

ANNE WALDMAN

WORKSHOP

## Creative Writing Life [Reading/Writing/Performing] Experiments

Be in the mind/perspective of a writer 24 hours a day. That means that all your senses are acute, attuned to delicate & fierce nuances of language. In waking, in walking, in dreaming, in thinking, in talking. Repeat the mantra: *I exist to write*.

Always have writing material at hand, a small notebook at the least. A working pen. Colored ink pens. Keep different notebooks & colors for different kinds of entries. Dream Notebook, Discursive Quotidian Reality Notebook, Cosmic Notebook. Have glue and scissors for interesting inserts.

Imagine you are not alone. Consort with other writers. You are in a League of Writing. You are part of a conspiracy to lift the discourse & practice of writing higher. Think of your writing as a way to alleviate the suffering of yourself and others. To make the world more beautiful and interesting. Writing might be good for you but it is not necessarily "therapy". Keep all therapy jargon out of all your writing.

A John Ashbery Method: Create a title for a poem, then take a walk and come back and write.

Write a poem using the jargon of another field: mechanics, fishing, boating, gemology, astronomy, psychology. Inter-cut with your own writing.

Organize sessions to exchange work. Or through snail mails, e-mail and other means. Start an epistolary collaboration, with a lot of Dear So & Soss.

Start a collaborative project with another writers that lasts at least 6 months (see the 3:15 a.m. group experiments of Bernadette Mayer, the Nada Gordon correspondence project and others)

Always when you read in books imagine you are "writing" through the reading (as John Cage does with James Joyce and others, making acrostic weaves).

Aleatory Composition: Create chance operations for writing using random methods: playing card drawings, throws of the dice, words out of a hat, choosing the eleventh word in a selection of pages on the left hand side of a text as a source, and so on. ( see work by John Cage, Jackson MacLow, Clark Coolidge)

"Name of The 'I'": Take your own full name: given, middle, plus nickname, or married, your mother's maiden, or adoptive name and write it out. Now "translate" it, using etymological dictionaries, "naming" manuals. Investigate the ethnic "roots" of all your names.

Investigate a phrase from another language out of your ethnic background. An old song, a lullaby? A political slogan. A family adage. An anecdote.

Start a club/ "study group" around the work of a deceased writer or writers or a Literary Movement or a book. Meet once a month and plan to read aloud (or translate), write "off of" and examine texts. The Sappho Club, The Niedecker/Zukovsky Salon. the H.D. Room, the Beat Trope Circle. Robert Duncan Lab, New York School Gallery, Black Arts Solarium.

Study (research) (privately) another writer you admire. Keep a file.

Make a study of one of the planets. Or a star. Keep a file.

Anthropomorphize an object. Make it speak or think in writing.

Or paint an object with words. (see Gertrude Stein's "Tender Buttons")

Write from the perspective of making the First Poem. Imagine you are just coming to articulate your mind with words. Say the words before you write them down.

Write from the point of view of an alien to planet earth.

Write in Beast Language. Imagine you are a specific animal. Write down the alliterative sounds. (see Michael McClure's *Ghost Tantras*)

Write as you sit by water (see Gertrude Stein's *Lucy Church Amiably*, and Jack Kerouac's *Big Sur*).

Write as you sit by fire.

Write while you listen to music. Any kind.

Write on top of a classic movie. Appropriate the dialogue.

Stand and write in front of a painting or sculpture in a museum for half an hour.

Write a bestiary, a series of poems in the mind of or thinking about particular animals (see the animal poems of Marianne Moore, Fontaine's fables)

The William Burroughs Walk : Take a walk, notice everything blue (or red or white or green or gold ) & make a list. Also notice what you are thinking when you see particular things or people. What is in your mind at the time. Combine what you see with what you "flash on" & remember.

The William Burroughs Fold In: Take two different pages from an outside text (magazine article or book and cut in half vertically. Paste the mismatched pages together.) (See *The Third Mind* by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin)

Try the same experiment horizontally, or cut up individual lines and place in a hat and pull out line by line a la Dada method of Tristan Tzara.

Intercut your own writings with the Iliad, The Popul Vuh, with The Bible, with the Koran, with Shakespeare.

Takes notes on what you overhear in a café, riding on a bus, in an airplane, coming off the radio.

Make a piece of writing with a different pronoun in every line.

Take the "I" out of your writing.

