Jennifer Ashton

From Modernism to Postmodernism

American Poetry and Theory in the Twentieth Century

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FROM MODERNISM TO POSTMODERNISM

In this ambitious overview of twentieth-century American poetry, Jennifer Ashton examines the relationship between modernist and postmodernist American poetics. Ashton moves between the iconic figures of American modernism – Stein, Williams, Pound – and developments in contemporary American poetry to show how contemporary poetics, especially the school known as language poetry, have attempted to redefine the modernist legacy. She explores the complex currents of poetic and intellectual interest that connect contemporary poets with their modernist forebears. The works of writers such as Gertrude Stein and John Ashbery are explained and analyzed in detail. This major new account of the key themes in twentieth-century poetry and poetics develops important new ways to read both modernist and postmodernist poetry through their similarities as well as their differences. It will be of interest to all working in American literature, to modernists, and to scholars of twentieth-century poetry.

JENNIFER ASHTON is Associate Professor of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

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To Edward C. and Katherine D. Ashton

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Introduction: modernism's new literalism

MODERNISM/POSTMODERNISM

"As we move into the twenty-first century," observes Marjorie Perloff in a recent book, "the modern/postmodern divide has emerged as more apparent than real."[1] Coming not only from a distinguished critic, but also the foremost academic champion of an avant-garde that – whatever disagreements its individual members have about their place in postmodernism – has defined itself against modernism, this observation is a striking one. After all, the divide once seemed crucial to many literary historians, including Perloff herself. Why now does it seem irrelevant, or perhaps more to the point, why did it use to seem so fundamental? What was the crucial difference between modernism and postmodernism? That is, what is the difference between, say, T. S. Eliot or Wallace Stevens and the poets most often identified with postmodernism, particularly those affiliated with the language movement in American poetry (Charles Bernstein, Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, Steve McCaffery, Barrett Watten, Bob Perelman, Susan Howe, Michael Palmer, to name a few)?[2] Certainly by customary definitions, the difference would seem incontrovertible. Where, for example, the modernism of Eliot has been identified with the autonomy of the text (or what postmodernism calls the "closed" text) and the determinacy of its meaning, the postmodern text is "open" and its meaning is indeterminate. And where the participation of the reader was thought to be irrelevant to the text in modernism, it has become not just relevant but crucial to the text in postmodernism. But if the divide appears obvious in the context of these stark oppositions, Perloff has strong reasons for denying it.

For even when postmodern poetry was most committed to describing itself as a repudiation of modernism, it was also insisting on a continuity between its values and those of a certain subset of modernist writers. Laura (Riding) Jackson, Louis Zukofsky, and above all Gertrude Stein are

invoked with almost ritual frequency as modernist practitioners of a thoroughly postmodern aesthetics.[3] But this subset of postmodern modernists has proliferated to the point that now (as we will see in Perloff's own analysis) even Eliot has come to seem increasingly connected to the values of postmodernism – i.e., to the open text, to the solicitation of the reader's participation, and to the indeterminacy of meaning. As the modernist poets to whom postmodernism was once most opposed turn out today to be its most sympathetic precursors, the differences between them do indeed become "more apparent than real," and what was announced as a break with the modernist tradition looks instead like its perpetuation.

The argument of this book, however, is that those differences, far from being merely apparent, are real, and that the modern/postmodern divide remains intact, both historically and theoretically.[4] I am arguing first that the literary history that eliminated the divide is mistaken, which is to say that Stein and (Riding) Jackson (if not Zukofsky) are not committed to the open text and the values of indeterminacy; and second, that the theoretical difference between a literature committed to the text's dependence on readerly participation, and a literature not so committed – a literature committed instead to the irrelevance of the reader and to the absolute autonomy of what Stein calls the work that "exists in and for itself" – is fundamental. This project is thus at once both a literary-historical and a theoretical argument: it is an attempt to alter the currently received history of twentieth-century American poetry by showing that Stein and (Riding) Jackson have been and continue to be misunderstood as postmodernists *avant la lettre*. And it is meant to show that this historical misunderstanding is itself a function of a more pervasive theoretical effort – beginning for my purposes with the early New Criticism of the 1920s and continuing through the work of critics like Perloff herself – to displace what, in its broadest terms, we might call the "meaning" of a text by the reader's experience of it, a displacement Perloff calls "literalism."[5]

LITERALISM

Perloff announces the growing inconsequentiality of the modern/postmodern divide in a book called *21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics*. In putting scare quotes around "new," she means to suggest that the poetics in question, far from being new, can be traced at least as far back as the earliest works of Eliot:

> In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981) I drew a sharp distinction between Eliot's symbolist mode and the more "literalist" indeterminacy of John Ashbery. Twenty years later, in the context of recent poetic developments, I would qualify my earlier reading by noting that the comparison was to the later Eliot, not the poet, then largely unknown, made familiar by Christopher Ricks's superb edition of the hitherto unpublished poems written between 1909 and 1917. (7–8)

