



ENCYCLOPEDIA STERCORE TARI

MEGHAN MCNEALY

Con•straint:*n.* A limitation or restriction.

WHAT IS POSSIBLE HERE?

When referring to our writing, what are the limitations or restrictions that we are faced with? What challenges us in such a way that we must work to find the words, to compose the sentences, and to structure the text that will communicate our ideas? Consider the constraints that are present at the time of any writing. What are we writing about? What language are we writing in? How much time do we have to write this? From the very moment we decide to write, there are restrictions that exist and which govern the way we sculpt with language. When we are unaware of these constraints, we are working against them as they keep us from producing our ideas to their truest potential. The acceptance of these constraints affords us the ability to see the way that language can behave within the constraint's parameters. We can take advantage of these challenges by producing a text that is aware of its limitations, and resolves the gap between an idea and text by working with the language that satisfies our constraint. In poetry, forms like the sonnet, sestina, and haiku prescribe a certain formula within which text is constructed, and so the language we choose to signify our idea must satisfy these constraints. Even the traditional five-paragraph essay is a constraint, a way of structuring the text before it is written in order for the writing to function in a specific way.

Con•straint:*literary.* A rule, structure, formula, or restriction on the way a text is composed in order to subvert over-used, perpetuated forms of literature and ways of saying something in favor of new, yet undiscovered functions of language.

WHAT IS POSSIBLE HERE?

By creating limitations for ourselves and embracing our constraints in choosing language, we allow the possibility for creativity with language, whether we are constructing a text that is creative or expository. Consider the language we choose as a monster not of our own making. How is our language, our way of saying something, affected by the language that has already happened around

us? How can we use language in a way it has never been used before, that has not been inadvertently absorbed by our imaginations from the stimuli that we are constantly inundated with?

Working with constraint begins with the question WHAT IS POSSIBLE HERE?

Just as we might approach a research project with a rich question or the intention of revealing an idea in a new way, we can investigate any text we are writing by using constraints that force us to work with language in a way that we are not used to.

Here are some examples of investigations into a text through the use of specific constraints:

we are about to compose a text. an idea has formed in our mind, a reason for writing of which we have become aware. we choose to compose a text that will cradle this idea, give it a being and a home, existent beyond the nascent void. we choose action for this idea in the act of writing. the text will be composed of language. a language will be chosen and the text will be composed within the constraint of this language until this language is the delineation of the idea: a skeletal posture, muscle memory, and breathing; a hard-wired circuitry, greased cogs, and steam. from our idea, a text is produced, a structure and a function.

This is the idea that is trying to be communicated, written off of the top of the author's head, and therefore composed of the English language that author is accustomed to. Now the author will investigate this idea within the limitations of different constraints.

POSSIBILITY #1: NOTATION

Id.g Lx/Constr. g Txt g Stx/Fx = x choose y

[where x = writer]

[where y = Id. choose x, x choose Lx, Lx choose Constr., Constr. choose Txt, Txt choose Stx/Fx]

By re-stating the idea in a very simple structure, almost pre-language, the author is able to investigate the very core function of the text. "This is what I am trying to say," the author might say, in a notation that makes sense to her. In this way, she has also created a formula for the text she is trying to create.

POSSIBILITY #2: LIPOGRAM [RESTRICTION OF A LETTER OF THE ALPHABET] IN "E"

an author is about to play with word composition. an ash of insight tugs at an author's mind, a standard for writing of which an author now knows. an author wants to play with word composition so insight will know comfort in its birth, and so it will grow with honor and humility from this vacuum of an author's mind. an author wants to play with living word compositions, not just words

or paragraphs or writing or books, but blood and skin and lungs; not buttons or cogs or plugs, but a matrix, a program, a tool.

The same idea is being represented, but in a more carefully considered language. Now the words that are the first to appear in the mind of the author may not work within the rules the author has set for herself. She must push past her habits with language, and challenge her imagination to think for itself, to play with language in a way that it is not used to playing.

POSSIBILITY #3: IAMBIC PENTAMETER

at the edge of a text our author waits, / idea shapes her thought, it communicates / in language of mind, where idea hovers / until language of text births and covers / idea in a blanket of dialect, / space where a reader is free to inspect.

With the constraint of rhyme and meter, the language perhaps becomes a bit more vague, but new images and associations are created, and another function of the original idea is explored. Knowing that the last word of the lines must rhyme, the phrases that are in the author's head must be reconsidered and coded into new shapes and images.

POSSIBILITY #4: ANTONYMIC TRANSLATION

they are not ready to deconstruct an image. the void is deteriorating outside their bodies, the chaos from reading they are forgetting. they hesitate to deconstruct an image that won't disturb that void, steal a shadow and prison, holographic within the idea of dying. they hesitate, entropy from the void out of static reading. an image won't deconstruct without the inability for expression or communication. the inability to express or communicate won't be neglected, but an image won't deconstruct outside a freedom without that inability to express or communicate since that inability to express or communicate is not a formless void: the invertebrate crumpling, forgotten butter, or suffocation; the soft, disconnected, open path; rusted, empty pegs, and icicles. for their void, the image is copied, the pile or the apathy.

EDITOR'S NOTE

An antonymic translation is not a replacement of each term with its opposite, but the replacement of a sentence with its opposite. Antonymic translation acts as an analogous translation of the base language's ideas in order to invert the meaning.

Constraints are a way to maintain control with our language by being conscious of its programming. The irony of limitation, in this sense, is that it frees us. Constraints open us to a seemingly infinite process that makes translation the exemplar of all writing.