Transition second to third, 16:21-18:15

Toby leans forward and unlaces their shoes. They slowly start to walk back to the right and pacing by the ladders and clothes pile in a small circle, taking off their business clothes as they go, a little at a time, tired. They gather all the box items and clothes into a pile under the yellow fabric and push it off to the side, then sit down on the box, manually lifting each leg to rest one foot on the bottom rung of each ladder.

Third piece, 18:16-26:52

Apparatus/set/props for this piece: ladders and wheeled box

“You cannot be ready.” Toby breathes hard and contemplates the ladders as the music begins. Slowly, they pull themselves up to stand on the taller ladder. This piece moves with slow deliberation around the box and ladders, standing or crouching on the steps, draping over the lower ladder, turning in tight circles on top of the box. There is no wasted movement, no fidgeting, only a deliberate if obtuse path. The ladders are climbed many times, but never quite

as ladders are meant to be used. At one point, Toby sits on a step halfway up the taller ladder, with their legs inside it, leaning out in a precarious backward balance. At another, they suspend their body horizontally between both ladders and the box. At another, they stand at the top of the tall ladder, holding a black rope for balance and gently twisting. Often they are still, breathing and waiting to move to the next place. Sometimes the stillness is restful and relaxed, and other times it is held tightly, ready to move.

After many strange shapes made on and between the ladders, Toby climbs onto the box, and turns to face the front left part of the stage. "At last."

Transition third to fourth, 26:52-28:07

As the camera changes, we see the set has changed out of view. An aerial apparatus has descended in the center. It is a pair of looped fabrics, hung as hammocks, a longer one underneath a shorter one. They are dyed in a watercolor ombre, white at the top and deep dark blue at the bottom.

Toby takes off their kneepads and hip shorts, leaving the dark metallic silver unitard, and wheels the black box over beneath the slings. They climb up to stand in the bottom sling, and from there to the top sling, sitting in it. The empty sling loops beneath them about 2', and the way they are hung and the way Toby is sitting, the top sling is nearly invisible, as if they are floating in midair. The box rolls away to the side of the stage seemingly on its own.

Fourth piece, 28:07-34:26

Apparatus/set/props for this piece: center stage, aerial slings

Toby floats on the slings, slowly dripping downward to hang by their knees, then ankle and neck. They take their time, fully surrendering their weight and melting. As the melody comes into the music they move more quickly, making more horizontal and open shapes, eventually climbing their way back up to the higher sling and dropping their legs downward with a heavy breath, hanging by their armpits. They twist and roll, faster and harder, until they are wound up higher in the slings and upside down, fighting and nearly thrashing, drowning, until they claw their way back to the very top and hang there, feet and head downwards, heavy again.

From there it is a slow and disjointed trip down, and another sharp fall with dangling feet, until they seem to gain their equilibrium, floating rightside up, deliberately wrapping the fabric. They kick up into it, and the short sling fabric spreads open to hold their entire body, like a short wide hammock, only their head visible. They flip this arrangement inside out and hover over the longer sling before catching it with their toes and taking it back inside the hammock-cocoon, and hiding the rest of their body inside as well. We can see them lengthen and contract, extend and fold, with their breath and the sound of the waves. Their hand hangs limply outside the cocoon for a while, but in time that too disappears.

Transition fourth to fifth, 34:26-38:16

Toby begins to emerge from the cocoon, first a hand, then their head, shoulders, body. The dark metallic unitard that covered their arms is gone and they have a textured, pale grey sleeveless shorts unitard on, with an open back that reveals their colorful tattoos. They continue to wiggle and squirm their way out of the cocoon (and the previous, left-behind unitard), pulling themselves out with the longer sling, until eventually they drip out and collapse on the floor, the waves turned to static.

Toby starts to wiggle and squirm, articulating their joints strangely, and bending at odd angles relative to the floor. The slings are taken up and away out of frame. Toby ripples and writhes across the floor toward the gray box, slowly and tortuously, leaving a trail of sweat in their wake. They bear their weight in strange places, and more ooze than crawl. When they reach the box, they crawl up it and over its edge, clinging precariously to climb up the stool without falling or knocking anything over.

They sit on the stool, feet curled around the legs, facing the right, and hunch over, gripping their face in their hands, then squeezing their hands together into a tight interlaced knot.