Perloff goes on to explain how the Eliot whom she formerly saw as the antithesis of Ashbery's (and for that matter, the language poets') "poetics of indeterminacy" has earned this limited admission to the "New" Poetics. She cites J. C. Mays's reading of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," where "images [tend] to balloon away from their referents and assume an uncontrollable life of their own" (25–26), a reading that, Perloff discovers, resembles her own reading of Stein as "stress[ing] *composition* rather than *representation*, the play of signifiers rather than the pointing relation of signifier to signified" (54). But if terms like "uncontrollable" and "play" give us a "poetics of indeterminacy" in Stein and now Eliot, what makes their indeterminacy "literalist"? Perloff never explicitly defines the term, but what she means by it is perfectly clear when she says that Prufrock approximates "Constructivist notions of 'laying bare the device,' of using material form – in this case, language – as an active compositional agent, impelling the reader to participate in the process of construction."[6] Certainly any focus on the "material form" of the text – which in this context refers to its physical appearance on the page, the sounds of its syllables – cannot help but "impel the reader to participate" (25–26) if only because our eyes, ears, etc. are required to read or listen to it. But what is distinctive about literalism in this context is that the materiality of the text is also understood to produce its indeterminacy. Every text is material, but the literalist text understands its materiality as an *invitation* to its reader, and hence as the condition that makes every reading both different from and equal to every other in constituting the text.

Let us take a comparatively early example of a text from the language movement that does everything Perloff understands as "literalism": Lyn Hejinian's *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* (1978), whose most visible formal feature is the ragged positioning of its lines in relation to the left margin. This raggedness is not random, however; it works according to strict principle, for each line is placed where the first letter of its first word would occur in an alphabet typed across the page in order from 'a' to 'z':

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
how ness posites
autobiography sees the world
by early beginning with the top narrate
much intention is retrospective and much
extension is prospective
for illusion of men can be so many scandals
shifting quite but admirable victed
sequences. . .[7]

We can easily see what might count as "literalist" about this text, in the sense that here and throughout the poem its most literal constituents (the letters forming the words, rather than the meaning of the words) are its organizing principle. And the arrangement of those letters confronts us as well with the most literal mechanical conditions of their production (the typewriter keys striking, the carriage advancing). In a gesture that echoes Perloff's definition of literalism, Hejinian remarks in her 1983 essay "The Rejection of Closure," that such formal devices as these not only "foreground process," but also "serve to 'open' a poetic text" by "invit[ing] participation" in that process.[8]

Certainly the amputated suffixes and roots of words (e.g., "ness," "posites," "victed") that are the linguistic hallmark of *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* invite the reader to entertain multiple possibilities: is it "evicted" or "convicted"? "Apposites," "opposites," or an alteration of "posits"? And what about the (necessarily "prospective") "extension" of options for "ness," which are as many as the adjectives we can bring to mind? But Hejinian imagines her readers as more than *participants* in the composition of the text; she imagines them as *agents* of its composition. Thus, the "open text," she says, foregrounds not just "the process of the original composition" but also that of "subsequent compositions by readers," becoming, in other words, not one composition but many (*The Language of Inquiry*, 43). Where the "closed text" is imagined to have a meaning that exists independent of the interpretations of its readers and therefore remains unaffected by them, the open text is reconstituted every time it is read. And because it is reconstituted every time it is read, there is no prior meaning to be discovered through interpretation. Rather, insofar as every encounter between the reader and the poem becomes a new composition, every new reader becomes a writer of the poem, so that the relation of the reader to the "open text" is no longer to understand what it means, but to become, again quite literally, who its author is. (And as we shall see later in this discussion, authorship under these conditions is no longer understood as producing a meaning or meaning to produce,

but as literally causing an effect. Indeed, strictly speaking, we might say that the open text never really has any meaning and is thus never interpreted at all.)

If the hallmark of literalism is a text's ability to compel our attention to its physical features, and more generally, to make us think of language in terms of its material constituents – letters and phonemes overwhelming words and sentences – Perloff's chapter on the Russian Constructivist poet Velimir Khlebnikov seems to present us with an uncontroversial example of literalism. But her account of the literalist Khlebnikov also makes her account of the alleged literalist Eliot all the more controversial. For in its effort to foreground the material constituents of language, what Khlebnikov's "zaum" poetry of the teens and 1920s supposedly shares with the language poetry of the 1980s and 1990s, Perloff argues, is the desire to dissociate language from understanding: "But, from the perspective of contemporary poets like Susan Howe and Bruce Andrews, what is more interesting than phonemic repetition as such is Khlebnikov's own sense of how phonemic and morphemic play can produce a poetic language beyond (*za*) mind or reason (*um*) – what Khlebnikov and his fellow-poet Kruchonykh called *zaum*" (*21st-Century Modernism*, 123). We have already noted, in the example of Hejinian, how the participation invited by her "phonemic and morphemic play" is supposed to make the reader the producer of the text rather than the discoverer of its meaning. But if we can see the uncoupling of language from reason in that example, it's hard to see what makes this literalization of language count as going "beyond" reason. According to Perloff, "Khlebnikov's stress on the materiality of the signifier, the graphic and phonic characteristics of language" embodies the cause of "resistance to an Establishment 'poetry'." Once Khlebnikov's cause also becomes the "cause of Eliot or of Stein" as well as of "Concrete Poetry" (which was even more uncontroversially literal in its commitment to "material form" than Khlebnikov's zaum poetry), literalism seems not to involve pushing language *beyond* reason, but never to let it get there in the first place (128). In identifying zaum poetry with Concrete Poetry, Perloff suggests that both make the text "concrete" by making the reading of it consist of experiencing its form (registering the shape of the letters, words and lines) rather than interpreting its meaning.[9] Or to turn this around, the concrete or zaum poem seems to make the reader into someone who experiences the poem rather than understands it by making the poem become an object rather than a text. In this respect poetic literalism – the transformation of readers into experiencing subjects and of texts into concrete objects – has an important analog in the history of

art in the last century, where painting and sculpture undergo a similar transformation.

