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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

***Without The Other: An Interrogation of the Ethics, Devising, and
Performance of Contemporary Autobiographical Theatre***

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Alex Rowan Doble

June 2015

The Thesis of Alex Doble is approved:

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Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract..... | iv |
| Acknowledgments | v |
| Preface | 1 |
| A Sense of Self | 2 |
| Beginning..... | 5 |
| End | 23 |
| Postscript..... | 29 |
| Appendix I: <i>I Don't Hate You Like I Hate Other People: Just Another Romantic</i> <i>Comedy script draft</i> | 30 |
| Appendix II: <i>I Don't Hate You...</i> rehearsal recording | 47 |
| Bibliography | 48 |

Abstract

Without The Other: An Interrogation of the Ethics, Devising, and Performance of Contemporary Autobiographical Theatre

Alex Doble

The 'self' is an unavoidable component of any actor's work – though it is often shunned: we find that our line of work demands we professionally conceal and avoid that 'self'. However, continuing to crusade in support of my belief that every traditional 'limitation' of the theatre is just another unique opportunity in disguise, I explore the value of 'the self onstage' by engaging in autobiographical performance and reflecting on the process and the outcome.

Taking into consideration works leading up to this point, as well as experiences in a more traditional acting role in the Fall 2014 production *Birth of Stars* at the University of California, Santa Cruz, this document discusses the nature of autobiographical performance, the attraction of the form, some of the inherent challenges presented to an actor approaching this mode, and why autobiographical performance is, in my opinion, essential to the field of contemporary performance.

Acknowledgments

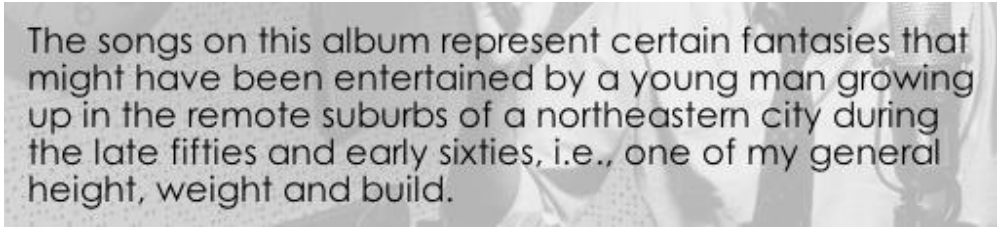
I would like to thank my thesis committee and the UCSC Theater Arts faculty and staff for their support and advice throughout this year – with special mentions to Angela Beck for her endless patience in sorting out my life, and to Professor Bierman for his constant enthusiasm, and for lending me that fabulous Spalding Gray book (which I have yet to return, but about which I have most definitely not forgotten).

I would also like to personally thank Sage Hoffee for not only putting up with me in her life, house, and head, but for letting me put all of the above up on the stage.

Preface

Following in a long line of works influenced by the experiences of their authors (whether those experiences be true or imagined), I feel inspired by a disclaimer included in the liner notes of Donald Fagen's 1982 album *The Nightfly*. Made up of songs written from his youthful visions of the future, Fagen went on to produce *Kamakiriad* (1993) – a reflection on middle-age – and finally, *Morph the Cat* (2006) – an album based on, in Fagen's own words, ruminations on 'the later stages of life – or the beginning stages of death' (Hall 26).

The aforementioned disclaimer is reprinted below:



The songs on this album represent certain fantasies that might have been entertained by a young man growing up in the remote suburbs of a northeastern city during the late fifties and early sixties, i.e., one of my general height, weight and build.

Aware of the potentially naïve, time-of-life specific nature that this text might have, I wish to open with a disclaimer of my own, in borrowed tones:

Note: *the ponderings in this document represent certain thoughts that may have been entertained by a young man, born in the English countryside, who is finally considering growing up in a southwestern US town during the mid-twenty-tens, i.e., one of my general height, weight, and build.*

A Sense of Self

‘The smallest social unit is not the individual; but two people. We create each other in life,’ proposes Brecht (Rousse 39). Semantically, this is indeed true; every Oxford English Dictionary definition of ‘society’ demands the plurality of its subjects. However, to consider it a little more deeply, Brecht here reveals the essential definition of the ‘self’. Suppose that you exist alone – yourself, and nothing more. You are all, you are the be-all and end-all. In being everything, you are nothing – there is nothing against which you may define yourself, and therein, you remain undefined. Here is where the second party comes in.

As soon as there are two, there can be the individual; and the individual has a ‘self’ – and this self exists because it is not ‘the other’ – the ‘not-self’. Like yin and yang, the existence of one is intricately tied to the other. Your ‘self’ can be as similar or as dissimilar to the not-self as you could care to imagine – but fundamentally, it is this sense of not-being the not-self that defines your self.

This sense of defining the self against a non-self is inverted in the classic Stanislavskian approach to embodying a character: you define that sense of character with reference to your own experiences, your own emotions: that character comes to life through parallels between their experience and your own – they are defined against your self. System-staples such as the ‘magic if’ feed directly off of the experience of the actor to generate a sense of character¹.

¹ ‘Think hard about what has gone before and re-create it’ (Stanislavski 43).

But though this method of 'self creation' seems capable of self-replicating ad infinitum, to what use is that 'original' self put? It remains largely hidden from the stage, shunned, but for a rather specific part of the medium: autobiographical theatre.

For the purposes of specialisation, and categorisation to define my education, I identify as an actor. But what, in my case, do I mean by 'actor'? Traditional theatrical (or, moreso, public) consensus would be that I am the most visible, accessible part of a system of artistic trickle-down: at the top, the playwright produces and is 'armed with a text' (Derrida 296), then, via his 'enslaved interpreters' (ibid.), the theatrical essence is filtered through technical, artistic, and business direction, eventually pooling in the performers, and is therefrom expelled into the faces of the unsuspecting public.

Contemporary theatrical consensus also seems to fit my definition of 'actor' ill; Liz Tomlin describes a 'binary division between text-based and non-text-based models of performance' (57) within the scene, something that she and I both agree 'inevitably constrains the potential of new artistic practice' (58). A reaction against the 'sanctity of the text' invariably must include a theatre in which any form of text – written or otherwise – is completely subservient to the physical – however, in terms of the work I have been producing, the presence of playwright as 'author-creator' (Derrida 296) is also no longer; *I, Actor*, am author-creator – author-creator-performer. *Actor-creator*, one might simplify. The text is no longer hallowed, transcribed into stone tablets and handed down from on high; we have

reclaimed the text, and now it is ours, there is no shame in incorporating it into our pieces; we are subservient to nothing and to no-one: actor-creators are no longer 'mimetic puppets under the control of a director' (Taylor 683).

I will hereafter explore some of the joys, the pitfalls, the advantages, disadvantages, dangers, thrills, and challenges of performing autobiography (and performing autobiographically), with some comparison to one of my more traditional acting roles during the last year, all contextualised by some of my previous works that lead to this infatuation – the 'honeymoon period' of which is still yet to fade.

Beginning

Deconstructing beginnings: according to Joseph Campbell, ‘the adventure may begin as a mere blunder ... one may be only casually strolling, when some passing phenomenon catches the wandering eye and lures one away from the frequented paths of man’ (53-54). Certainly, this particular adventure of ‘the self onstage’ began after a delicately tuned series of coincidental occurrences – blunders, if you like – that lead me from a well-trod path down a series of increasingly serpentine corridors and through decreasingly well-lit rooms.