Cross-Gender Appositions: Write what you might think of as being in the voice or mind of a person of the opposite sex or opposite gender-preference from yours.

Write in front of the mirror.

Write with a "persona" in mind.

Cross-genre: No rules. Push the margins. Combine the epic with the haiku.



Examine the prose poem, the epistolary poem, the essay-poem.

Write *only* in the margins.

Write in the margins of all your books (see Susan Howe's *Melville Marginalia*)

Write an 8 page novel in which all the pages may be inter-changed.

Write and cross out half your text. Cross out every other line.

Make a diagram for a poem.

Write a short novel with a beginning and an end & no middle.

Check out the Oulipo methods and games for writing. The explorations with palindromes, just one idea.

Write a symphony. Or take another musical form and translate into a language-form.

Write an opera where all the words are to be sung, or shouted or read in a whisper.

Make drawings around your writing.

Write a long haiku.

Explode the haibun ( see Waldman's *Marriage: A Sentence*)

Play with forms but challenge them. Double your sestina, your pantoum.

Write 20 sonnets in one sitting.

Write a series of cut-up sonnets (see Ted Berrigan's *The Sonnets*)

Write a poem consisting entirely of asides. Distinguish through punctuation. Parentheses and brackets.

Write off all the postcards you receive in one month. Include all the imagery and words of the postcard, both sides. Write a two-sided piece (whatever that suggests to you).

Allen Ginsberg Sweet Confession: Write a list of embarrassing moments.

Write a two-page autobiography backwards with four major epiphanies.

Write a calendar. A meditation for each month of the year. Try modeling your piece on a calendar from another culture.

Write a series of "holiday" poems. Do some research on the origins of these days.

Write alphabet pieces. Each line with a letter of the alphabet, each paragraph with words beginning with the letters, and so on. Each title could honor a letter in a series of 26 pieces.

Rewrite a myth (see H.D.'s *Helen In Egypt*, Ann Carson's *The Autobiography of Red*)

Writing with no commas or question marks (Read Stein's "Poetry and Grammar")

Make a poem in shape of a vehicle, a ziggurat, a double helix, cloud, a storm, a person, a particular orchid.

Write a play that challenges the usual structural norms.

Write a poem as a "political intervention". Have it translated or translate your self into other languages. Find a place in the Culture-at-large to insert it. Publication, performance, media.

Write a play as a "cultural intervention", as political instruction (see plays of Amiri Baraka, Vaclav Havel). Write for an audience you wish to "instruct". Write to expose the 'state', the "system", issues of sexism, racism.

Create a guerilla theatre movement in your local community. Perform in public – in shopping malls, parking lots, in parks.

Write a monologue out of a feeling of "oppression". Ordinary & then elevated speech .

Write a rant against something, someone, an issue that needs vital attention. Have it be "aired" in public, say, at a nuclear power plant.

Have a read-in where you read your own writing and others non-stop in a public place. Record the responses.

Write from a part of the body, as if your ear were thinking, your thigh, your eyeball.

Write an "acceptance speech" as if you were the President of a country.

Write a terrorist poem.

Write from "left brain", write from "right brain".

Write using lines and phrases from the dictionary or another "big tome" source. Create a structure around pages and numbers and letters of the alphabet.

Waldman Talismanic Object Experiment (with a group). Everyone bring in object with a story. It is displayed, discussed. The others, in turn, ask questions, take notes, write. Pay attention to how the objects are being discussed, not simply the information they engender. Go around the group in a thorough fashion. You will have pages of words. Then refine or expand. Focus on one or more, or all of the objects. Tell stories, or be very spare and abstract. Can be a detective story, a litany, whatever you desire the shape or form of the writing to be.

Bring in an object that has a dream associated with it and do the same.

Notice how if you start recording your dreams, they come back fuller and more vivid as the days progress. Record your dreams in a disciplined way for at least a month .

Exchange dreams with another writer and write off each others' dreams. You may start dreaming each others' dreams.

Dream the end of a conflict. Focus on a place where suffering is extreme. Imagine people who are suffering. Work with images from newspapers, journals, television. Write out of this experiment with an intention of efficacy. This experiment resonates with the Buddhist practice of "tonglen" or



the "sending and receiving" practice, where you literally visualize suffering , "take it on" (breathe it in) and then breathe out sanity, easement of suffering.