Indeed, the term "literalism," used as a way of talking about how art becomes an object (or rather, never ceases being one), finds its first currency not in Perloff or in any of her twenty-first-century modernist texts (including the twentieth-century ones), but in "Art and Objecthood," Michael Fried's 1967 essay on the emerging movement in painting and sculpture that is most often identified as "minimalism."[10] While Perloff does not cite Fried as a source for the term, her understanding of literalist poetry corresponds quite precisely to Fried's understanding of literalist "art." In works like Tony Smith's six-foot cube entitled *Die* (1962) or Robert Morris's *Untitled (Ring with Light)* (1965–66), every material aspect of the work, including not just the visual and tactile (and even aural in some other examples) form of the object itself, but also of the environment in which it is beheld, is relevant to its status as object:

> There is nothing within [the beholder's] field of vision – nothing that he takes note of in any way – that declares its irrelevance to the situation, and therefore to the experience, in question. On the contrary, for something to be perceived at all is for it to be perceived as part of that situation. Everything counts – not as part of the object – but as part of the situation in which objecthood is established and on which that objecthood at least partly depends. (Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 155)

If, in the example of Hejinian's open text, the relevance of everything about the reader's experience makes her the author of the text in question, at the moment when everything about the object and its situation becomes relevant to the beholder's experience, the beholder's experience itself comes to constitute the object. Indeed, the beholder's experience is, as Fried explains, the "everything" on which the object's very "objecthood" depends. And so, inasmuch as "the experience of literalist art is of an object in a *situation*" it is "one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*" (153).

When Fried refers to this relation in terms of the "special complicity that the work extorts from the beholder" (155) – i.e., her participation – the literalist object begins to look exactly like language poetry's "open text." Moreover, this solicitation of the beholder translates into an aesthetics of indeterminacy in Fried's account of literalism, just as it yields a poetics of indeterminacy in Perloff's. For despite (or rather, entirely because of) the obdurate materiality of the object, the possibilities it affords are infinitely expansive, as many and varied as the beholders who might approach it: "The beholder knows himself to stand in an

indeterminate, open-ended – and unexacting – relation as *subject* to the impassive object on the wall or floor" (155). But while Fried demonstrates the same set of concerns that Perloff does around the treatment of the work of art as an object of experience, and thereby, as something that exists necessarily in relation to a subject, "Art and Objecthood" is an argument *against* literalism for its repudiation of modernism, whereas *21st-Century Modernism* celebrates literalism for its successful embrace of modernism. "Ours may well be the moment," Perloff writes in the last line of the book, "when the lessons of early modernism are finally being learned" (200). Learning "the lessons of early modernism," however, by which Perloff means learning the lessons of the writers who count as modernism's true avant-garde, also means unlearning the lessons of what she takes to be the critical legacy of mainstream modernism: "Of course, 'Prufrock' was. . .to become a celebrated modern poem, but the New Critical classic. . .is not ours" (27). If, in other words, the lessons attributed to Stein, Khlebnikov, and now the avant-garde Eliot are those of the "open text," the ones that need to be unlearned are those of the New Criticism, with its notorious commitment to the autonomous (in Hejinian's terms, "closed") text.

In this respect, literalism in poetry does seem to follow the same course of resistance as literalism in art, for according to Fried, what literalism rejects in modernist painting is precisely its autonomy, the idea that "what is to be had from the work is located strictly within it" ("Art and Objecthood," 153). Whereas the modernist work of art not only makes no claims on the beholder, but "finds intolerable" the very idea of any relation to an audience, "literalist art," writes Fried,

> addresses itself to the beholder alone. Someone has merely to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to become that beholder, that audience of one – almost as though the work in question has been waiting for him. And inasmuch as literalist work depends on the beholder, is incomplete without him, it *has* been waiting for him. And once he is in the room the work refuses, obstinately, to let him alone. (163)

Like the literalist object that awaits the beholder, the "open text" awaits its reader, and both are "incomplete" alone. But resisting the autonomy of the text by making the text dependent on the reader's experience of it becomes problematic when language proponents like Perloff or Hejinian turn to Stein as their mascot. For if literalism refuses the autonomy of the work of art by calling upon the beholder (or reader) to participate in its situation – indeed, to *create* its situation – Stein, by contrast, insists on the

autonomy of the work of art precisely by refusing any relation whatsoever between the work and anyone who might experience it, including the author herself. In short, Stein refuses literalism.

Stein begins a 1936 lecture called "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There so Few of Them" by commenting on the fact that she finds herself before an audience, a situation, she argues, that is antithetical to the creation of masterpieces:

> One of the things that I discovered in lecturing was that gradually one ceased to hear what one said one heard what the audience hears one say, that is the reason that oratory is practically never a master-piece . . .It is very interesting that letter writing has the same difficulty, the letter writes what the other person is to hear and so entity does not exist there are two present instead of one and so once again creation breaks down. I once wrote in writing *The Making of Americans* I write for myself and strangers but that was merely a literary formalism for if I did write for myself and strangers if I did I would not really be writing because already then identity would take the place of entity.[11]