My curiosity about the use of real stories in theatre was first piqued when I was part of an ensemble² being lead through a devising process by UCSC student Rosie Glen-Lambert in May 2013, which culminated in a performance in the attic of her house (*Everyone Else is Already Taken*). The performed piece presented the theme of ‘confession’, and it included a mixture of more traditional scenes in which we acted out fictitious scenarios where we pushed the boundaries of confession as a theme, as well as more experimental, avant-garde sections that aimed to bring the theme into the real world and into relevancy. The most important of those more contemporary scenes was the (somewhat unimaginatively-named) ‘confession scene’. Before I describe this portion of the

² Well-represented by Taylor’s description of companies like The Performance Group, we too were a collaborative ensemble ‘formed by actors interested in a collective, autonomous theatre free from the constraints of text, director, representational strictures, audience expectations, and historically fossilized stage conventions’ (683). Glen-Lambert insisted on referring to herself as ‘editor’ over ‘director’, and indeed eschewed much of the control traditionally afforded by the latter position.

show, a salient feature of the performance that must be declared was that the audience members were all asked to anonymously write, on entry to the house, one of their deepest, darkest secrets, fears, shames, or sins on a scrap of paper. This paper was placed in an envelope, which was kept by Glen-Lambert backstage.

The confession scene, then, in a nutshell: the ensemble were all stood dotted around the attic space, sat on chairs, wound around beams, et cetera – but the space was in pitch darkness. In a seemingly-random order, each performer would turn on a flashlight that illuminated their face, and say aloud a confession – sometimes one of their own, sometimes an ensemble member's, and sometimes an audience member's. Never was the source of the confession announced; nor were they ever justified, solved, moralised over, or denounced. These confessions ranged from things such as 'I'm afraid of the sea; whenever my friends invite me to the beach I'm always 'busy', to 'I hate strangers and I don't know why,' to 'I am a virgin and do not want to be,' to 'I have tried to kill myself.' Though the length and depth of these fragments of 'person' varied wildly, what did not vary was the weight of each of these scraps of paper – the gravity and the sincerity of the sentiment written thereon; there was a tangible sense of genuine feeling in each statement, which was shared between performer and spectator alike – bringing us 'closer to realization [of] the Artaudian ideals of theatre as [a] purgative experience for [both] audience and actor' (Taylor 683).

Post-show, I was always fascinated by the feeling of community that had been fostered within each audience; groups of fifteen, acquainted for a mere thirty

minutes apiece, interacted with each other in those minutes after each performance with such overwhelming openness, such respect – and were more responsive and receptive to each other than any other groups of patrons I had ever seen exiting a theatre. My firm belief is that it was that scene – in which *they too* were exposed, no longer just us and our characters – that led to this overwhelming sense of togetherness and acceptance. The darkness anonymised, and the anonymity proved disinhibiting – and so the attic became a space in which our darkest desires were aired freely, and the weight of the world was spread across many shoulders.

Later, I would discover that we were not alone in using our confessional scraps in a public forum: British contemporary theatre company Forced Entertainment's 1994 production *Speak Bitterness* was, at its most expansive, a six-hour durational piece in which a line of performers would take turns listing off confessions written mostly by company 'playwright' Tim Etchells. Though we too used pre-prepared text in our confession scene, what sets it apart is the use of audience text and the fact that none of our confessions were fictitious. *Speak Bitterness's* confessions are often inflated, ranging 'from big-time stuff like forgery, murder or genocide[,] to nasty little details like reading each other's diaries or forgetting to take the dogs out for a walk' (Etchells 179). Forced Entertainment also generated a sense of culpability within (and spread across) the ensemble, rather than giving ownership to the individual, by insisting on the use of the group pronoun 'we'. The thoughts I heard voiced downstairs following

performances of *Everyone Else is Already Taken* were generally along the lines of 'that wasn't my confession, but I could have written it' – and I wonder if Forced Entertainment were trying to promote this sense of shared guilt (to be communally exorcised through the performance) by democratising the confessions through the pluralistic pronoun. I would argue that keeping the phrasing strictly personal added to the verity of the sentiments, and gave them more potency when spoken aloud.

Confessions (or what appear to be confessions of a kind) are also snuck into Bristol-based theatre duo Action Hero's similarly-durational work *Slap Talk* (2013). Trading off lines, Action Hero (Gemma Paintin and James Stenhouse) read 'combative dialogue' (Paintin 2014) from an autocue for anything from four to six hours – and at several points the 'combat' seems to simmer down into something profoundly personal, and very touching. During the first six-hour performance at the University of Plymouth, I was struck by one of Stenhouse's lines: 'I'm punching above my weight. You're above my weight' (2014). The piece moved from overblown and incredibly humorous to intimate and revealing within the space of these two short sentences – almost, it seemed, tapping into the autobiography of the performer. Later, both Paintin and Stenhouse would make some very personal remarks ('it's not my fault you need a brace', 'it's not my fault you're so small', et cetera) – but the company were taking advantage of the assumption that there was autobiographical content within their writing. The tension was increased exponentially when we were lead to believe that we were seeing through this

charade, into the real lives of, and relationship between, the company-cum-couple onstage. Interestingly, however, the lines in the show are not set; what Paintin might say one night, Stenhouse could say the next. Action Hero leave clues visible to us: the presence and centrality of the autocue asks that we question how 'authentic' the performance is, and how 'authentic' these 'true' moments are (Paintin 2014) – and it makes a very serious point about modern media spectatorship on the occasions that we're fooled into believing that they are real. But taking advantage of seeming-autobiography to make larger statements aside, the piece begs another question: can autobiography carry as much personal weight when delivered by someone other than the author? The personal remarks Action Hero throw out in *Slap Talk* may be true on some level, but they aren't necessarily coming from the right mouth. What does this, in turn, say about the value (or even the possibility) of reproducing autobiographical shows? And is it truly autobiographical when spoken by an 'other'? Does it even matter? I will touch upon these questions in a later section.

The following year (academic year 2013-14), I produced a piece of work that once again used personal experience as a basis for a performance. *Greetings to the New Brunette* (Man Corner 2014) revolved around the romantic relationships and encounters of myself and the other half of Man Corner, Oliver Tatt. On this occasion we used a combination of songs, stories (both real and fictional), and performed scenarios to explore the theme of love – what it meant to us, how we had experienced it in our lives thus far, and how we were perhaps

both getting it completely wrong. Once again, we delved deep into personal experiences, half-expecting that our stories were too specific to mean anything to anybody else. And yet, once again, we were greeted afterwards by audiences with comments such as ‘I’ve felt those things, but have never been able to articulate them,’ or ‘I’ve said that, but I’d never given *why* a second thought before now.’ Clearly, there was something in the deeply personal that translated into something felt by the whole – since, to my surprise, it wasn’t only men who approached us with feelings of shared experience – there were an equal number of female spectators responding too. I remember one particular woman in a flood of tears, saying that we’d really struck a nerve; something unexpected, but I suppose, perfectly understandable; we were discussing the nature of love: a universal experience.

A valuable lesson I drew from that show’s process was that autobiographical performance does not necessitate non-performativity. It draws from real life, certainly – and it cannot deviate from that ‘truth’ without becoming a corruption, a variation upon itself – but this does not mean that the presentation of this unchanging ‘truth’ need be as stale as a news report. A comment I received after performing *Greetings* was ‘that was very ‘you’’ – both a friendly jab from a fellow graduate student (who had also produced a piece of autobiographical work – *Handle With Care* (Meike Deveney 2014) – a truly stellar durational piece, impeccably framed), as well as a revealing observation on the ‘self’ I had presented: ‘very’ could suggest that I was, in spite of my attempts at being

transparent and honest, a caricature of myself. I chalk this up to the performativity of the piece – we had to be selective in our representations of ourselves in order to create something coherent. I say ‘selective’ very specifically – nothing was ‘heightened’ beyond the unavoidable amplification a stage provides, though with pieces missing, what remained may have seemed enlarged; an optical illusion, and nothing more. The ‘you’, however, the raven continued, suggests that I was, nevertheless, successful in my transparency. It was me, my self, onstage, and nobody else.