Fifth piece, 38:17-44:00

Apparatus/set/props for this piece: stool atop the box

Toby is hunched over, torso resting on elbows resting on knees, perched on top of the stool. They stay on the stool for the entirety of the piece. They are breathing hard, and their tiredness shows in their face and breath throughout. They turn their head to look directly at the audience, then turn back to their own experience.

When they start to move their body, it is carefully and with great effort. They extend stiffly and contract sharply. Their hands sometimes are fists, sometimes clawed, often tightly holding another body part. Their position on the stool varies, sometimes sitting, other times crouching on the rungs, or sliding down off the seat to hang on the side precariously. Much of the movement of their body is initiated with their hands, or by letting things fall into gravity. As the repetition of the synth gets taken over the static, they repeat a sequence of looking, hiding their face, stroking their knees, and dropping a leg alongside the stool to swing and return, until both legs are dropped at once and their slowly, shakily extend into a spread-eagle shape, balanced astride the stool, face anguished. When the music breaks to piano, they collapse inward, curling in on themselves, starting a slow spiral turn around the stool to ultimately sink down it, on their belly on the drop and then sliding lower, draping over, legs dangling in space as static builds and fades again.

Transition fifth to sixth, 44:01-47:00

In the silence, Toby sets their feet down onto the gray box and carefully crouches down behind the stool along the narrow edge of the box. They reach behind it into the darkness and

grab the black wheeled box from earlier, rolling it around to the left of the gray box and opening its lid. They crawl awkwardly along the edge of the gray box and step down inside the black one, crouching into it. As they stand up, a lustrous red dress comes with them, up over their hips on top of the gray unitard. They step out of the box to wrap the straps of the dress over their chest and shoulders, tying them at each hip to gather the skirt. They sit on the wheeled box to finish arranging the straps, then push backward with their feet to roll behind the box-stool combo to the back of the stage, near where the crutches and cape are lying. They walk carefully over to the crutches, their hands holding their hips steady with each step.

Sixth piece, 47:01-51:59

Apparatus/set/props for this piece: crutches

Toby stands alongside the crutches, facing away from them, one foot extended backwards along their length. They roll their shoulder backward, then forward, turning their torso toward and away, and the movement repeats and carries into their hips, eventually turning their whole body, which sweeps forward to grab the crutches, and the duet is on. This piece has a sensuous, tango-like energy, with curving hip movements, feet and crutches stroking the floor and twining around each other, and gravity-defying bends and leans. Toby and the crutches move as if partners to each other. Its soundscape comes entirely from the live sound of the crutches and Toby's body.

At one point, they lower themselves from a long, low A-shaped lean - crutches forward, legs back - onto the floor, only to sweep the crutches around them in a circle, momentum carrying them back to standing. At another point, they wrap their left leg around the crutch shaft and handle, balancing just well enough to release the other crutch and free both hands, rolling their wrists and wrapping around their torso. At other points, crutches and legs take it in turns to move one another, or a hand leaves the crutch handle to touch another way.

In the end, one crutch lies along the floor, and Toby slides the other crutch along its length, bit by bit, until they can pivot around and lay them in parallel. Toby rocks backward on the floor between them, stroking their length, until the momentum carries them upward and they catch the cuffs on their way up, standing both at once and leveraging them for a deep backbend. They keep rocking upward, hands on handles, weight swinging forward and back, until they press back into a deep lunge and with a final flourish, wrap their right leg around their left crutch, twisting to look back over their shoulder toward their left.

Transition sixth to seventh, 52:00-55:08

As the first plucked cello notes begin, Toby unwinds their leg, and walks to the side and back toward the ladders, using their crutches. They pause there for a moment, while some set change happens off-camera. As they walk back to stage left, we see a black crash mat in the center stage, and a pale purple-pink aerial fabric coming down from the center of the stage and with its ends draped over the gray box on the left. The stool has been moved from the gray box to the black box in the back corner, and Toby leans their crutches carefully against it. They limp

to the gray box, and climb on top to sit on it between the two trailing pieces of aerial fabric. They look up and rest for a few moments.

They stand up on the box, looking upward toward the top of the fabric. They untie their red wrap dress, and let the ties puddle on the floor beside the box, then shimmy the rest of the dress off with it, and sit to rest again, now wearing only the gray short unitard. This time when they stand they pull themselves up with the tails of the purple fabric, and once standing, methodically wrap each arm in one tail from shoulder to wrist.

