

## **WRITING EXPERIMENT FOR SAT WEEK 4: “Performing The Docile Body”**

### **In 3 Steps/Constraints**

**Spring 2014 // d wolach**

“If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary” (146). --- Judith Butler, from *Undoing Gender* (Intro)

### **BEFORE YOU BEGIN / REMINDERS FOR THIS EXPERIMENT:**

**\*\*Please read ALL of this sheet—including the tips/suggestions, definitions, etc—before beginning to write.**

**\*\*This prompt encourages you to locate your writing within what Butler calls a "scene of constraint" through a series of *improvisatory* gestures that are themselves determined by that constraint (among others).**

**\*Note that this experiment’s directions are short and few compared to the number of pages I used here—because I included what I hope are helpful tips for us, as well as dictionary definitions of “tekne” (techne), “technology,” and “outmoded” below. Again, please read the whole document. Note that the directions involve 3 short free-writes and then 3 constraints to stick to while you are writing your 10-20-line poem.**

**\*Make sure to title your poem once finished, like you did for the other writings. The title is a part of the poem is another chance for you to be creative, playful, as well as to evoke further what you desire the whole poem to be doing!**

**\*Bring this poem with you to class Sat (Week 4, our next Sat class), along with other writings you’ve done for this course! Please also send me the poem as attached word, doc, etc file with your name on it. And include a unique subject line in the email—always send your writing experiments as a separate (non-reply) email. As usual, email your attached file to me by the end of Sat night.**

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**STARTING OFF:** Do some of the readings for this week before you begin writing, or anyhow do some of the reading before you get too deep into the writing—perhaps use the writing experiment as a way to take a short (hint!) break from reading, to let things percolate. Start to look at, at least, the Butler and Foucault readings (particularly useful for you will be the Foucault and Butler, since these are our theoretical canonical texts from which one could (I did) make such a writing experiment). You might like to read one or two of the recommended readings also—those who are struggling to get inspired or are feeling unclear still after doing the assigned readings will find doing so helpful.

### **WRITING EXPERIMENT DIRECTIONS (PROMPTS IN 2 STEPS):**

#### **STEP 1:**

**FREE-WRITE QUESTIONS:** to warm up as well as to make “raw language” that will be used in

your main writing, i.e., in the writing you'll be sharing.

**Free-write Question 1:** Consider a time when you were trying to learn a new activity or skill (a new language, how to drive, brush your teeth, etc.). Free-write: How did you go about acquiring this skill? (5 min)

**Free-write Question 2:** Now consider skills or kinds of knowledge or capability that you don't recall ever having learned but which you need to live in the world (e.g. how to speak your "native" language, how to walk or wheel, speak, etc.). List some of those things. Pick one and imagine how you learned this skill/knowledge/activity and from whom you learned it. Free-write. (5 min)

**Free-write Question 3:** Describe your body. (5 min)

## STEP 2:

**Here are the main constraints to stick to; there are three. Read the following before you begin to write:**

- a) **LOCATE AN OUTMODED TECHNOLOGY:** Before writing, and in order write this poem, locate a currently (as of right now, today) outmoded ("out of date") technology or "techne". Because Foucault does, and because it is a more accurate transliteration of the Greek, I'll be using this spelling: "tekne." Note: remember that in class I described both my body and my old laptop as *potentially* outmoded technologies. Locate that tekne you feel will be most compelling for the writing, and do this first, since you will need to make use of it to write the poem. Inspect it. Take a few notes. Think about, and perhaps begin to sketch out, some language that this currently outmoded technology evokes for you in the poem you are writing. Think about the writing from your free-writes.
- b) **USE OUTMODED TEKNE IN WRITING YOUR POEM:** Once you've familiarized yourself with this outmoded technology, find some way to actively use it to make a 10-20 line performative poem, one that is based on your free-writes above, in particular your body description. In other words, this outmoded technology should be used in, and even as, the process of your writing. This involves a little bit of thinking backwards. Ask: in what ways could I make use of this thing such that if I didn't the poem would be impossible for me to write?
- c) **MAKE USE OF TECHNOLOGY AS PART OF YOUR PERFORMING THE POEM:** As you write your poem, and afterwards of course, find ways to write that will allow you to make use of this outmoded technology to perform (read aloud at least) the poem. **NOTE:** "make use of" does not mean "as a prop." If you have chosen as your outmoded technology an abacus (an ancient and still very useful calculator), for example, don't just plan to wave it in the air while you read—eh? Instead as you begin this experiment, ask yourself: Beyond using it as a prop, how can this be used during my reading of the poem--as part of the reading--on Saturday? Perhaps I can use it as a counting device that will, by some chance procedure, determine the number of lines that I write. And then for the performance I perhaps I decide that I will use that same chance procedure to determine the order in which I read the lines...

