

**TALK PRETENDING**  
**Freya Dooley and Cinzia Mutigli**  
(Extracts from performance script, 2017)

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Cinzia is onstage, positions mics. Freya comes onstage.  
Stand opposite each other. Rear of stage.

F: So, I'll create a character. The one that I am not. Multiple characters, multiple I's. Perhaps they are not even fully formed personalities; perhaps they just represent ideas, or ideals, based on bits I've picked up from elsewhere.

Perhaps they have basic skeletal plot, a profile and a vague short-term trajectory. As time goes on they'll flesh themselves out, become something more complex, evolving. -  
Eventually, they'll take on their own voice.

I've been thinking about soap stars that play the same role their entire lives. Like Adam Woodyatt who plays Ian Beale in EastEnders. I mean, the ones who have never done anything else. Do they have trouble differentiating between their two personalities? Or do you think their onscreen characters are so ingrained subconsciously, that they merge with offscreen-selves?

Obviously the things they do and say are scripted. But I mean, who they are and how they think. Maybe even what voice they use. What about Sharon... Sharon's voice is very specific. Whispery, suspicious, sultry. I wonder if Leticia Dean is whispery, suspicious, sultry.

I realised when I was writing this that I described Sharon's voice as sultry and also that I've never heard a man's voice described as sultry. I looked it up. Sultry means seductive, sensual, sexual, in a specifically female way. It's also a term used to describe the weather- in that context, sultry means "omitting an oppressive heat." Perhaps the two uses are connected.

C: (Chipping in) Sharon's played other characters in other things though. She was in Grange Hill I think. There were a few of them who were in Grange Hill as teenagers and then moved on to EastEnders... I was thinking about Gail, in Coronation Street.

F: (to Cinzia) Well Sharon's been in EastEnders since 1985 so that's my entire life.

C: Gail in Coronation Street is a better example; Sharon left EastEnders for about ten years.

F: So did Michelle, for more like twenty... She's back too. But it's a different actress, they replaced her.

C: Because I think *real* Michelle is a successful producer now isn't she?

F: The real, original Michelle do you mean?

C: Yeah.

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(Cinzia centre stage)

C: I've been watching and reading stuff about dead famous people. Today I watched *Can I Be Me* about Whitney Houston. These documentaries that set out to reveal who a person really is - what made them, who made them, why they fucked up - are grasping at echoes and vacillations.

When in *Can I Be Me* her family and people who worked with Whitney talk about her, they are creating a shape of her so that it forms a space surrounded by their voices. She's not there, there's just this space defined by these other people's words, they are creating another unsound version of her, for us.

I peer between the words they say trying to see the real Whitney, and I strain my ears to try to pick up ultrasonic signals that connect me directly with her. Her voice is recorded and she is filmed talking. We can't rely on her voice though, because this is her persona speaking.

(Freya comes onstage- rear right)

There is footage of her when she's just started having hits and is new to promotional interviews. The interviewer guides her on how to answer questions because his voice will be cut out.

You can see her taking it in, learning the game.

Ten or fifteen years later she's on camera talking about how good family life is. She is saying those words so that the record shows everything is good. She's trying to construct a big screen in front of herself with the words "Everything is good" emblazoned across it. The screen is transparent, but although we can see right through it, she's still playing the game.

The nearest I get to the real Whitney Houston is a shot from below of her on stage: she lifts her left arm and a little underarm stubble shows.

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F: Julie Andrews gives a speech at a botanical gardens event. She's a keen gardener and has a particular passion for roses. During a backstage interview, when asked what kind of rose she'd be, she eventually settles on "an average garden rose... it seems to say:  
'Savour me, smell me, feel me, pluck me, I am here to give you pleasure, enjoy.'"

Julie Andrews' voice is who she is, people love the sound of Julie Andrews' voice, and Julie Andrews loves the sound of her own voice. She found it by accident and doesn't want to lose it. She likens singing to a state of desire. *Julie Andrews* once described singing as 'like sex before the moment of climax'. Not very wholesome for wholesome Julie Andrews. But Julie Andrews never said she was wholesome, everyone else did.

Desire is intensified by absence. In 1997, the year Princess Diana died, Julie Andrews loses her voice. It is gone, she is separated. She is no longer able to sing, and for a while, not even able to speak without taking big, gulping breaths to muster the strength of sound. She feels like she constantly has to clear her throat. Her voice is damaged beyond repair, broken, smashed up like it's been dropped. It won't ever go back together again the same way.