Stein explains what she means by identity with the example of her relation to her dog: "I am I because my little dog knows me but, creatively speaking the little dog knowing that you are you and your recognising that he knows, that is what destroys creation" (*Writings*, 355). What matters here is not so much the latter recognition (although it too is crucial to her logic), but the dog's, since it will turn out that all kinds of things (especially things that are not masterpieces), none of which possesses its own faculties of recognition, can be functions of identity just as persons can. Insofar as the recognition in which identity consists arises out of a relation between an object and a subject who may as well be a dog, the relation is one of pure memory: all that is required to produce the dog's recognition, and in turn your identity, is its having been in your presence. Moreover, the object, whether it be the dog's mistress, the literalist work of art, or the "open text," only achieves its identity – which produces what Fried would call its objecthood – out of the situation in which it is experienced. And even though such an object, as Fried explains, "must remain the center or focus of the situation," nevertheless "the situation itself *belongs* to the beholder." The dog's experience of having seen you before can *only* belong to the dog. Thus the object of identity – always the object of a *subject's experience* – can never be an entity because it can never, as Stein puts it, "exist in and for itself"; it can only exist *for someone* (*Writings*, 357). Indeed, the whole point for Stein of insisting that the masterpiece is an entity is to insist that it cannot be an object. And the whole point of insisting that it cannot be an object is to

insist that what it is can never be a function of anyone's experience of it – or, to put this slightly differently, that what it is can never be a function of what it is *for* someone.

For Stein, then, a masterpiece can never be an "open text" because it can never "invite participation." This is not to say, of course, that readers do not or cannot have responses to or experiences of a work of art (in a trivial sense we can't help but do so); only that their responses and experiences have nothing to do with what makes it art. This is nothing if not a commitment to the autonomy of the work of art, and in fact, it's a commitment to one of the most important, if only intermittently influential New Critical arguments for that autonomy, William W. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's "The Affective Fallacy," which contends that specific readerly responses – particularly emotional ones like happiness or sadness – are not only not required to grasp the meaning of a poem but are in fact altogether irrelevant to that meaning. But the reason these New Critical doctrines – the autonomy of the work of art and the affective fallacy – have been only intermittently influential is that they have always been at odds with two other, equally foundational, ones: namely, that the poem must not mean but be, and that paraphrase is heresy.[12]

The logic whereby the heresy of paraphrase entails the requirement that the poem must not mean but be, and further, the logic whereby both render impossible the kind of autonomy that Stein (and Fried) imagine for art, find concise expression in the aptly titled chapter called "The Poetic Experience" in I. A. Richards's *Science and Poetry* (1926). The famous phrase "heresy of paraphrase" occurs much later in the work of Cleanth Brooks, but the critical principle behind those words – that the best interpretation of a poem is the poem itself – is already in place when Richards urges that the best way to grasp the reasons for "thinking [poetry] valuable" is to "begin by reading slowly, preferably aloud, giving every syllable time to make its full effect upon us."[13] Because our focus in such an exercise is not, according to Richards, the sentences, or even exactly the words, of the poem, but the separate syllables of the words; and further, because what we are after is "the *sound* of the words 'in the mind's ear' and the *feel* of the words imaginarily spoken," this "reading" of the poem (which is above all a repetition of the poem) produces not an account of the meaning of the poem, but an experience of what Fried would call its objecthood (Richards, *Poetries and Sciences*, 23). As we will see in chapter 3, Richards occupies a somewhat anomalous position in the New Criticism because in elaborating this claim for the sensory effects of the poem he explicitly embraces the readerly "affect" that Wimsatt and

Beardsley (and for that matter, William Empson, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, and a host of others) reject as "fallacy."[14] By the latter critics' reasoning, Richards has already given up the grounds on which the poem can count as autonomous. But by Fried's (and, I am arguing, Stein's) reasoning, the others also give up the autonomy of the text when they commit themselves to locating the "meaning" of the text in what Ransom calls its "objective features" and what Brooks calls its "formal" features.[15] Indeed, by treating the objecthood of the text as if it were equivalent to the meaning of the text, the New Critical commitment to the heresy of paraphrase cannot help but entail a commitment to the affective fallacy – if the meaning of a text is reducible to the text's objecthood, it can *only* consist of the reader's affect.[16]

Thus, when Richards says that "it is never what a poem *says* that matters but what it *is*" the moment when the poem has to "be" rather than "say" is also the moment when it becomes an object rather than, in Stein's terms, an "entity" or in Fried's terms, "art" (Richards, *Poetries and Sciences*, 33). For the moment when the text becomes an object is precisely the moment when it can no longer be autonomous, since everything that constitutes the text's objecthood – the "sound" and "feel" of its constitutive syllables – belongs entirely to the experience of *someone* – just what Stein insists it cannot do and still be a masterpiece. The New Critical poem becomes, in other words, the very kind of literalist text that Perloff says "foregrounds the material form of language" and "impels our participation in its construction" (*21st-Century Modernism*, 25–26).

In this context, it should hardly be surprising that someone like Perloff is fond of quoting Charles Bernstein's statement that "the poem said any other way is not the poem," itself a paraphrase of Brooks's "heresy of paraphrase" doctrine (cited in *21st-Century Modernism,* 12).[17] Yet neither she nor Bernstein nor anyone else currently subscribing to that claim recognizes its patent repetition of the theoretical commitments of the New Criticism, and the recognition never takes place because the proponents of language poetry rightly understand themselves as committed not to the autonomy of the poem but to its objecthood. While the literalism celebrated by Perloff and by language poetry more generally appears to have corrected one New Critical mistake – that of equating objecthood with autonomy – it has simply reinstated the more foundational one – that of equating experience with interpretation. Perloff's concluding statement in *21st-Century Modernism*, – that "the lessons of modernism are finally being learned" (200) is, therefore, in some sense right, if we take the modernism whose lessons are being learned to be that

of Cleanth Brooks and I. A. Richards rather than that of Gertrude Stein. My point, however, as I have already tried to suggest, is not just to correct a thoroughly codified misreading of Stein. And it is not, ultimately, to expose the fact that the avant-garde credentials of Perloff's twenty-first-century modernists derive more from the New Critical "mainstream" they claim to repudiate than from the marginalized experimentalism they claim to embrace. I am arguing as well that the codified misreading that has produced a literalist Stein is a *necessary* consequence of literalism's New Critical foundations.

