

Performative Words: Writing For and Making Performance
A Performance Lecture by Autumn Widdoes
Japan Writers Conference, Nov. 2nd, 2013
Okinawa, Japan

“How do you enter into a new language with only the performative words that you know? This performance lecture will discuss how to create work for performance in Japan (performance art, poetic narratives for movement/dance theater, and plays), how to find both non-Japanese and Japanese collaborators/actors/performers to stage the work, and how to cultivate an audience, with a particular focus on doing this outside of the major cities and without networks. Additionally, we’ll discuss how to incorporate and enfold personal experience, the writing and unwriting of oneself into the texts, working with translations (and “anti translations”), and engaging with new language(s) and their complexities in one’s work without using it/them as simplistic ornamentation.”

1. How to find collaborators and spaces to create: (outside of larger networks in cities that have performance festivals and an infrastructure that supports new/emerging performance based writers/artists) OR:

How to make work in the inaka or in smaller cities...

1. Join a class.
2. Teach a class. Create the class that you would like to be a student of, since as a teacher, you’re going to again become the student. A good class allows this type of interaction and learning environment.
3. Socialize and network. Look outside of the designated “art spaces” and “theaters,” and stay open to working with people who aren’t necessarily “professional.”
4. Imagine new spaces: site specific performance, street-based performance, home based performance (International Home Theater Festival), virtual spaces (Youtube, Vimeo, Instagram, Vine).

2. How to create performance:

A. Study and Learn.

- i. This Town is a Mystery: <http://thistownisamystery.com/diy-with-headlong/>
- ii. Coursera’s “Site-Specific Performance” course offered via CalArts. It’s free and it’s got very good resources. <https://www.coursera.org/course/sitedance>
- iii. Read. Read anything that is a performance text. Read non-performance texts. Read plays, read poetry, read books, read film scripts. Re-think what a live performance text can be. Ex. GATZ by Elevator Repair Service (restaging of the entire text of “The Great Gatsby” for the stage).

Read technique books: “The Viewpoints Book” by Anne Bogart and

Tina Landau. Contemporary Performance curates books on their Facebook page. Their recommendations are an excellent source for an unofficial graduate school education in Performance Studies.

iv. Online communities: Howlround, Contemporary Performance, etc.

B. Play

- i. Experiment with form.
 - a. Learn the traditional formats. Practice them. Then, subvert

them or riff off of them. Make new formats. Some of them will work, some of them will not. Just play around freely without the intention of making your magnum opus. Play and playfulness is key.

5. Experiment with space

- i. Unless you're well-funded or you have a grant, find spaces that are affordable (don't spend a ton of money to mount a performance).
- ii. Site-specific work can take place anywhere you wish your piece to investigate or interact with the environment (indoors or outdoors). It doesn't need a particular audience base (parks, beaches, streets, arcades, parking lots, promenades, plazas).
- iii. Join fringe festivals.
- iv. At cultural centers, offer to host classes/workshops for free in exchange for space.
- v. Get creative and think of spaces that already have a built in audience. Places that already host many types of performers and where you may also have a community already (bars, small theaters, etc.)
- vi. Double bill yourself with musical acts at festivals.

Virtual Space:

- i. Youtube
- ii. Vimeo
- iii. Instagram - Jonah Bokaer's instagram dance videos
- iv. Vine
- v. Mixbit

3. Writing For Performance

1. Theater – playwriting
2. Poetry
3. Film/Videos – screenwriting
4. Dance and other Experimental Formats
 - a. Dance Theater/Physical Theater
 - b. Poetry + Dance – ex. Anne Carson w/ Jonah Bokaer
 - c. Performance Art
 - d. Essays in Performance – “The Performance Lecture”
 - e. Ensemble collaborate work

Writing Across or In Between [interstitially] Languages

1. Achieve bilingualism - nice, long term goal...
2. Work with native speakers or translators
3. Co-write with collaborators who speak other languages
4. Work with literary concepts/techniques that go beyond line-by-line translation (ex. Sawako Nakayasu's use of translation and anti-translation of Chika Sagawa's poetry in “Mouth: Eats Color”)