So Julie tries to relocate her lost voice, or at least try and find a new one, via the words on the page. She writes, she publishes. During this time, an unauthorised biography of her life is released and her representatives are furious because everyone in the know knows full well that Julie is in the process of writing her own auto-biography, in her own words.

I read about this in a Daily Mail article promoting said biography.

The headline is: 'A spoon-full of Vitriol: Why Julie Andrews is no Mary Poppins'.

After several operations, although her voice is nowhere near as powerful as before, she finds a way to be able to sing again. She calls it speak-singing.

The event of the return of her voice is a scene in the film, *The Princess Diaries 2*. People get very emotional about it, because Julie's voice represents so much to so many people; Julie Andrews' voice is a National Treasure. On the YouTube clip, people write emphatic comments about how hearing Julie Andrews sing again brings tears to their eyes, a lump to their throats.

(Cinzia comes onstage)

C: I've mainly avoided stuff on the deathaversary of Diana. But I've read two articles and watched one documentary. The documentary was *Diana: In Her Own Words*.

F: Why?

C: I suppose I watched that one and none of the others because I was making that futile attempt again to see the real person behind the manufactured image. I'm not pretending to care about Diana, unsurprisingly I don't relate to her.

F: What about Whitney?

C: I relate more to Whitney Houston... I never wanted to live Diana's life and I didn't have a desire to meet her when she was alive. I had a similar interest in her to that I shared with my mum for Dallas. I watch the documentary because I don't believe in the tale of who she was, I want to hear something else: The True Story. But it's not there I'd have to make it up myself.

There is a perpetual stream of people who say that she cared profoundly for them and enhanced their lives immeasurably despite meeting her for around three minutes. Nobody says, "That sounds far-fetched. Didn't she put herself forward precisely so you could project the love and understanding you need onto her?" That would be unkind.

Hilary Mantel says in her article about Diana, *The Princess Myth*, that "For some people, being dead is only a relative condition; they wreak more than the living do. After their first rigor, they reshape themselves, taking on a flexibility in public discourse." But aren't people with that level of fame constructed by the mass audience even while they are alive? They are shape-shifted as much as shape-shifters.

(Cinzia leaves the stage)

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Freya comes on stage, front left

F: I've been reading about Gertrude Stein. In addition to her writing, her biographers often refer to the sound of her voice. Feminist critics have noticed that in interviews, the interviewer often would talk about her appearance and her sexuality and therefore, her other-ness. Here are some things I've either learned or decided about Gertrude Stein:

Gertrude is a lesbian.  
Gertrude wears heavy corduroy.  
Gertrude is heavy.  
Gertrude is hearty.  
She roars with laughter, out loud.  
She has a laugh like a beefsteak.  
She loves beef.  
She is not easily embarrassed,  
if they find her repulsive, or outlandish or disgusting,  
that's all right.  
If they love her, that's alright.

If they just shrug her off, it's time to retire.  
Gertrude is intimidating and impatient.  
Gertrude will happily make a statement.  
Gertrude chews over language.  
Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway were friends.  
Gertrude and Ernest disagreed on writing. On what makes good writing.  
She thought his literary voice was syrupy.  
Ernest apparently ended their friendship because he was repelled by the sound Gertrude's voice, specifically, the way she spoke to her partner, Alice.  
Gertrude wrote Alice's autobiography.  
The book was called the Autobiography of Alice B Toklas but actually it described Gertrude's life through Alice's eyes.  
Gertrude wrote it in Alice's voice.  
Gertrude often refers to herself in third person.  
Despite the so-called impenetrability of a lot of Gertrude's writing, this book was very popular, and was described by critics as 'unexpectedly charming'.

C: Legends persist and myths are remembered. It is not true that Cass Elliot choked to death on a ham sandwich (she died of heart failure) but even Frank Zappa referenced the choking in a song. There is another story, though. Cass Elliot had been booked to play a series of gigs in Las Vegas. In the lead up to them she was fasting and lost a third of her body weight. But she got a stomach ulcer and then lost her voice.

F: What about Whitney?

C: (to Freya) Towards the end of Whitney Houston's life her voice also broke down to a dreadful whisper.  
(to audience) Cass Elliot climbed on stage in Vegas to share her voice. She sang *Dream a Little Dream of Me* but her voice was shattered.

F: What about Diana?

C: (to Freya) In *Diana Was Our Society's Warning to Women*, Bidisha writes that Diana was punished for speaking "her truth".  
(to audience) In bits, Cass Elliot left the theatre after saying sorry to the audience for not having the voice they had paid her for.

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