AUTHORIAL ATTENTION

While serving as the 1989–90 Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard, John Ashbery delivered a series of lectures, a requirement of his appointment, which he then collected over a decade later under the title *Other Traditions*. At the beginning of the first lecture, he describes having experienced a certain apprehension about the desires of his prospective audience – in particular, about whether he would be expected, as he puts it, "to discuss the meanings of my poems":

> Unfortunately I'm not very good at explaining my work. I once tried to do this in a question-and-answer period with some students of my friend Richard Howard, after which he told me: "They wanted the key to your work, but you presented them with a new set of locks." That sums up for me my feelings on the subject of "unlocking" my poetry. I'm unable to do so because I feel that my poetry is the explanation. The explanation of what? Of my thought, whatever that is.[18]

The last remark in this series of statements suggests a question on Ashbery's part about what relation his "thought" has to the meaning of the work. Insofar as the poet's "thought" is the thing of which his "poetry is the explanation," the meaning seems to be something that neither the poems nor the poet can serve to "unlock" – the first, because the poems are themselves both lock and key; the second because any further explanations the poet can offer will not be the "thought" embodied by the poems. The poet's "thought" and the poem's meaning become even more complicatedly opposed as Ashbery continues: "On occasions when I have tried to discuss the meanings of my poems," he says, "I have found that I was inventing plausible-sounding ones which I knew to be untrue" (*Other Traditions*, 2). Thus in Ashbery's version of the heresy of paraphrase the attempt to supply the poem's meaning in any form other than the poem itself can only count as an "invention" that effaces the poet's "thought."

The term "thought" undergoes a significant shift, however, when Ashbery's skepticism about his ability to explain his "thought" suddenly turns into a skepticism about its relevance to the processes that produce the poem, such that thinking itself starts to look as though it requires no thought. Indeed, Ashbery's account of how "thought" functions in his poetry becomes strikingly similar to Marjorie Perloff's account of what happens to "reason" in Khlebnikov's "zaum" poetry. Only instead of arguing that turning poems into objects leads us "beyond reason," Ashbery suggests that "beginning and ending outside thought" is what makes poems into objects:

> After all, if I can invent poetry, why can't I invent the meaning? . . .If I'm not more apprehensive, it's probably because of a deep-seated notion that things are meant to be this way. For me, poetry has its beginning and ending outside thought. Thought is involved in the process; indeed, there are times when my work seems to be merely a recording of my thought processes without regard to what they are thinking about. If this is true, then I would also like to acknowledge my intention of somehow turning these processes into poetic objects, a position perhaps kin to Dr. Williams's "No ideas but in things," with the caveat that, for me, ideas are also things. (2)

What exactly is "outside thought," if that is where poems begin and end? And what is the relationship between that exteriority to thought, and the "thought processes" that go on "without regard to what they are thinking about"? In both this passage and the earlier one, the direction in which "thought" is moving is, I will argue, nothing if not the direction of literalism, and the literalism involved is not just a matter of calling poems objects.

For while Ashbery is very much concerned with confining his remarks to what the *poet* does, the "thought" that he thinks is *in* the poem (or better, *is* the poem) turns out to be something much closer to the material and even mechanical conditions and processes that Hejinian calls the "composition" of the poem, whether they belong to the poet's activity or the reader's. Meanwhile the thought that seems to fall away from those processes, "outside" of which the poem "begins and ends," has everything to do with what Ashbery calls "ideas," which in turn seem to have nothing to do with those "thought processes" of which his "work seems to be merely a recording." The limit of this tendency to separate "thought" from "ideas," a limit Ashbery clearly values, leads, he declares, to a "poetry totally devoid of ideas" (3). Obviously no one, including Ashbery himself, would describe his poems as "devoid of ideas" or even as seeking to be so, and that is not my point here. I am interested instead in the logic

required for Ashbery (and anyone else for that matter) to imagine poetry pushed to that limit. This is not just a handy strategy on the part of Ashbery to avoid having to explain the meaning of his work; rather it represents what I have already begun to suggest is the far more pervasive project of postmodernism in general: the effort to make meaning a matter of someone's experience (the writer's or the reader's) rather than of someone's intention, and to make interpretation a matter of reaction rather than of understanding.[19]

