

WEEK 5 WRITING EXPERIMENT: “OUTMODED TEKNE, OUTMODED POEM, OUT MODED BODY?”

This writing will be ultimately to produce another poem that will complement your “body sonnet,” resulting in a 2-poem sequence.

Please follow the constraints below in the order that they appear, starting with thinking (and, if you can, writing for five minutes about) why I keep coming back to this quote from Judith Butler’s “Intro” to *Undoing Gender* (hint: perhaps you are being asked to practice another sort of “improvisation within a scene of constraint”?!):

“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” (Butler 146).

DEFINITIONS:

Techne (tekne):

1. A craft, or trade; the active application and/or production of practical knowledge.
2. An form or system for the advancement or understanding of something; a system for the production of (usually practical) knowledge.

Either spelling of this word is correct—I use the later, which is the Greek transliteration of the word and not the Latin.

Technology:

1. Machinery and equipment developed from scientific knowledge.
2. The application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, esp. in industry: “computer technology”; “recycling technologies”.

Outmoded (Adjective):

Old-fashioned, obsolete, out-of-date, antiquated (remember that in class I described my old laptop as potentially outmoded)

GETTING STARTED:

First, make sure to *do the new readings*—or at least do a good portion of the readings—before writing from the prompt/constraints below. Then:

Free-write for 5 minutes on the following statement: “my poem is an outmoded technology.”

Free-write for another 5 minutes on the following statement: “my BODY is an outmoded technology.”

PROCESS CONSTRAINTS:

To construct your poem, please **make use of**:

1) an outmoded technology, or “outmoded tekne” (for more about this, see the “EXPLANATORY NOTES...”)

2) 1-2 lines of your body poem (these lines should be re-written/revise for the purposes of this new poem, i.e., they should not appear completely the same as they do in the sonnet)

Before writing, and in order to write this poem, start by locating a currently (as of right now, today) outmoded (“out of date,” “old fashioned,”) technology or tekne. Once you’ve located this outmoded technology, one you’d like to use for purposes of making this poem, make use of that currently outmoded technology in order to write the poem. First, inspect it. Take a few notes. Then use language that this currently outmoded technology evokes for you in the poem you are writing, but ALSO actively make use of the technology somehow in the writing.

Q: What do I mean by “actively make use of”?

A: I mean that you should come as close as you can to making it so that this particular outmoded tekne is, or at least seems, absolutely necessary to the form the poem ends up having. In other words: MAKE THE OUTMODED TECHNOLOGY INDISPENSIBLE TO YOUR WRITING OF THIS PIECE.

Be creative in how you use this tekne to make the poem!

FORMAL CONSTRAINT: ALTERNATING LINE BEGINNINGS:

The only formal constraint—besides, obviously, the constraints provided by your chosen technology—is that the poem’s lines alternate with the following beginnings: “my body...” and “a body...”. Thus your poem is a sort of “list poem” in couplets, in which the lines alternate back and forth between these two beginnings. Here is an example for clarity (of the beginning of such a poem):

my body, thing-body,
a body drifts, as if someplace winter. and now

my body does into every night, wishing
a body, an-other body, into some proper place

without name.

my body, tooth-rot and harbor, as
a body rakes canals and muster...

...AND SO FORTH...

A NOTE ON LINE MAKING AND LINE *BREAKING*

Notice that the line-part above, “without name”, is PART of the line above it, it is the end of the proceeding line, only it is simply also below it. A line of a poem is not necessarily on the same “text line.” A line in poetry is often thought to be a completed phrase, and ends when the phrase completes itself (there are other ways to define the “line” in poetry, and we’ll discuss some after this writing is done). If you want to try including this sort of line as the one above, that is fine. Such a way of completing the line after continuing it to the margin below is called an “enjambment” of a line.

So “enjambment” or “enjambing a line” is fine, and may be done to mix your alternations up, such that your list isn’t as, say, “mechanical” – unless, of course, you are aiming for mechanical. The main thing is that you are alternating line beginnings, alternating after each phrase gets, according to you, completed. You may, of course, simply alternate without enjambment, beginning your lines in an a/b/a/b/a fashion, one sort of line beginning right below the next, and so forth—this more straightforward sort of list poem can be equally and in fact more interesting and complex and vivid than one that makes use of enjambment.

*****END OF EXPERIMENT INSTRUCTIONS—BUT PLEASE READ AT LEAST ONCE THE EXPLANATORY NOTES BELOW*****

IMPORANT ELABORATION/EXPLANATORY NOTES ON the PROCESS CONSTRAINTS:

--Besides the formal constraint of alternating line beginnings in the manner described above, all formal elements of this writing are up to you, except that the poem **MUST** emerge out of the technology you’ve chosen to use, that is, it should be enacting and/or responsive to the technology you have chosen to use, not just “writing about” it... i.e. it must **FORMALLY** evoke, or **IN FORM** relate to, the technology it is deploying (put another way: your poem should be shaped by or inscribed by this technology, not just by your inspiration).

--Perhaps you might use this outmoded technology as a contrasting focal point, another subject that can occur within the poem, to help you think and write in relation to the themes, problems, and images you are interested in exploring. Use this outmoded technology in order to “imaginatively outmode” your own poem. Perhaps the poem can be related, for you, to the readings, such as Stryker’s “My Words...” or the new readings, such as the Philip or Moten poems (including the recommended reading, “Imagining Cyborg Bodies” by Jennifer Gonzalez). Perhaps it can call to mind for you Foucault’s notion of the docile body.

--During the writing, ASK yourself: How does this currently outmoded technology function now that it is no longer part of a market, up to date, compatible with other technologies within the sphere of commodities? Be creative in asking yourself how this out of date technology **MIGHT NOW** function, or how **YOU** can make it function **DIFFERENTLY** as a sort of poetry engine or filter for writing.

--Try to stick with the 14-15 line format, as this poem is part of a 2-poem sequence.

OPTIONAL CONSTRAINT, BUT HIGHLY RECOMMENDED (because it is FUN & will help you write the poem!): You may also--and this is up to you--try to find a way to use the outmoded technology in the ACT of reading aloud the poem, that is, when you read it in workshop and maybe if you read it for the class during our get-together. Cassette? Speech software that is outdated? Your eyelashes? Are any of these potentially "outmoded" technologies that you can use to not just write the poem, but also PERFORM the poem? Take formal risks!

I hope some of you DO think about how to use the outmoded technology DURING THE ACT OF READING. Beyond using it as a prop, how can this (old ratty laptop, say) be used during my reading of the poem--as part of the reading--on Saturday? Further: perhaps I can write ON it, LITERALLY, as my paper (this would be difficult for a cassette tape, but hey, why not try?)!

So: try to choose an outmoded technology that you feel you can then use in the act of reading/performing of the poem, too. This way the outmoded technology becomes, in a sense, "un-outmoded" or revived (it is brought back to a kind of life, as it were).