

## Writing Experiment WEEK 1

### DRAFTS ARE DUE IN CLASS SATURDAY, WEEK 2, THEN EMAILED TO D

Spring 2014

Performing The Text

d wolach // wolachd@evergreen.edu

This is a two-part writing experiment, or, if you will, two writings are due for this week, each related to the other as well as to the course Week 2 readings. As noted above, these two writings are due by class-time next Saturday (Sat Week 2). They should be in my (d's) inbox by no later than Saturday night. Thus, please to d as typed and attached file (Word, Text Edit, Adobe InDesign, and most any word processing format is fine. PDFs are also fine). As you finish this week's readings you'll begin to find more relations between those readings and this writing experiment than what is described here. Try to carve out those relations yourself, allowing yourself to be playful while attempting to be as rigorous as you can be in the week you have to write these pieces. How does your writing intersect with the texts I'm reading? In what ways are the questions and problems I'm discovering have to do with what I take--or other writers take--"performing the text" to mean?

The prompt (direction) for each small writing piece are below. Further thoughts or suggestions (under "Tips") follows each prompt. Please therefore realize that the first paragraph after each sub-header/title is the prompt, whereas what occurs under tips aren't further directions but rather some things to consider that I felt might be helpful for you in your writing endeavors. Remember that weekly writing experiments are drafts, and so necessarily "unfinished" in the sense that though I expect folks to edit their work at least once through, the work won't be radically revised or edited in as thorough a manner as our final writing projects will be. The idea is to come in with a fully drafted and at least copy edited (for spelling, grammar, etc) piece of Saturday, but that still needs work, which we'll then often have the chance to do via feedback and workshopping the following Saturday (the Sat. that that writing is due).

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### Part 1: "PERFORMANCE? IMPOSSIBLE!" -- 1.5pp max.

In up to 1.5 single spaced and typed pages (max.), write an "un-performable performance," or "performance writing that is unperformable," if you prefer, where by "un-performable" I don't mean "physically impossible," such as would be the case if I asked you to perform a scene from the play Noises Off but in front of an audience on Jupiter. Such a scene, were it to actually be written to take place on Jupiter, would be physically impossible despite the logical conceivability of its performance "if only we weren't built the way we are" (for this atmosphere). And I certainly don't mean "un-performable" in the sense that a poem or play written for Earth but ABOUT people on Jupiter might evoke un-performability. That would be to simply write a scene that evokes impossible circumstances through its VERY performable content--we might call such a performable text "sci-fi." That is, I'm not asking

us to write ABOUT impossible performance, but to DO or WRITE the impossible.

### TIPS/SUGGESTIONS FOR PART 1:

\*\*Obviously, the reading to oneself or aloud of any writing is a sort of performance (though to what extent and why might not be so obvious). And so it follows that writing itself is a sort of performance. Thus we may want to argue that if this writing can be performed, then it is performable necessarily. OK, perhaps--at least to the basic degree I just outlined.

\*\*Then what am I asking us to do? Another way to put this is: what is a performance and what is performance writing? I'm asking us to find ways to respond to such a question and do so in a specific way.

\*\*So, a hint: I'm asking us something about "form" in relation to the page, certainly to play as creatively as we can with form, and I'm asking us to *fail*, almost necessarily, at making something un-performable--and therefore to fail enjoyably and spectacularly. Further, what this experiment is asking of us is to take 1.5 pages to find ways to confront the limits (your sense of the limits) of performability within a particular context. Your piece may be possible to write, but not to perform in any way beyond reading the writing aloud to yourself and others. Certainly Lorenzo Thomas's "Two One-Act Plays" can be performed beyond reading it aloud, but it DOES ALSO provoke us to ask whether it SHOULD be performed. In that sense it is closer to being "un-performable" than the Jupiter scene examples, either of them. And yet one might say that the form of this work by Thomas, through its provoking us to consider it as a performance, is what, in part, gives it its tension and effectiveness both as a prose poem and as a couple of ethically problematic and tumultuous one-acts.

\*\*To give you some final thoughts for Part 1 on how you might proceed...Your writing can take an ethical and political angle as well, or it can take this puzzle on as "purely formal," which is to say to say to yourself "the form of this writing is what will make it 'unperformable'". Or this prompt can be used as a way for you to carve out space for your current thinking about what performance is or can be. Or perhaps this is a chance for you to ruminate creatively on the relations you take to exist between aesthetic performance, as seen in plays, for example, and performance of identities. Perhaps an overlapping of these is what you are after...

\*\*Your writing and overall approach can take any form you wish, but the medium needs to be writing, or at least largely so. If, for instance, you feel you need to incorporate other media into this piece, such as visual arts, you may, as long as the majority of the whole is written and typed. That said, you may decide you want a recorded version (a record of what is written in audio) once it is written out. That is fine.

Notice that the directions here--my notes to help you think through this writing experiment--are almost as long as you have to do the writing itself.

### **Part 2: "ESSAY PERFORMING THAT EXPERIMENTAL ESSAY!"**

As we'll see later on, to essay is from the French, and means "to attempt or try." So, try to

essay your thoughts on one or more of the readings this week (such as Artaud, or perhaps Buuck--up to you), and do so in a way that is also a performance. That is, write a performance/performative essay, where again I mean by "performance" something other than simply "reading aloud."

This writing experiment is also 1.5 single-spaced pages max. and should be emailed as attachment and brought to class next Sat of Week 2 just like Part 1 above (they can be in the same doc file, and in fact I'd prefer they be).

### TIPS/SUGGESTIONS FOR PART 2:

\*\*What this writing prompt is asking of us is to write a rough sketch performance essay as way to a) have fun and play, b) find ways to do the essay that are other than the "five paragraph form," c) where in writing such a piece, of which the form is largely up to you, "performing the text" as well as the term "performance" itself are being interpreted and re-defined by and through the writing itself.

\*\*Most of us have written five paragraph essays almost to the exclusion of all other forms of essay. Why? Because the five paragraph form is what is taught in high schools and large universities almost exclusively. Why? Not because it is easier or more fun, but because it has serious merits as a form of writing. I'm asking us--myself included--to consider the essay a performance space, a potential to make something that not only can be performed, but would be interesting to perform. (By "interesting" I mean to the writer, to you!).

\*\*Make discoveries. Push yourself to get weird with the page. Get on yourself to be invested in the form. Ask questions overtly or implicitly--that is, emphasize your own curiosities rather than what it is that you know or feel you can prove. Remember to try--which implies provisionality over certainty, formal play over cookie-cutter paragraph (not that paragraphs are out, or bad, either!).

\*\*Enjoy.

### EXTRA-CREDIT challenge:

Ok, well you won't literally receive extra credit for this. So this really is an "additional" challenge you might like to try. It is this: if anyone has the desire to try to incorporate one or two of Artaud's "elements of the theater of cruelty" in the performance essay or the "unperformable performance" writing, that'd be pretty great. *Not at all necessary* for either of these writing prompts, but since some of you will invariably be using Artaud as one of the authors whose text you are essaying on for "Part 2," and since all of us will be reading the Artaud, I for one would find it INTERESTING, in fact downright exciting, to read/hear/see/sense how you are incorporating "Artaudian" elements into your writing. If inclined, by all means, give it... *a try* ....