A characteristic turn in this logic occurs in Ashbery's account when he goes on to offer his alternative to "discuss[ing] the meanings of [his] poems." What he will do instead, he says, is "talk about poetry from an artisan's point of view" (*Other Traditions*, 4). We might think this description would entail various aspects of craft, but for Ashbery it more interestingly involves another set of concerns: "How does it happen that I write poetry? What are the impetuses behind it? In particular, what is the poetry that I notice when I write, that is behind my own poetry? Perhaps somebody wondered this. . . I'm therefore going to talk about some poets who have probably influenced me" (4). Here Ashbery seems to be following a standard operating procedure in literary criticism, which is to point to the writer's "influences" – often in the form of the texts he is known (or knows himself) to have read before or while writing the work in question – as evidence for the meaning of the work. The value of such evidence generally depends on the degree to which the ideas or the formal techniques contained in the work in question are compatible with those of the "influential" source; yet what Ashbery emphasizes first about the poets he plans to discuss is not the ideas or formal techniques he shares with them but the fact that theirs "is the poetry that I *notice*" (4). As we will see, Ashbery, in rejecting the possibility of explaining the intentions of his work and turning instead to an explanation of what he "noticed," has in fact committed what the New Criticism called the "Intentional Fallacy," despite his apparent rejection of his own intentions. Something even more striking happens when he says that the poets he is about to discuss "*probably* influenced me," the implication being that he cannot be sure whether they did or didn't. In combination these remarks do not so much call into question whether poets like John Clare, Raymond Roussel, and Laura (Riding) Jackson truly influenced Ashbery; rather they raise the question whether the effects of that influence (i.e., the "thought" in the poems) could have been *intended* at all. Thus, says Ashbery, "I'm sorry about the confusion I have involuntarily helped to cause; in the words of W. H. Auden, 'If I could tell you I would let you know'" (3). The things

Ashbery "notices," in other words, serve to explain not what he meant but what he noticed – a function of the complex formation of his attitudes, dispositions, interests, however unaware he is of how he came to have them – when he wrote his poems. In short, the poet's attention has taken the place of his intention.

Ashbery's great long poem (and one of the foundational documents of postmodernism), "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," is, in fact, a detailed elaboration of the logic of this displacement; moreover, as we will see, "intention" and "attention" are the very terms Ashbery uses for it. The overarching conceit of the poem – that of the "self-portrait" – is itself predicated upon the crucial distinction that literalism makes between the representation in the painting (what Ashbery calls its "illusion" and Fried calls its "pictoriality"), and the materials used to effect that illusion (its "objecthood"). For the title Ashbery has given to his poem is that of a famous sixteenth-century self-portrait by Francesco Mazzola (called Parmigianino), which the painter created by manufacturing a hemisphere-shaped piece of wood to serve as his canvas and then by painting on it an image of himself as if reflected in a similarly shaped glass:

> . . . Francesco one day set himself
> To take his own portrait, looking at himself for that purpose
> In a convex mirror, such as is used by barbers. . .
> He accordingly caused a ball of wood to be made
> By a turner, and having divided it in half and
> Brought it to the size of a mirror, he set himself
> With great art to copy all that he saw in the glass . . .
> (lines 9–15)[20]

Throughout the poem, Ashbery is interested in the shape of the wood, whose material presence constantly threatens to dissolve the mimetic realism of the portrait painted on it. But what follows from the literal objecthood of Parmigianino's work is of less importance in the poem than what follows from another major hallmark of literalism: the idea that the physical and mental states of the beholder in the act of beholding, including all of the environmental conditions that impinge upon those states, make the object what it is.

In the case of "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," there are two beholders involved, the painter himself, beholding his reflected image in the mirror, and the poet, beholding the painted image on the convex piece of wood. In both cases, the image presents itself as a snapshot of what the painter "saw" at the moment of painting:

> The glass chose to reflect only what he saw
> Which was enough for his purpose: his image
> Glazed, embalmed, projected at a 180-degree angle.
> (lines 18–20)

But this rendering of "what he saw" (his reflected image) has also become, for Ashbery's purposes, something more like a snapshot of the painter *seeing* (the "self" as beholding subject). That is, Ashbery treats this representation as a sort of arrested state of being. Hence also his insistence that Francesco "set himself," a phrase that appears twice in the opening fourteen lines of the poem, both times at the end of a line, cut off from the actions the painter "sets himself" to do ("tak[ing] his own portrait," "copy[ing] all that he saw"), so that his "self" appears to be "set" or fixed on the verge of those actions.

Playing on the cliché that the eyes are the window to the soul, Ashbery remarks on how certain signs of temporality belonging to the moment that has supposedly been captured serve to establish the presence of the soul:

> The time of day or the density of the light
> Adhering to the face keeps it
> Lively and intact in a recurring wave
> Of arrival. The soul establishes itself.
> But how far can it swim out through the eyes
> And still return safely to its nest? (lines 21–26)

The answer to the last question, that the soul "swim[ming] out through the eyes" is "unable to advance much farther / Than your look as it intercepts the picture" (lines 30–31) presents a problem about the "set" quality of the figure posed in the painting: first, the very moment that figure represents is in a certain sense false, since the painter, over the course of days, weeks or even months of copying his reflection, ends up representing many different moments. Second, insofar as the infinitely varied moments he "copies" are what compose his "self-portrait," the fixed self portrayed can never be identical to the one reflected in the glass through those many moments.