Moving on now to this academic year, five-thousand miles across the Atlantic Ocean, to Saturday, October 4th, 2014. I walked into the eXperimental Theater at the University of California, Santa Cruz, armed with a crumpled, photocopied side, next to Emily Schneiderman, whom I would go on to play opposite that quarter. We were at recalls for Michael Chemers’ *Birth of Stars* (2014), to be directed by Digital Arts and New Media student Joan Raspo. As we were instructed to position ourselves in front of an imposing-looking camera, Joan turned to me and said: ‘You’re the new kid. You don’t quite fit in. You’ve met this girl. She’s intriguing, and you’ve got a huge crush on her.’ Reeling a little at this complete stranger confronting me with an excerpt of my life story circa-November 2012, I pause for a little too long before it clicks: ‘Oh, you mean in the play! Got it.’

Little did I know it at the time, the overall process for this play turned out to be unique in a number of fascinating ways. The similarities that arose between

myself and this character did not end there³ – something which transpired to be both interesting as well as problematic for me. Now without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to introduce JAMIE, and to describe my experience in *Birth of Stars*.

Having the playwright in the room for a rehearsal is a double-edged sword; whilst they can provide valuable insight and explanations with scope beyond that of your wildest imaginings, they can also sometimes have an unrelenting grasp on their work, an inability to let it find its own feet and to waddle out of the nest, either to fly high, or to plummet to its gruesome and bloody demise. Having Professor Chemers in the space was actually wonderfully liberating – he was open to making script adjustments when things didn't read well, and was very receptive to the fact that I was being asked to play the role of JAMIE 'straight' in terms of nationality; i.e. playing him as British.

This was also a double-edged sword. Of course, changing words such as 'math' to 'maths' made little difference to the overall production, and prevented the language being anapistic – an American English text being awkwardly pronounced in (and sold to the audience as being part of) a British English dialect. It did, however, make making other changes seem more appealing than dealing with perhaps artistically awkward language: 'Hey, don't come off all twisted, I *get* you,' pleads JAMIE on page 35, later retorting that SOPHIA's 'thing for science' is 'no

³ I'm not including the fact that 'I use his face and his vocal chords', to quote Ricky Gervais conceding on the ways he might conceivably be like his character David Brent (*The Ricky Gervais Show*).

biggie. It's cool with me.' For weeks my delivery of these lines was stilted, begrudging, and reticent – I was determined that these were lines not suited to an English actor, playing an English character – but after a while I realised: would they be more natural spoken by an American actor? I very much doubted it. The awkwardness arising from a nationality change had put me in the mindset that anything that felt unnatural in my mouth must be a mistake – when, in fact, most of these things were simply acquired tastes that I'd have to learn to chew properly⁴.

So to some degree, it was out of necessity that some lines were changed to maintain the internal logic of the part. Chemers embraced the idea of a British JAMIE, and even expressed that it conceptually complimented the character as he saw him. But midway through the process, the director approached me and said: 'I want you to play JAMIE more like you.' What did this mean? Did this mean that my character work was unsatisfactory? Was I acting poorly? Poorly I could understand, I never expect more – be that a realistic expectation or a stereotypical bit of self-deprecation – but so poorly that a director effectively asks me to *stop acting*? I was astounded.

Looking at it from a more objective standpoint, what had more likely happened along the way was that I had unwittingly introduced myself at recalls and in rehearsals as a character – Alex – or ALEX, I suppose – and in doing so, I had

⁴ Except for the word 'dong', rather pleasingly printed on page 69. I changed my substitution for that nightly – often settling for 'nob' as a satisfactory equivalent. Though Chemers had once suggested 'willy', the fact that my character was in his 'late teens' would make the usage of that term at least a decade out of place – and therein, almost equally as awkward to use.

ceased to be a *human being*, and had instead become *the expected performance*. The evidence was there for all to see, the clues visible to be followed: the script changes were all overseen by myself, suggested and requested by myself – so, slowly – awkward phrases for the sake of being awkward aside (which, honestly, is no real deviation from the truth of ‘me’) – JAMIE’s language stopped being JAMIE’s language, and turned into my own.

I feel as though it is this kind of situation that generates negativity towards actors who play characters that are very much like themselves: the perception being, perhaps, that whilst a similar sense of self might offer them a wealth of insight into how this character might think, feel, or act, we cannot be sure that this person who is ostensibly performing ‘someone else’ isn’t just ‘being themselves’. It might come across as unimaginative, lazy – and it might even be so, directly or indirectly. I also can’t imagine it being particularly challenging or satisfactory to the actor; we put so much emphasis on the joy of the escapism side of our work that performing someone who might as well be our ‘street self’ doesn’t sound appealing in the slightest. Nor did it seem appealing when I was asked to play JAMIE ‘more like me’.

I have been asked on numerous occasions about the ethics of performing in a piece that is, in a sense, semi-biographical. *Birth of Stars* was, likely unbeknownst to the majority of our audiences, based partly on the true story of female astronomer Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, who ‘found that hydrogen and helium are the most abundant elements in stars, though this conclusion was not

generally accepted until it was confirmed four years later by the noted American astronomer Henry Norris Russell' ('Physical science', Britannica School) – although it is noted that Russell not only confirmed these findings, but 'took credit for explaining the phenomenon' (Vetter).

Is this a problem for me ethically, to attempt to portray the life of others through biography? In this particular case, I will state plainly: I never gave the ethics of the thing a second thought whilst performing it. First and foremost, it was a story merely *inspired by* these true events and real-life people (Payne-Gaposchkin is obviously reflected strongly in SOPHIA, and Russell in STEPHEN) – JAMIE was more of a theatrical device than anything else in this sense, and beholden to no real-world influence or inspiration – but even then, I would say that in terms of ethics, the performer is beholden to nobody but themselves and their own conscience, in my opinion – when performing biographically or *autobiographically*. If a human being puts themselves in the public domain – as we all inevitably do on a daily basis – we are viable targets for dramatic reinterpretation. We cannot help but be. We feature so prominently in the lives of every other human being around us that we cannot claim ownership of ourselves – particularly not of other people's interpretation and experience of us. As such, why should the performer owe you any courtesies in their portrayal of you? Though, if they're interested in performing democratically, accurately, and

inclusively, it is their right to invite you to collaborate with them or to perform alongside them⁵; something I shall explore in greater depth anon.

⁵ This provision being the saving grace to a paragraph that otherwise explains my disclaimer in the preface – I am fully aware of the controversy around some of Gray’s works, regarded as being exploitative of his family and others in his life – and yet I cannot help but believe that it is utterly within the rights of the performer to waive this provision wholly.

Middle

The self, we have concluded, cannot exist without the other. My initial foray into the world of autobiographical storytelling this year had me emulating monologist Spalding Gray. A storyteller of the highest calibre, Gray's work had me utterly enraptured and completely invested in 'his search for 'the perfect moment'' (Heddon 143). The beauty of his work was that it lacked the corruption of committee – it was a pure vision, untainted by compromise. My first writings were an extension of the themes I had previously explored in *Greetings*; the fleeting meetings of strangers in the everyday – or, more specifically, my interactions with women. I recorded and mused on several encounters, adventures, interactions – exploring the faint hint of romance in chance passing acquaintances. My stories were to end with the first adventures of myself and the girl I had just met at the start of the year – somebody with whom I was developing a very intimate relationship with very quickly. Clutching an excerpt regarding our first sexual encounter, I was anxiously preparing to submit the revealing document to my playwriting professor when she asked if she could read 'how I had written her'. The realisation hit me like a high-speed guilt-train: this was not only my autobiography, but someone else's *biography*. Heddon had informed me that Gray had violated the wishes and trust of his family in writing about them and making public private documents (Heddon 146), and yet it hadn't occurred to me that my writing too had the potential to expose others, to violate their trust, or to misrepresent them.

This was signalled from the beginning: the ‘self’, we concluded, cannot exist without the ‘other’ – Heddon reinforces this notion: ‘the ‘self’ [is] not only a historical and cultural construct but is imbued with, and indeed is inseparable from, others’ (124). So how do we navigate this? In being ‘inseparable from others’, how can autobiography exist with the author alone? And, since autobiography seems to be given meaning or context in relation to the life of another, ‘to what extent ... is our freedom to narrate our own lives restricted by the rights of others to privacy? Does the right to commodify one’s own life and self entail the right to commodify others?’ (Couser 7).