The Waldman Portrait Duet: people pair off in the group. Then sit in with your partner and "sketch" each other with words, making a detailed description of the person's physicality and also what associations arise as well. Then start talking & "interviewing" each other with profound questions; What is your greatest fear? Things of that kind. Keep writing as you are both talking. Notice "how" things are being said. Then sit in silence again and review your writing. Shape it, edit, expand or not.

Experiment with languages, other than English. Intersperse these lines with English acting as a kind of "shadow" text.

Homophonic translation or "mis" translation. Take a poem in another language that you can pronounce but don't understand and translate through its sounds. Check out texts in Arabic, Sanskrit, Russian, Greek. See what the words, even if you don't "know" these languages, suggest.

Homolinguistic. Translate a poem by someone else from English to English.

Make a piece of writing that's all questions.

Poem of the vowels (see Rimbaud)

Chants, lists. Start with 100 Memories.

Collaborate with a visual artist. Try to work together on the spot. Piling on words, visual ideas.

Write continuously as you travel.;

Write continuously for one day in and out of your dwelling.

Occasions: lullaby, dirge, epithalamiums.

Write a Ghazal, for example: lyric whose theme is love & wine, "often mystically understood", varies in length from 5 to 12 couplets all upon the same rhyme. The poet signs his or her name in final couplet. Write a series of ghazals.

Write a Nouns only piece.

Verbs only.

Prepositions only.

White out parts of another's text.

Write on top of another's text.

Shadow Text: Write a subtext to another text.

Rhizomes: Go in a lot of directions at once.

Using conversation/something actually said/then opposite - something made up.

Write a palinode where you take something back. Use negations, the word "not", the word "never",.

Mishear and write.

Write a poem which captures rhythm of another activity. Try to capture those rhythms/that music in your head as you type, row, cook, chop wood, speak, swim, walk, ride horse, a bicycle.

Write a ritual poem (See Technicians of The Sacred) that is a gift of some kind.

Study/research a current obsession (a movie star, a country). Keep a file. Draw on for writing in any form. Try an ode. (see Odes by Neruda, Frank O'Hara, Ron Padgett, Allen Ginsberg)

Propose a question before you sleep, or. a topic. See what happens. Keep a notebook that will "worry" the question.

Hypnagogic writing: Write out of the altered state of just going to sleep or coming to consciousness out of sleep. Keep a notebook by the bed.

Write a poem for each moment (hour, day, month)of the year. A Book of Minutes, A Book of Hours.

Write in same spot at same time of day for one week.

Dream about or imagine a place you've never been before and write "about" it.

Write a duet for yourself & another voice.

Write something to go with the radio.

Write for a chorus, or a call & response.

Write with musical accompaniment

Write something (not a song lyric) to go with another instrument.

Write a piece with body movement, facial gestures in mind.

Write to invite participation of the "audience."

Write a piece you will read while lying down.

Write for reading in the dark with a flashlight.

Investigate Greek drama, Noh drama,Balinese theatre, and othe traditional dramatic forms and write piece "off" them

Write for a mask that you will wear and perform your writing behind. Design your own mask.

Perform a piece by Gertrude Stein. Intercut your text with Gertrude Stein.

Write a radio play (see Samuel Beckett reaxdio plays). Make a tape of your play.

Create a space for yourself to perform the work within boundaries (marked out by chalk, by string, by placement of objects).

Read standing on a chair. On a table, on a ladder.

Explore or investigate a ritual out of your ethnic/religious background. For example, there could be a song or dance (words & gestures) that has been handed down in another language. Uncover some remnant of this Seder, or Holy Communion, or Buddhist or Taoist or animist, or Native American rite and develop a brief solo/group piece.

Write a poem to make your plants grow. For the ozone layer to heal.

Work with composing a text up against another one. For example, write against an extreme sound or against another person's reading of a text.

Select on gesture and use the gesture as a refrain as you repeat certain words or phrases within a text. Have a "code" of gesture that is matched with certain words.

Write with a simple prop in mind. Try to integrate it well with text.

Select a brief classical text and "perform it" with asides and commentary.

Stomp on the corpse of a piece of writing as you read another piece of writing that is indebted to the one you honor/denigrate.

Write a poem as "collateral" for the bank or to pay a bill. Try a poem as "commodity",

Write a poem as a "subpoena" to another person.

Investigate a topic, a theme, a place, a presence, a reality, a phenomena for 20 years and keep writing "on" it.

*( Selected List, ongoing, for the Jack Kerouac School, 1975 --)*

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