This discrepancy between the moment that "adhere[s] to the face" of the depicted painter and "keeps it lively and intact," and the actual lived experience of the painter in the process of painting is something that, according to the poet, the portrait both captures and conceals in the "soul" that emanates from its subject's eyes. At once the "secret" of

the "soul" and the least secret thing about it, this discrepancy becomes the primary source of lyric pathos in the poem:

> . . .The soul has to stay where it is,
> Even though restless, hearing raindrops at the pane,
> The sighing of autumn leaves thrashed by the wind,
> Longing to be free, outside, but it must stay
> Posing in this place. It must move
> As little as possible. This is what the portrait says.
> But there is in that gaze a combination
> Of tenderness, amusement and regret, so powerful
> In its restraint that one cannot look for long.
> The secret is too plain. The pity of it smarts,
> Makes hot tears spurt: that the soul is not a soul,
> Has no secret, is small, and it fits
> Its hollow perfectly: its room, our moment of attention.
> (lines 34–46)

In this dramatization of the figure depicted in the painting, the surroundings whose sights and sounds the figure abandons with "tenderness, amusement and regret" because he has to "stay posing in this place," are the very surroundings that the figure's beholder – any beholder, including not just the speaker of the poem but also the painter who once beheld a similar figure in the mirror – cannot help but admit into the field of his attention. Those surroundings *are* the field of his attention. Thus, while no single "moment of attention" we could imagine to have been experienced by the subject represented in the painting can ever be the one that appears to be "glazed, embalmed, projected" in his face; at the same time, that face is literally the effect of *every* "moment of attention" the painter experienced in producing it.

But when the speaker says to the portrait, "[Y]our eyes proclaim / That everything is surface. The surface is what's there / And nothing can exist except what's there" (lines 79–81), the portrait also becomes the effect of "our moment of attention" as much as of the painter's. Unlike the depicted figure whose gaze offers the illusion of a fixed "moment of attention," however, the speaker's (i.e., "our") attention is free to wander:

> The balloon pops, the attention
> Turns dully away. Clouds
> In the puddle stir up into sawtoothed fragments.
> I think of the friends
> Who came to see me, of what yesterday
> Was like. . . (lines 100–05)

The weather imagined to have been the painter's situation ("rain," "autumn leaves") has been replaced by the speaker's ("clouds in the puddle"), with its own set of personal associations ("friends who came to see me," "what yesterday was like"). And once the portrait's "surface" becomes the literal effect of these wandering attentions, whether they be those of the painter or those of the beholder, the painting (just in the way that Ashbery describes his own poems), becomes unparaphrasable: "there are. . .no words to say what it really is" (lines 92–93). Moreover, the fact that the painter's quotidian experiences – everything that literally *caused* the effects that are the portrait – is something "impossible now to restore" turns into the logic whereby meaning likewise becomes irrecoverable:

> . . . Long ago
> The strewn evidence meant something,
> The small accidents and pleasures
> Of the day as it moved gracelessly on,
> A housewife doing chores. Impossible now
> To restore those properties in the silver blur that is
> The record of what you accomplished by sitting down
> "With great art to copy all that you saw in the glass"
> So as to perfect and rule out the extraneous
> Forever. In the circle of your intentions certain spars
> Remain that perpetuate the enchantment of self with self:
> Eyebeams, muslin, coral. . . (lines 136–47)

Apparently the "strewn evidence" in the painting ("eyebeams, muslin, coral") only "meant something" when it was still part of the painter's *actual* situation at the time when he made the painting, instead of being part of the deliberately constructed situation in the finished picture. Finding what the evidence "meant" thus becomes the impossible project of recovering that original lived situation. Throughout the poem, Ashbery treats its irrecoverability as a kind of forgetting, so that all of the things he imagines to have been omitted from the "circle of intentions" in the painting – things "which were ours once" – become "forgotten / Things that don't seem familiar when we meet them again, lost beyond telling" (lines 213–16). The "impossible" project of "restor[ing] those properties" is impossible, therefore, not because we cannot restore the painter's intentions, but because the painter's intentions are not what we seek to restore.

After all, in the passage above Ashbery implicitly equates the painter's "intentions" with the "hollow" and "unreal" situation represented in the painting and not with the actual situation (now "lost beyond telling") that produced it. In this respect, the painter's "intentions" look just like the

"ideas" that Ashbery disparages in describing his own poetry and the poetry he values. Moreover, even if the original "meaning" of the "strewn evidence" is long gone, the "intentions" ("ideas") it represents appear to have been entirely successfully carried out; if not, there would be none of the pathos of the discrepancy between the "forgotten" lived experience of the painter and the idealized "moment" his portrait is intended to capture:

> . . .One is forced to read
> The perfectly plausible accomplishment of a purpose
> Into the smooth, perhaps even bland (but so
> Enigmatic) finish. (lines 464–67)

What then are we to make of the poet's announcement some lines later that the painting can never be what the artist intended?

> . . .This always
> Happens, as in the game where
> A whispered phrase passed around the room
> Ends up as something completely different.
> It is the principle that makes works of art so unlike
> What the artist intended. (lines 443–48)

In a game of telephone, Ashbery suggests, the "whispered phrase" ceases to be what the speaker "intended" from the moment it is "passed" to a listener. According to the extended analogy, then, the painting becomes "unlike what the artist intended" from the moment it "passes" to the beholder. Ashbery has seemed up to this point to be maintaining a distinction between the irrecoverable "meaning" of the "strewn evidence" in the painting and the "circle" of the painter's "intentions." Yet it should be clear in this passage that the principle that "makes works of art so unlike / What the artist intended" is identical to the principle that makes meaning "impossible to restore." Both claims follow directly from thinking of the work of art as an effect of someone's "moment[s] of attention," whether the beholder's (in the first instance) or the artist's (in the second). Indeed, once the work becomes such an effect, it can only be "unlike what the artist intended" because "what the artist intended" can never be identical to who the artist was and what he was doing when he produced it or who the beholder was and what he did in the act of beholding. Or to put the point more strongly, once the work becomes such an effect, it cannot exactly have been intended by the artist in the first place. Moreover, because Ashbery locates the "meaning" of the work in the "attention" that produced it (not the "intention"), it becomes, like the

"whispered phrases" in the game of telephone and like the "open text," thoroughly indeterminate. Under this regime, every work of art becomes the "self-portrait" of whoever beholds it. Ashbery's postmodernism is the postmodernism of the open text.