I previously argued that my experience is mine to exploit at will – and that by existing in and around my life, others forfeit their right to privacy when they come within range of my awareness. I will, for the most-part, whole-heartedly demand that ‘harm to minor characters in one’s autobiography be dismissed as unavoidable and trivial’ (Couser xi) – however, my cold, logical thought train was derailed by the soft, squishy feelings-part of my brain when it came to my writings about my soon-to-be partner⁶. The concern for her feelings made Couser’s ethical question all the more poignant; and it lead me to the idea of inviting my future girlfriend to write with me. By having both parties present to present both sides as two interwoven autobiographies, do we safely navigate around the issue of misrepresentation and exploitation?

⁶ Couser also finds that ‘intimate life writing – that done within families or couples, close relationships’ (xii) has higher ‘ethical stakes’ (ibid.) – which leaves me unsurprised at my greater sympathy for ‘persons who are liable to exposure by someone with whom they are involved in an intimate or trust-based relationship but are unable to represent themselves in writing’ (ibid.).

Once Sage (the previously mentioned 'soon-to-be partner') agreed to write with me on this project I scrapped the materials pertaining to people who weren't there to defend themselves from my single-sided viewpoint, and we proceeded to systematically deconstruct our relationship from both sides. The drama that had previously been lacking – that of basic, human conflict – was instantly reinstated the moment the second person spoke out. 'We had a lovely weekend, and I realised then that this was the girl for me,' I concluded. 'We had a lovely weekend, and I realised that I never wanted to see him again,' she replied.

It is in a scenario such as this that we may encounter one of the dangers of autobiography. Performance is fraught with danger – but in this mode, there are enormous personal stakes: you immediately face the dangers of self-discovery, but also there is the danger of discovering too much about others⁷, and about how they view you. The focus of the piece didn't shift when the company doubled, so I had to be prepared to face not only her differing interpretation of our romantic life, but the baggage of past romantic lives that she brought along with her. 'Leaving yourself at home' implies also 'leaving your character at the door' on the way out – a nice separation of the personal and the fictitious, of home and work –

⁷ 'Leaving yourself at home' – a practice generally venerated in the modern theatre – is made impossible. 'Clean up before you come to the theatre. And once inside, don't spit in corners,' (557) Stanislavski writes, in reference to a metaphor from his first publication *My Life in Art*. Autobiographical performance seems almost the equivalent of vomiting all over the stage by this logic. 'Most actors ... bring all the dirt of their daily lives into the theatre – gossip, intrigue, tittle-tattle, slander, envy, petty vanity. The result is not a temple of art but a spittoon, a rubbish heap, a cesspit,' he continues. All future performances of mine will feature a sign above the door reading 'follow me, follow, down to the hollow - and there let us wallow in glorious mud' (*The Hippopotamus Song*, Flanders and Swann) – for the 'dirt of my daily life' has become the subject of my art, and I shall revel in it.

of personal and professional, if you will – and ‘ideally’, in the traditional theatre, never the twain shall meet. Not so in autobiography. Gray has been quoted mourning the loss of this separation (‘I am both living in it and telling about it – which makes things extremely claustrophobic’ (Schechner 164)) – evidence that the loss of this part of system ethos removes a layer of protection for the actor.

Perhaps, though, this is not something to be feared, but to be embraced: the aim of the exercise is, after all, to transpose the individual into infinity, into ubiquity, into allegory. When the story has been laid so bare that there exists nothing but the kernel, the singularity at the very heart, it ends up at the other end of the spectrum: the impossibly personal becomes unimaginably universal – and through this, the person (and therein, the element about which we have feelings and could potentially ‘learn too much’) is lost. Dehumanised. Dematerialised. As Newton states, ‘...getting someone else’s story is also a way of losing the person as “real”’ (19).

The show we ended up writing (*I Don’t Hate You Like I Hate Other People: Just Another Romantic Comedy* (see Appendices I and II)) will debut at UCSC’s Barn Theater on May 1st. Taking a less performative approach than *Greetings*, this exploration of Sage’s and my relationship takes the form of a series of anecdotes explored from both sides – and often these sides are in complete contradiction, which, as expected, creates the humour and the drama. I don’t think the piece suffers for being less abstract in its approach; we avoid using our proper names, just to keep it from being pointedly personal – and we spend the majority of the

show addressing the audience, referring to ourselves in the first- and third-person (until the section where I reveal the things about the relationship that upset me – at which point during an improvised version of that scene I naturally broke from the third-person into the second-person, and addressed her directly as ‘you’; something unplanned, but, I feel, deeply meaningful and enormously appropriate).

Considering the reproduction of autobiographical shows; one of the comments I received from professors regarding *Greetings* was that part of the beauty of the show was its naïveté, and how personally- and temporally-dependant it was – how it could not possibly have been performed by anybody else at any other time of life. ‘You could only have performed this *now*.’ I firmly believe that, as much as I loved that piece, I really couldn’t perform it now; it came out of heartbreak, that sense of being set adrift post-relationship – a place where I am no longer. This was hammered home when we began rehearsals for *I Don’t Hate You...*, having written it six to eight weeks before – even at just a couple of months’ remove the text felt completely alien to us, and readings felt stilted and awkward. It wasn’t until we employed a tactic from *Greetings*’ ‘Gallery’ scene (in which myself and Oliver traded off meandering monologues telling two different stories, interwoven) whereby we used the script to define start and end points for each block of text, then improvised the material in between, that we got it to sound natural and feel ‘true’ again. The use of improvised dialogue with a set direction allowed us to not merely recite ‘memories of six months ago, as told by me three

months ago', but to recount 'memories of six months ago in a way that is true and meaningful to me, here and now'.

Auslander asserts 'that memory distorts, that the information we retrieve is not the same as the data we store,' (Zarrilli 56) – so placing that in the context of my own work: *Greetings* was, at the time, the height of honesty as far as I was concerned. The key phrase here being 'at the time' – because personal truth is in constant flux (case in point: every year we think 'Goodness, now I'm n years old, I realise how naïve I was at $n-1$ '). We cannot recall events exactly because our mind *does not record memories exactly* – and even after that, our mind is an analogue medium – those memories warp and degrade like vinyl or cassette tape – so even then, the memories, in their relative recorded exactitude, do not remain exact. As such, I have concluded that recreating autobiographical texts is nigh-on impossible without reinterpreting it from the viewpoint of your older, (hopefully) wiser self, in your new place and time of life. Similarly, I can see no sound arguments for autobiography as delivered by an 'other' – this would not, as far as I am concerned, differ in any way from traditional acting, relegating the original, writer 'self' to the status of character, and tearing the actor away from his or her self to try and embody an 'other'.

End

Returning to this idea of ‘self’; Heddon notes that ‘the self is unavoidably split. There is the self who was and the self who is’ (27). This problematises the notion that autobiographical performance is somehow more ‘truthful’ than other modes of performing. This concept, ‘truthfulness’, is something I do not intend to delve into in this document, because of the myriad ways in which it can be interpreted: is there not always truth in skilfully crafted theatre? Is ‘truth’ for the performer the same as ‘truth’ for the audience (i.e. can one ‘live truthfully under imaginary circumstances’ (Meisner/Longwell 15) without revealing any real ‘truth’ to the spectators)? How can one determine or prove that anything that happens onstage is factually accurate when the events are taken from something as ephemeral as the past – and from something as specific as the actor’s past, or the audience’s? I feel well-represented by an appropriated quote of Adrian Howells’: ‘my work prioritizes interpersonal connectedness and what I refer to as an authentic experience between two people (though the question of “authenticity” in the field of performance is always vexed)’ (Heddon/Howells 2) – though whilst I might value the connection between two people – namely, myself and an audience member – I do not limit myself to one-on-one encounters, and would hope that my work connects me uniquely (and creates an ‘experience between two people’) fifty times over – and that this connection is enough to convince my audience that the material is ‘real’ and ‘honest’ in spite of the unavoidable and ‘vexed question of authenticity’.