**d-ish) Areas of inquiry:** There are multiple things one can think about and research, multiple angles from which one can write the poem, and so multiple areas of inquiry (or even “topics of coverage”) that one’s writing can investigate. What you choose for the poem to evoke is up to you largely, but: just as we close read (“close wread”) one another’s writings this week by “writing to” another’s piece, find language that will evoke how the poem is being constructed, how it will be performed, and that it is being performed during a week in which “performance” is directly related to categories of identity, to “the docile body” (Foucault), to bodies, and to the systems that categorize bodies. That is, don’t just ignore the areas of inquiry or concern that are at work this week in our discussions and during lectures and workshops. Allow for your poem to speak (sing) from those concerns, problems, questions.

**\*\*END OF WRITING PROMPT DIRECTIONS\*\***

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**SUMMARY: choose an “outmoded technology”** to both use in the performance/reading of your writing and that will serve to be one of the processes by which you write the poem in the first place. That is, choose an “outmoded technology” (definitions are below) that will become both a form of process (or filter for writing) as well as means by which your poem gets performed live. Try to make a poem that “speaks to” or relates in some way to the concerns of our readings this week, not to mention last week etc.

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### **TIPS & SUGGESTIONS:**

**TIP (RESEARCH!):** Research the outmoded technology you’ve located to use. Even if that technology is seemingly deeply familiar to you, do some small amount of research. Generally: even, maybe particularly, when your topic/area of concern appears familiar enough for you to just “write off the top of your head” about it, always do some research as to what you are writing to/about.

**TIP 2 (RESEARCH!):** Use of dictionaries, encyclopedias, and thesaurus, will give you language that you don’t have in mind—will help expand the poem’s vocabulary and hone your topic/focus.

**REMINDER ABOUT PROPS VS. “MAKING USE OF”:** it is vital that one doesn’t just choose to use this technology as a “prop.” This isn’t about using a stage prop in a one-act. This is about being creative in performing a poem live that makes central, and deeply makes use of, the outmoded technology in the reading aloud of the poem--in its live enactment/as part of its performance. Find a way(s) of performing by creatively making use of this outmoded technology that speak to that technology itself.

**TIP 3 (Two QUESTIONS):** here are a couple important questions that could help you zero in on the poem, in its initial drafting, its performance, as well as in the editing/revising of it prior to Saturday:

—what about your chosen outmoded technology NEEDS to “live in the air” in addition to being evoked the page?

—what about this use in performance DOES NOT JUST DUPLICATE in performance what I’ve written? What kinds of tensions as well as compliments between page and live reading can I relay?

### **OUTMODED TECHNOLOGY DEFINITIONS, FURTHER NOTES:**

—Think about our discussion of “tekne.” Think creatively and more widely about what how pervasive technology is here, that it is both the scientific organization and application of knowledge and knowledge systems, and also the machinery that is produced from that organization and application. Think about what counts as such. Think specifically about what technologies during your life have become *outmoded*—taken out of circulation as commodity in a market, that have been taken out of “market circulation” often to be replaced by something else that “does the job” with “greater efficiency,” and generates greater profit, or has increased “usability” of “functionality.” Recall that the application of the word “technology” can itself refer to an object, yet also to a human being treated as an object (a trained human being, for example). The term can also itself be a theory of organization and not a thing—where technologies can be, often are, replaced by other technologies, these aren’t always “discrete” or “visible” objects. System of knowledge as technology? Poetry as technology? Does Foucault answer “all of the above” here?

—Think about your own laboring body as it is trained to perform specific tasks. Think of who trains it. Think about why. Think about institutions of training. Think about technology and vocation. Technology and information. Technology AS appendage (cell phones, for example, as like added appendages).

—Poet and essayist (professor of black studies) Fred Moten discusses the human being as commodity. In Moten’s use of Marx’s musing, in *Capital*, about what the commodity would say “if it could” speak, he opens his book *In the Break* with “the history of blackness is a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist” (1). So realize that technologies aren’t necessarily electronic—and in fact sometimes are in fact *us*. Sometimes they (we?) are laboring bodies within a system, systematized, and are often not willfully so. So: what does Moten’s quote here have to do with *tekne*, with the definition of “technology” and with technologies that have become “outmoded”?

### **DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS:**

#### **Technology:**

Machinery and equipment developed from scientific knowledge.

The application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, esp. in industry: “computer technology”; “recycling technologies”.

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Outmoded: out mod ed

Adjective

Old-fashioned.

Synonyms: Obsolete, out-of-date. antiquated.