Seventh piece, 55:08-1:00:52

Apparatus/set/props for this piece: aerial fabric

As the first long cello chord sounds, Toby steps off the gray box, arms held strong to their sides, and swings in a long arc over the crash mat, toward the ladders, and back again. After a few swings they start to slow themselves down on the crash mat with small steps, unwrapping their arms, until they stand in place holding the fabric. They pull themselves into the air upside-down, catching one leg on the fabric, and start an aerial sequence, rotating their body back and forth between the two fabric pieces, creating spaces and threading through them until they are high enough to wrap their body around the waist and shoulders and hang upside down, one leg hooked on the fabric and the other leg and both arms stretched outward, relaxed. They sit up above this position and look outward before cartwheeling back down, and rolling to the floor.

On the floor, they untwist themselves from the fabric and spin it in the air above them, billowing gently like a sail, before they climb up once again. This time they climb upright, and at the top thread their body through to open outward in a twisted draping shape, then snuggling back between the fabrics to flip upside down and hang vertically. They gather the free ends of the fabric and twist them, sending themselves into a spin, from which they climb up and somersault forward once again. They land hanging upright with legs together and arms outstretched, and slowly let themselves sink to touch the ground, pivoting around the touching toe until they are once again spinning, hanging in the air just above the ground. They sink out of the spin to lie on the mat with the fabrics at their feet, breathing hard.

Transition seventh to eighth, 1:00:53-1:02:15

As the new soundscape becomes audible, Toby reaches across their chest, stroking and arcing their arms. They wrap themselves as if in a hug and then reach upward, fingers splayed, arms and legs moving stiffly and mechanically, in time with their breath. This motion picks them up and they sit up, scoot off the mat, and push it to the back of the stage, out of the way. Their tattoos - a colorful octopus on their right shoulder, an owl on the left, a tree at the bottom of their back - are very visible. They lie back down.

Eighth piece (finale), 1:02:16-1:07:25

Apparatus/set/props for this piece: wheelchair

Toby scoots on their back toward the cluster of ladders. They repeat some of the mechanical breathing movement, turning and creature-crawling, until they reach the wheel leaning against the ladder. They roll it alongside them, knee-walking, to the center front of stage, and pluck its spokes in an off-key tune that is echoed in the recorded sound. They roll it to the left side of the stage where the other wheel is leaning, and sit down against the side of the gray box, on top of the red dress, lying one wheel to each side. They rest before reaching behind the gray box to pull a manual wheelchair frame out from the space inside the box, and wheel it around in front of them. They cuddle it in various ways as they reunite it with its wheels - stroking, spooning it on its side, head-nudging and following it as it rolls, reassembled, toward the center. Toby climbs in and sits, turning to face center.

As the harp strikes, Toby strokes their arms across their body and opens them, repeating it on each strike. On the final strike they turn their back to the audience, and begin conducting the orchestral sweeps. The imaginary orchestra is spread out over the set, in the locations of the ladders, stool, boxes, fabric, mat, and cape, and they gesture with scoops and sweeps all the pieces together as the music builds. As it fades, their raised left hand comes down to touch their head, sliding down their face as they turn back toward the front with their free hand, and down their throat. As it lands on their heart, on the last notes of music, they smile (through some tears).

Video fades to black, and returns to do a bow.

Credits, 1:07-26-end

Text reads:

~~“Binary Star”~~

with Noah Witke Mele

Music: “Transcend and Include”, Artemis 7

Transitional music: “Become Death”, Jahzzar (CC-BY 3.0)

“What We Ask of Flesh: Passing”

with Christal Brown

(Untitled, ladders)

with Polly Motley

Soundscape: Toby MacNutt

“Of Burials at Sea”

with Nicole Dagesse

Soundscape: Toby MacNutt

“Time Dilation”

Music: with assistance from Michael Eringis

“(It Takes) Two”

(Untitled, fabric)

Music: Liana Nuse

(Untitled, wheels)

with NEVE

Music (temporary): Toby MacNutt

Project Assistant: Dawn States

Creative Consultant: Serenity Smith Forchion

Video Production: Angus Kittler Reid - QFilmworks.com

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For booking and other inquiries, contact twmacnutt@gmail.com

<https://www.tobymacnutt.com/dance/a-singular-they/>