'Our culture is saturated with confessional opportunities, ranging from chat shows to "Reality TV," from Internet blogs to social networking sites such as Facebook,' (Heddon/Howells 1): so in this world where there are multitudinous outlets for potential confession, and the self seems far from a valuable commodity, why is autobiographical theatre (such as I see it) relevant, enticing, and powerful? I think because of the uniquely personable quality it holds. There are many approaches more akin to those other examples of confessional media as listed here, but in the truly accurate, truly honest sense in which I perform autobiographically, I feel at odds with the fatuous and pandering chat show format, the highly formulaic nature of 'reality' television, the oft-performative nature of online blogs, and the undoubtedly-performative nature of Facebook. These outlets are far from autobiographical – 'truly' and 'honestly' autobiographical, as I emphasised before – these are generally focused, skewed, promotional, and sensational. They also lack that live, human quality: autobiographical theatre offers 'encounters in real-time with real people' (Heddon/Howells 2), and so possesses that ever-valuable and generally-undefinable electricity provided by liveness, the energy that exists between bodies in space⁸; perhaps the most important and impressive quality that theatre has over other artistic mediums. This returns us back to the very reason I feel as though autobiographical theatre holds value regardless of whether or not the

⁸ Perhaps it is unwise to mix the word 'liveness' with what Auslander might refer to as an example of one of the many 'clichés and mystifications like "the magic of live theatre," the "energy" that supposedly exists between performers and spectators in a live event, and the "community" that live performance is often said to create among performers and spectators' (2).

material is verifiably 'true', and my expressed hopes that the power of the material will be enough to justify its status as real - but just like the 'liveness' of broadcast theatrical events, the voyeuristic thrill of autobiographical performance depends purely on the willingness of the audience to accept it as true. It could, of course, all be completely fabricated – but how it is sold to us, and how much we believe in it thereafter, will determine completely the experience we get out of it. Or, turning the triangle around, the experience it gives us, and the nature of the way it is delivered can completely change the way we view it as 'true'.

While I'm exploring the nature of the form, I would like to take a moment to consider the recording of autobiography, and the writing of works like mine. The 'creation' and the 'generation of material' is unavoidable, and completely passive – it is living in the day-to-day. The process by which you dramatise that material is independent of and irrelevant to the process of gathering the material – so when writing an autobiographical show, there is a pre-performance writing stage of developing the 'theatrical prescript'⁹ (Taylor 683) – and that prescript includes text that is unavoidably 'postscriptive' (Taylor), simply by being a recording of events that have come before. Whilst Taylor explores this in terms of the problems of non-scripted performances being recorded afterwards for posterity and recreation, I use the term in a more positive, constructive way, to encourage a reconsideration of the way we treat 'present' text developed from past experiences.

⁹ Or 'prescribing the prescript', I suppose.

Taylor's article highlights how 'to "read" the postscriptive text in the same way as a prescriptive text is to confuse completely the purpose and function of the preserved text' (684), but concedes that 'the methods of examining the postscriptive text' (ibid.) are not common knowledge, nor are they fully developed. As myself and Sage discovered, our shift from treating the recorded text as prescriptive to postscriptive (through using written lines as cues to discover immediate versions of recorded events, rather than merely recounting those events as written) turned *I Don't Hate You...* from a stagnated recital into a lively performance. Autobiography, it seems, stands up as little more than dead literature when approached as prescript – but regarded as postscript, where the text is a memorandum to be interpreted rather than a recording to be (re)presented, we have the liberty to reimagine and revive the piece as live drama.

So why, in the end, do I insist on exploring autobiographical theatre? Why am I not satisfied with performing, in a more traditional mode, the thousands of dramatic characters that have been created for that very purpose? Put simply: speaking of Stanislavski, Brecht, and Grotowski, Auslander states that 'all assume that the actor's self precedes and grounds her performance and that it is the presence of this self in performance that provides the audience with access to human truths' (Zarrilli 54) - concluding that the actor's self and the character are autonomous, and that the ever-valuable interpretive differences between various versions of the same role are 'determined by the difference between the actor's emotional repertoire and the character's. The uniqueness of the interpretation is

a function of this difference, not of the actor's self-presence emanating from her performance' (54) – leading me to the question: why try and showcase these differences in personal experience through the mask of character rather than just outright? Admittedly, the characters give us a common frame of reference against which to see these variations, but the themes in my works are the backdrop against which these human permutations become visible – without the complication of character to muddy them. Is that not a more direct way of addressing these differing qualities?

So that's my (potentially naïve) vision of *why* I have an infatuation with this style of performance – this confessional style of performance. But what of the future for me? I would like to explore the boundaries of autobiographical performance as a therapeutic tool. I previously mentioned how these kinds of works can be '[a] purgative experience for [both] audience and actor' (Taylor 683), but I am anxious to feel out where the lines are drawn. There is an acknowledged sense of therapy to repeating these experiences, that almost exorcises them¹⁰, or renders them less random and meaningless in the grand scheme of things – something that I have both experienced and enjoyed – and yet, my forerunners leave for me a warning in their wake: Deirdre Heddon enquired of Bobby Baker how performing her life might affect its future trajectory: Baker responded that she had 'a sneaking suspicion that [it had] sent [her] on a trajectory spiralling towards madness in a sense' (Gill 151). Furthermore,

¹⁰ See Heddon on Gray's use of his mother's mental health and suicide (54, 144-151).

Spalding Gray had supposedly worked out 'what was speakable and what was unspeakable', and 'what belonged in the therapist's office and what onstage' (Schechner 164) – and yet Heddon poignantly records the following: 'During my own act of considering confessional performance as a mode of pragmatic therapy, I am confronted by its limitations, as I learn that the body of Spalding Gray has been found in the River Hudson' (Gill 151). Whether this was the final frontier in his search for the perfect moment, or the outcome of failing to truly exorcise anything through years of autobiographical monologising, one can only imagine.

Postscript

‘We might think of autobiography as cartography of the self,’ states Heddon (88). In those moments where it seems to me that perhaps the presentation and performance of the self is nothing more than masturbatory self-indulgence, this quote reminds me to consider the form’s value as a tool for personal navigation.

Eschewing the traditionally indirect way of providing a mirror in which the audience may examine themselves, autobiographical performance invites us to stare right into the life of another – a life in which we might find commonality and kinship – two values that unlock our empathy, which enables us to be better people, and allow us to better the world by being more sympathetic within it.

Though my ‘cartographic’ performances may be based on a landscape that no other man will ever encounter, I have a hopeful inkling that – though I shall never walk them – other human landscapes share a similar topography; the maps I offer will not provide an identical journey, nor can they promise the same destination – but with any luck, the wanderer may get the chance to enjoy some landmarks and sights that, without the guide to invite them that way, they might have otherwise missed.

Appendix I: *I Don't Hate You Like I Hate Other People:*
Just Another Romantic Comedy script draft

Please find on the following pages an annotated copy of the script from a rehearsal leading up to the May 1st staged reading.

Draft 28/4/15

I Don't Hate You Like I Hate Other People:

Just Another Romantic Comedy

Alex Doble and Sage Hoffee

Dramatis Personæ:

Alex
Sage

Playwright's note: Hyphens are used to where the next speaker needs to interrupt or *really* jump on the line. So '?' would still be inflected like a question, but the following line would follow very soon after - barely time to think, let alone continue speaking.

'/' denotes a point where the next speaker should begin their lines, even if it means talking over the other. Their next line will begin with a '/' also.

Lines in brackets are said as though they're in brackets. Asides, but *afront*. If it's italicised, though, it's stage directions!

Our scene: *two chairs, facing the audience. A blank calendar.*

Both: One.

Sage: Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen.

Alex: One [redacted] was timid, passive, wouldn't say boo to a goose.

