

Self Portrait as Another Untitled Play

Lights up on a dressing room, it's almost empty with the exception of a vanity mirror. I sit in front of the mirror, lights highlighting my face.

: I just wish I had more light.

Performance — begins as a wish to be seen, to be recognized, divulges into the offering of one's self and an obsession with spotlights. See also: art, manifesto

: Even once the lights are gone, you'll still see me, standing here, waiting. Or at least, that's what I've been told.

I sit on the stage watching myself watching you watching me watching myself.

I've always been obsessed with performance. Growing up, I took ballet and tap, I played the piano and viola, I joined the school choir. Even before I knew what it meant, I would have given anything to be on stage.

: Are you enjoying the show yet? Is it enough of a show yet? Maybe I should light myself on fire like Pippin did.

You watch me, you're always watching me. You wonder about me, how much makeup I'm wearing, how long I've rehearsed, whether my lines are memorized, whether I'll come to the stage door after the show. Watching me watch myself watch me watch you.

The first time I stepped in the school auditorium, it was to see the middle school's production of Charlotte's Web. The day after having my appendix removed I watched the spotlights highlight a middle schooler's face and decided for the first time that I needed one for myself. My stage obsession quickly shifted into theater, memorizing monologues and trying to perfect a New York accent.

: If I walked off the stage would you be close enough to catch me? Would you even want to?

I've been writing for as long as I can remember. I'd create picture books bound with pipe cleaners and filled with stories my mom wrote down for me. I felt every word in my chest, through my entire body. I've always been tied to storytelling in the same way I've always been tied to performance, they're the same in that way. The distinction, of course, is that writing is confession, whispering my sins for no one but me to hear. Performance is displaying them.

: Darkness and light feel simultaneous when I'm up here. Everything beyond the stage is so dark but if I looked up I'd be blinded by the stage lights.

The mirror lights flicker.

I think too much about beginnings, beginnings of obsessions, of fears. I spend a lot of time attempting to map my mind, some things begin with a specific event, other things happen immediately, intrinsically, they begin and then spread into something wider

before I can diagnose the cause. My obsession with stages is something like that, something wider than myself, I've tried to map it but there's never been a root.

I lay down on the stage, letting it move underneath me, I let the stage lights blind me, it's better than the never ending darkness.

: Watching me watch myself watch me watch you.

I think part of it was trying to lose myself. If I was living a story then maybe I wouldn't be the same person I was, maybe that would mean I wouldn't need to be, I could give everything I am to my audience and hope they sat through the whole show in return.

: I tried to stay away. It has never been sustainable, or at least that's what I've been told. I promise not to take anything from you. I'm only here to give, I swear, I'm only here to give.

This is manufactured for your benefit. You recognize that don't you? Everything here is a construction. Remember; this is entertainment and entertainment alone. Aren't you entertained?

I started playwriting in middle school and in every play I wrote, I'd ensure I had a role, just in case I needed the stage, just in case I couldn't handle not being on one. Trying to ensure I still had something I could give to the audience that wasn't already in the writing itself. Looking back on it — it feels redundant.

: I don't think I'm making much sense.

No, but I think you know what I mean.

I have been in four plays and five musicals. The best part of each performance I've been in is the opening night, putting on my costume and makeup, watching the lights go up on the first scene and realizing there's someone watching me.

: There's never been anything remotely genuine about this. Everything that happens on this stage is the farthest from genuine you can be. I am confessing someone else's sins, I am saying someone else's words, I am being someone else's person. None of this is me, none of this has ever been me.

I'm writing for an audience that doesn't exist but I've never been certain if I want there to be one. If I'm writing to confess, then doesn't the audience take that away? Writing, maybe, is both opposite and the same as performance. I am both writing for no one and everyone. I am everything all at once and nothing at all.

: I used to arrange my stuffed animals in rows on my bed as they watched me belt out a song from half of Mulan's soundtrack. It was easier than a real stage and warmer than performing for my mother.

That's not true, but it's a beautiful story, isn't it?

*Every time I was in a show, I'd spend one night before opening laying on the stage.
Letting it shift under me, listening to the cracks of the empty auditorium. It was the
closest thing I've ever felt to home.*

: This is giving and taking all at once. An exchange of identity, of confessions, of humanity.
Confessing, displaying, recognizing all at once — that's what I'm here for, that's all I've ever
been here for, that's all I'm asking for. You see it now don't you? You have to see it.

Pray for me, won't you?

*Even as I sit here, writing this, I can feel the stage shift beneath me. I can hear the
whistles of the auditorium as wind and rain pummel it. I am here and I am nowhere. I am
home.*

: Tell me you see it too. Tell me you recognize it.

Blackout

but I'm still here.