Sage: He was climbing in through windows at 12 at night and back again at 6.

Alex: She was a strict vegetarian, and so, by proxy, was I.

Sage: He was eating all my food and living in my house rent free.

Alex: She was afraid of her parents, and never stayed out after dark.

Sage: She was a few drinks in 'the one' the understood me.

Alex: She was watching my tone of voice for fear of upsetting her.

Sage: He was I love you but I got someone else pregnant.

1 of 16

Alex: She was as naive as me, as scared as me, as innocent as me.

Sage: They were the only love I knew.

~~She was very content in a very nice world.~~

~~Once upon a time, a princess was born, and I just say she came a little too soon, maybe she was a little too much for the King and Queen to handle at that time in their lives.~~

Alex: So I get home from lunch with Rachel. Late. So I'm sheepish. And there's this girl I'm supposed to practice monologues with. And I don't want to do it! She's so much more talented than me! 'So let's go get ice-cream', I say. And we do. And it's fun. We bond over a mutual (and guilty) love of Fall Out Boy and Legolas being the hottest member of the Fellowship. Then we get home. We're home alone, and we crash on opposite couches. So I throw a pillow at her. (Of course). And she throws it back! And suddenly we're pillow fighting. Laughing. Wrestling on the floor, touching. I don't know her and I'm touching her. And we tire, and we lie down on the sofa, bodies in opposite directions, meeting face-to-face.

Sage: So here it is. The moment that people beg for. The moment you realize that the look the other person is giving you is no longer just friendly - it's intimate, it's burning, it's hard to swallow. It's the moment where the world stops spinning and your breath quickens. It's a wordless moment that can bring you to your knees. It's the moment I hate the most. It's the moment when I turn from 'a friend' into 'a potential lover'. I can spot this look and feel nothing but dread because this moment brings my oldest (and some could say my best) friend: disappointment. I've known him since I was little and he visits a lot, but I think this is his favorite way to visit. So he gives me this look and fear shoots through me because I'm not ready! Not again, not so soon! But I can't let my old friend down. Can I? No.

Alex: And she's giving me this look, and I realise 'I really like this girl. I don't want to miss this moment. I don't want to lose her.' /So I kiss her.

Sage: /So I let him kiss me-

Alex: A peck on the lips. An invitation. An imposition. A proclamation. And it's wonderful-

Sage: And his face lights up like I've seen so many times before. A happiness I can always see but never feel.

Alex: Her lips are soft and warm and /we kiss again and again and again-

Sage: /He kisses me again and again and again-and his light grows: happiness.
But what am I? Does it even fucking matter?

~~At the end of the day, I'm just a girl who's steps.~~

~~The prince is sent a lot of time thinking of running away. What if he runs away?
If she walks out the door, he never came back?~~

Sage: I want you to imagine the most beautiful sunset you have ever seen in your life. Imagine the colors of the sky - pinks, oranges, yellows, reds, all fading into the blues of the night. Now put that sunset over Monterey Bay. Now place yourself on the rocks that live just below Westcliff. The waves are crashing and the mist is everywhere. Now you're not alone on this rock; you have someone else there, and you guys are talking about what you want in life, and while your mouth is saying things about how you want finish school, your head is screaming 'I want to be anywhere but here right now, I want to run away. I want to literally say fuck you and start running for my car and drive away to somewhere no one will find me.' So your mouth does something drastic to try and calm down your brain and says to a complete stranger 'Hey, do you want to go to Yosemite with me next weekend? Yeah, just you and me - no big deal.' Which means 'Hey stranger, do you want to drive four hours to the mountains with me and sleep in my car in a turn out on the side of the road and then hike to the top of this really high mountain because I am depressed and hate being here?'

Alex: Yeah, okay.

Sage: Okay, cool. I'll pick you up at seven on Friday.

Alex: The next week, we go to Yosemite. Hiking? I love hiking. I'm great at it. This is going to be spectacular. But she says I have to go and buy shorts. I haven't worn shorts in about fifteen years, for very good reasons. (The reasons are my lilywhite chicken legs). So I go to the shoe shop, and I buy hiking boots (these are going to be an investment, I can feel it), and then I go and pick up a pair of shorts - the most acceptable shorts I can find - and I'm ready to go.

Sage: They *were*n't acceptable, and he *wasn't* ready.

Alex: So we climb this thing, and it's great,

Sage: Ahhhh it was something thats for sure... I watched this kid wordlessly struggle up this mountain. He hated every minute that we were going up, but he did it. Not because he loves hiking. You could tell from the shorts that that was not the case. No he did it because he liked me... That was kinda cute.

Alex gives Sage a look.

Alex: And then we head back down and drive somewhere to spend the night. We find a turn-out not too far away, and she pulls up and cuts the engine. She pops the trunk and starts methodically emptying the contents, wordlessly. Five minutes later we've a nest - a bed buried in the backseat. Bashfully I change behind the car as this beautiful girl unabashedly strips down to her bra and shorts right in front of me, then we crawl into the makeshift bed, pulling the hatch half shut behind us.

In the back, we lie in the fresh air, listening to the chirps of the night and watching the occasional headlight beam drift across the upholstery. 'What's on your mind?' she asks, tugging at my shirt. 'I'll take off mine if you take off yours,' I smirk. 'Oh, thank God!' She pulls her bra off over her head. I stare a moment in vague disbelief. 'I guess I'll have to join you.'

Sage: Have you ever slept with your shirt off? If you have you know how awesome it is. This isn't an uncommon thing people!

Alex: We embrace, my cold chest against her warm back, my mouth against her shoulder. I run my hand over her breasts, down her side, and around her defined hips, then up her back, feeling out all the contours. I slip my hand down her pants, squeeze her ass, then move around and trace out her soft, wet-

Sage: If you get to say 'soft, wet vagina', I get to talk about your baby-soft balls.

Alex: Okay, I won't say it then - we'll move forward thirty minutes.

Sage: No no no. Go ahead and talk about my 'soft wet vagina', because I think these people have a right to know about your baby soft balls.

Alex: No they don't.

Sage: So I stick my hand down his pants, as one does when they are a part of a consenting party of two adults partaking in a sexual act. And what do I find down there? One of the cleanest shaven junks I've ever seen, and let me tell you, I've seen a lot of junk. So I go exploring around the smooth shaved

patch as ya do, and find some leg and some peen, and then I discover something I've never before encountered in the realm of male genitalia. I had just touched the softest balls. In the area, definitely. In the world? I'm willing to say maybe.

Alex: Are you done yet?

Sage: Yeah I guess thats all they need to know for now.

Alex: Still not going to talk about your 'soft, wet vagina' because I'm a class act and I respect you as a human being.

Sage: [REDACTED] I'm not sure I can say the same, but please do continue.

Alex: So we're both naked, touching, groping - she's on top of me, and she's kissing down my body, and then she up and says 'Enough of this horseshit. You want to do this or not?' - and I freeze. What do I say? I'm enjoying myself. But I'm not prepared! I didn't expect this! Why would I expect this?! 'Do what?', I stutter. 'Fuck it,' she announces, and I let my mouth run without thinking. 'Yes I want to!', I cry, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Sage: Okay, lets rewind this for a moment back to 'Enough of this horseshit. You want to do this or not?' - and I freeze. What do I say? I'm enjoying myself. But I'm not prepared! I didn't expect this!

Alex: What am I supposed to do? Jump all up on you?

Sage: Well, now I'm thinking 'I don't know, he's pretty meek, he doesn't even wanna touch me'.

Alex: You never offered the opportunity!

Sage: We were sleeping next to each other in a car!

Alex: Yeah, as friends at that point-

Sage: Were we really friends?

Alex: I thought so. I hope so!

Sage: Were we ever friends?

Alex: Sure we were! We hung out, we had fun!

Sage: We went on dates-

Alex: Those weren't dates-

Sage: You paid for ice-cream! And dinner!

Alex: ~~██████████~~ Whatever. Carry on.

Sage: ...'why would I expect this?! 'Do what?'" First of all, I didn't say 'enough of this horseshit', I only thought it. I did say 'you want to do this or not?', at which point you froze and said 'do what?', and I just thought 'you're really gonna play dumb with me right now kid? I got my hand dick deep in your pants right now. I can stop if that's what you want...'

Alex: I couldn't just let you! I was being awkward and trying to respect you!

Sage: (*ignoring him*) I did notice he was enjoying himself. So I ask if he had a condom, and he says no. Now ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, let me draw everyone's attention to this statement: 'But I'm not prepared!' Nope, definitely was not. 'I didn't expect this!' I find this one hard to believe. 'Why would I expect this?! 'Do what?'" Oh fuck off. If you didn't expect this, why did you shave your junk?! Flashback to Alex's bathroom: 'Uh, I'm gonna shave my junk, but I don't think I'll bring a condom. She won't want to have sex with me. No, I'm wearing those shorts, and they're not sexually appealing at all - but they are pretty short. What if I sit down and she sees up them and it's all hairy? Yeah I better shave this.' Hmm, I guess I see where you're coming from now.

~~The princess spent a lot of time searching for a friend. Someone to want her, someone who wouldn't hurt her. But time after time she found herself in one fucked up situation another. The friends that she trusted didn't want the same thing as she wanted. She would often find herself backed in a corner unable to say no. So the princess decided that she would leave people before they could hurt her.~~

~~She walked over to the calendar and crossed out more days. She sits back down.~~

Alex: We got home one night, and I made spaghetti. Really bad spaghetti. And we put it into two bowls, then went into my bedroom and sat on the floor. We tuck in. Then she says, 'we need to talk.' Instantly my appetite disappears. She tells me outright:

Sage: I don't want to be your girlfriend.

Alex: 'That's fine,' I say. (It's not fine.)

Sage: I can't be tied down. I've been let down too many times before.

Alex: Okay...

Sage: I also need you to stop buying me things.

Alex: I don't buy you things in that way.

Sage: Like those earrings.

Alex: Those look great on you.

Sage: I know, you also bought me a hat.

Alex: I thought you would like it.

Sage: I did thank you, but this has to end.

Alex: Okay. (It's not okay. What is this? What are we? What is she saying? I DON'T KNOW WHERE THIS IS GOING!)

Sage: Whooo! Glad I got that off my chest. Let's cuddle. What? I'm totally a slut for cuddles. End Scene.

Unfortunately one of the princesses favorite thing to do was love people. She wanted somebody to give the love that she didn't feel in hopes that someone would love her back. But being faced with demons time and time again her heart grew cold.

~~She flounces over to the calendar. She says:~~

Alex: My heart melted completely when we were on the bus this time, and we're watching the couple sat opposite us. They were sat together, not looking at each other, not talking to each other - sharing headphones, I'll give them that - very romantic. And we're whispering about them, staring at them, making out, being that obnoxious couple we hate - and we just don't care. And Sage starts laughing. 'What?', I ask. She won't tell me. 'What is it?' I ask again, half-concerned that I've embarrassed myself. She still won't tell me. The mood is dampened just a little bit. 'What is it, please tell me,' I implore. She

laughs again. 'I can't tell you. You'll laugh at me.' 'Oh, okay,' she submits, seeing the look on my face. 'I was just thinking, 'I'm that girl I hate, but I don't care, because I'm so in love.' She's never used this word around me before. I spend the rest of the bus journey beaming.

Sage: [Redacted]

Sage: I don't know when my heart *actually* melted.

Alex: 'I am an ice queen'-

Sage: I don't know if it actually *did* melt. But there was a moment when I knew 'yeah, this could work out.' And it wasn't that fateful bus ride, when I said I was in love, and I don't know if those were my exact words (because this was pretty early on in the relationship), but something along those lines *could* have been said. It was much later, much later on where my heart may have thawed a little. We were laying in bed, and he was telling me how beautiful I am (like usual, *thumbs up*), and he said to me - 'I could spend the rest of my life with you, I could marry you. I've never thought that about anyone else before.' Now, usually this would freak me out. Usually I would just pivot swiftly out of the room, because I am an athlete. I've broken up with guys because they've told me that 'I'm their everything'. More than a few have said 'I'm gonna marry you someday.' And I kind of vomited in my mouth a little at all of these prospects. But here, lying in bed, with my lilywhite chinadoll of a boyfriend-

Alex: Oh fuck off-

Sage: (*gives him the finger*) I thought, 'you know what? I'm fine with that.' Someone said my heart grew three sizes that day. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Sage: Yaaay! Others would say 'that hard-headed woman finally knew how to love.' But I would say, 'I found a person who is not a total jackass. Who can sustain a normal conversation. Who I don't need to tell *not* to throw canned food out - because it's canned food, and that should last forever-

Alex: Your ex-boyfriends are dumbasses.

Sage: You could say I found love in this hopeless, hopeless world. *He is my light that shines bright-*

Alex: A-

Sage: *He is my light that shines- what? Going to say something?*

Alex: Nope.

Sage: *He is a light that I can at least settle for and be totally happy with. Now say something. Say something sassy.*

Alex says nothing.

Sage: But I don't need to settle for. Is he the light at the end of my tunnel? I don't know. Because I've never been one to publicly say *silly crap like this*. I won't post on Facebook about you, unless it's maybe something we've made fun of and I find a connection and it's really strong. I won't paint my walls with pictures of your face.

Alex looks concerned.

Sage: I can't say that I *will* take pictures of you, or us, together. But yes. I too feel as if I could marry you.

By the process of not fighting never not because she couldn't she just didn't want to as being weak trying to protect yours if from the eyes of the outside world. The harsh words of others slowly chipping away at what armor she had.

Alex decides that this is probably the nicest thing she could say and accepts it, but is still concerned. [redacted] and crosses off [redacted]

Alex: We're sat in my office. And apparently, I don't do enough to get along with her friends.

Sage: I don't know if all of you know this, but Alex is kind of a recluse. *Let's just say he hates people.* Continue.

Alex: I said I didn't want to go to the beach and hang out with them because I just feel awkward and anyway, I don't like the beach.

Sage: I don't care if you don't like the beach. I would like you to get along with my best friend while she's in town having a 'great time' with us. Meaning, *if I have to suffer through this, you have to suffer through it too.*

Alex: But wait a moment - I spend nearly every day around her housemates, friends, whatever. We've never spent any time with *my* friends-

Sage: None of your friends live here! And the friend that does live here, lives in your house!

Alex: -but that doesn't matter, because *I don't put in enough effort trying to get along with her friends*. And as she's telling me this, and as I'm disagreeing, she's picking Rolo after Rolo out of the bag-

Sage: So I go up to his office. And, I'm feeling angry. I'm feeling like I'm ready to rumble. I've got my script and my bag of Rolos, and let's go!

Alex: -the bag that I bought-

Sage: Now I'm upset. Because I just got done spending the whole day with Caroline, and she's upset because she thinks that Alex doesn't like her-

Alex: (I don't, not really, no) — *AND NEITHER DOES SHE! (point)*

Sage: And whilst this is a true fact, I will not stand for these shenanigans, because I would like the people I love *to get along*. So I waltz up to his office, ready to hit him hard with fact. And then I see his tiny little face, and for a moment my rage falters. And I feel bad. So I sit there, in his office, telling him off about not liking my friends. All the while, I'm eating Rolos, enjoying and savoring my fucking Rolos. 'Cause this is all I got right now.

Alex: And she's unwrapping them-

Sage: Have you ever seen anyone just eat something while you're trying to negotiate? It's pretty intimidating.

Alex: -eating them-

Sage: You just kinda savor the moment, and do it nice and slow.

Alex: -tossing the foil in the bin-

Sage: This is a pretty cold-hearted tactic. And halfway through, I realise that I would like to be eating these Rolos *with* him.

10 of 16

Alex: And all I want is for her to stop telling me that *I don't put in enough effort trying to get along with her friends* and /give me a Rolo.

Sage: I wanna /give him a Rolo. But I can't just hand it to him. I can't just reach into my bag, pull out four or five, present them to him. Because that would let him know that he has won, and that's not the direction I want to go in.

Alex: Suddenly-

Sage: I have to go. It's time for rehearsal. So I *slowly* unwrap a Rolo, and place it on his desk, and think, 'look how nice I'm being. I'm giving you what you want. Oh, I know you want it. Here it is. *Take it.*'

Alex: She ups and leaves, leaving an unwrapped Rolo on the desk, presumably to spite me. She takes it to the door, then she locks the door and runs.

Sage: (laughs) Oh you silly fuck.

As the prisoners got older, they learned how to put a wall up that kept away the dragons. But when one went to college it broke. It came tumbling down. Thoughts of the past flooded her mind. Being locked in closets, getting yelled at for hours, being taken away on long car rides and being told how much she was hated. But worst of all she remembered the moment she thought she would never be save.

At 10:00 again to cross on day. This time he says as he does so, so he has an excuse not to look at anybody.

Alex: There are things that upset me. Like, one time we got back home after rehearsals. She'd clearly had a bad time, because she's furious, and I don't have anything to say. She doesn't want me to apologise, she doesn't want my pity - she's just angry. So angry. And upset. And as soon as she has nothing more to say, we drive the rest of the way home in silence. And we get through the door, and she throws her bag down, storms into her room, grabs a shitty fagend of a joint, and proceeds to angrily smoke it, clawing it in, spitting it out. 'You can go home you know,' she hisses at me. Of course I'm not going home. I want to be there, I want to show you that I care, that there is something positive in your life right now, that I love you, and that I'm here for you - of course I'm not fucking going home. Even if it hurts me to watch you smoke. Hurts me to watch you hurt yourself. Hurts me to watch you publicly announce 'my boyfriend can't do his job - his *one* job - that is, to take care of me.'

Leads to these

Sage: He sat there, with that sad lost expression, on my couch as I angrily stomped through my house. And just when the anger seemed to be at its peak, he came and gave me a hug. A wordless hug that echoed through my empty house and my empty heart. This was the moment I have been waiting for all my life. A silent but understanding hold/cuddle/hug when I am upset, and a stranger just successfully made me feel better. Something my family and friends could have never done.

Alex: And sometimes I do get jealous, when you go out looking so good, or when we talk about the men you've been with. 'You can't understand me unless you know my past, and I can't talk to you about it because you get jealous and upset and I feel like you're judging me.' I'm not judging. I am not one to judge. But I'm sorry if I don't know how to feel, or if I don't like knowing who my girlfriend has slept with. I'm sorry if my upset or my unwillingness to laugh about it makes me look judgmental - I promise, I'm not. I want it to be okay, but I do get jealous, and it doesn't make sense, I know, because we're together, and I love you, and I trust you, and I don't care what came before because all that matters is right now.

Sage: *(Gives a long, loving stare at Alex. Something that says 'I wanna hold your junk.')* I love you too.

Pause.

Sage: *(laughing)* The stage direction there says 'I wanna hold your junk!'

Alex: *(smiling)* Why are we a good match?

Sage: Because when I'm sad and looking for a little sympathy, laying on his floor in a bed of candy wrappers, saying 'no, I don't wanna go to bed' - half asleep, he comes over and starts taking off my shoes.

Alex: She laughs at my stupid jokes.

Sage: Because when I have a bad dream at three in the morning, he gets out of bed and blows them out the window.

Alex: She didn't laugh when she first saw me naked.

Sage: Because even though he doesn't actually *drive* me to the ER at four AM, he will ride shotgun and comment on my driving. ~~And then he'll say 'I'm not driving' and I'll be like 'You're not driving?'~~

12 of 16

Alex: improv something sentimental lol

Sage: [REDACTED] And then after all that, he'll read me a Doctor Suess book in the waiting room to try and make me feel better.

Alex: Not that that's ever happened. improv!

Sage: I don't constantly want to punch him in the face.

Alex: But like [REDACTED] improv more!

Sage: In fact, when we get mad at each other, I know we have to make up. I don't want to drag out the angry time. You could say we've really matured as people.

Alex: She didn't run away either, so that was good. improv 2: improv harder

Sage: I could run away, but I don't.

Alex: I don't really know why we work so well together.

Sage: We're kinda like chocolate and bacon. Disgustingly awesome.

Alex: I get frustrated with her sometimes. And sometimes she gets mad at me. [REDACTED] — EW no

Sage: I mean, I'm always right, but sometimes I have to let him know that, maybe he's, sometimes - I'm always right.

Alex: I'm going to be honest, I don't like her dad. Or some of her friends.

Sage: I don't like how sometimes I feel he doesn't care as much about family as I do.

Alex: Am I obliged to? I don't think they make her happy, and I don't think they're very nice people. I won't pretend to think otherwise.

Sage: And I understand that it's just where we grew up and how we perceive the world, but it makes me sad.

Alex: And I don't like the way she brushes her teeth.

Sage: I hate the way he washes dishes.

Alex: Or the way she makes the bed.

Sage: I hate the way *he* makes the bed.

Alex: But in spite of all these things, I still love her to pieces.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

One day the princess met a prince and no it was not love at first sight. No he did not save her. He didn't do much. But he waited for her to come back from her adventures so he could hear her stories. Then one day he asked when she would be ready to take him on an adventure with her.

[REDACTED]

Both: One. Two.

Sage: Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen.

Alex: So here we are.

Sage: End of the line.

Alex: *Two* is stronger. More independent. I have to work for something I sometimes felt should fall right in my lap.

Sage: He is my delicate, lilywhite flower.

*1 del to stole
this - improv.*

Alex: [REDACTED]

Sage: He isn't the strongest boyfriend I've ever had. But he's the most interesting, and easy to talk to.

Alex: I lie awake at night, listening to her breathing so I can wake her if she's having nightmares - and I never get tired.

Sage: He's my best friend.

Alex: She is self-conscious about new things, different things.

Sage: He's innocent.

Alex: She has a history, a whole life before 'we' became 'us'.

Sage: He's sometimes right.

Alex: She makes me earn it, but only ever gives me a hard time because she knows I can do better.

Sage: I give him a hard time because I'm kind of a bitch, but he thinks I'm doing it so he can better himself.

Alex: She doesn't just accept what I say as gospel.

Sage: *He is my new definition of love.*

Once there was a prince that found a princess that was pretty cool. She liked adventures and people that weren't jackasses. One day the prince asked when he could get to go on an adventure with her. She said "okay. I don't hate you like I hate other people".

A brief pause of consideration.

Sage: Is this about the 'one'? The infamous 'one'? About how we found each other and we might be separated by five thousand miles of water forever? Will we be together forever, or will it be nine months of fun and we call it a day? Might we be together for two years and then say 'well, we had a good run'? Why you, why here, and why now? I can think of a couple reasons why you showed up in my life. Will we be together forever? I don't know.

Alex is silent.

Sage: The point is, just have fun. Be with the person you love now, and maybe it'll work. Maybe your love will last forever. Maybe it will go up shit creek as soon as you walk out of the door, and this show is over. Maybe life doesn't suck that bad. Maybe.

Alex remains silent.

Sage: It's the uncertainty of what could happen. It's the unhappy accidents. You don't know what might happen in three months.

THIS IS SO BAD
OK MY COOLNESS

Alex: ...do you ever?
Sage: "The End!"
Alex looks stressed. The light cut to black.

Sage improvises.

Alex laughs.

Alex: I love you.

They hug.

Fin.

Appendix II: *I Don't Hate You...* rehearsal recording

Available at the below web address is an audio recording of the second run we did of the piece – in which we used the text as a series of waypoints to improvise around. As discussed on page 26, I believe it sounds considerably more alive than the scripted version in Appendix I (dated March 16th 2015, asides from handwritten amendments).

<http://goo.gl/k7nAFJ>

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