INTENTION

As I have already tried to suggest, this critique of intention, along with the indeterminacy that it entails, involves a logic that extends beyond Ashbery to encompass much of what counts as postmodern in American poetry. In a text like the 1994 Norton anthology of *Postmodern American Poetry*, for example, where Paul Hoover's introduction is designed to summarize the whole of postmodern poetry by listing its common imperatives, the list is built around this very logic: "Postmodernism decenters authority and embraces pluralism. It encourages a 'panoptic' or many-sided point of view. Postmodernism prefers 'empty words' to the 'transcendental signified,' the actual to the metaphysical. In general, it follows a constructionist rather than an expressionist theory of composition. Method and intuition replace intention."[21]

Not surprisingly, the examples of Ashbery (whose version of "intuition" would be "attention") and of language poetry take up a large chunk of Hoover's effort to explain and give examples of these general postmodern doctrines. And while Hoover does not explicitly return to the category of intention as such, his account of the egalitarian politics of language poetry implies that their work achieves its political aims precisely by renouncing any prior investment in authorial intention: "The author cedes his or her false authority as individual ego; broadly distributing wealth in the form of words, the author acquires a more trustworthy authority. Because the words are so freely given, they may seem scattered and disorganized. It is therefore necessary for the reader to participate actively in the creation of meaning" (Introduction, xxxvi). Hoover then turns for his evidence to Charles Bernstein's much cited essay "Writing and Method": "The text," Bernstein writes, "formally involves the process of response/interpretation and in so doing makes the reader aware of herself or himself as producer as well as consumer of meaning" (cited in Hoover, Introduction, xxxvi).[22] As soon as the reader "participates actively in the creation of meaning" or becomes the very "producer" of meaning, meaning is no longer identifiable with the author's intention, unless (as we saw in the case of Hejinian), we count the reader herself as author. The refusal of intention is already apparent, moreover, in Bernstein's fusion of

response with interpretation, for when interpretation becomes a matter of our response, the intended meaning is no longer necessary to our "interpretation."

The Nortonized description of Bernstein and of language writing in general is, in fact, quite accurately borne out in Steve McCaffery's *North of Intention*, which cites the following poetic text by Bernstein as an example of "primary, non-prescriptive play. . .offering itself as a highly volatile circulation of signifiers":

> my high
> mallorca
> tailored
> sitten (s)ought sunk
> ogled a blond
> (pilaf)
> ( )unched
> th. . . b. . .rb. . .n th. . .mb. . . l . . .n. . .
> mAgiC
> "moon" and "stars" and lentil
> agaze[23]

The volatility of the text – here the very means by which its signifiers circulate – consists entirely in its capacity to be imaginatively altered by the reader. Like Hejinian's *Writing Is an Aid to Memory*, Bernstein's *Disfrutes* is supposed to solicit the reader to construct the text, which in this case means supplying not suffixes or prefixes or roots of words, but linguistic material of the most "literal" kind, individual letters. We might produce, *Wheel-of-Fortune*-style, a "p" or "l" or "m" or "b" or "h" to complete the partial word in the seventh line, and if we replace the ellipses in line eight with the right sequence of vowels, the string of meaningless consonants becomes a phrase, if not exactly a familiar one: "the bourbon thumbelina." According to McCaffery, this engagement on the part of the reader means that the "semantics" of Bernstein's text has been "returned to the order of production and use value as part of the historical step towards the re-politicization of language as an open field of truly human engagements." Consequently, McCaffery argues, the reader's active participation in "the order of production" means that the text has "no concern with. . .the dominant theory of communication that sees it as a transmission from producer to receiver along a semiotic axis of production–consumption, giver–recipient." And as a result, its "signs can never settle into messages from 'authors' and intentional language can hold no power" (*North of Intention*, 150). The reader no longer labors

alienatedly to fulfill the author's intention; rather, she and the author share the materials of language to produce the text in collaboration.

And this commitment to collaborative authorship goes beyond the sorts of hypothetical collaborations with anonymous readers that Bernstein and McCaffery imagine. In "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten focus on their actual collaborations with each other: "If there has been one premise of our group that approaches the status of a first principle, it has been. . .*the reciprocity of practice implied by a community of writers who read each other's work.*"[24] Indeed, for Silliman *et al.*, the collaboration that supposedly occurs when the hypothetical anonymous reader participates in the text is understood to *follow from* the actual collaborations that take place among writers in the language "community." And the point of both kinds of collaboration is to present an alternative to the "replaceable components of workshop reading circuits, summer writing programs, and appreciative reviews" ("Aesthetic Tendency," 271). But where McCaffery argues that these institutions are a problem because they only serve to reinforce the "intentional language" of mainstream poetry, Silliman *et al.* argue that their literary practice serves to rescue the category of intention from mainstream poetry's prescriptive tendencies. Because mainstream American "workshop" poetry is institutionally driven by normative standards of production and judgment, they argue, it is "precisely the opposite of explicit agency in the arts" while "aesthetic tendency – the politics of *intention* – as opposed to aesthetic arbitration, offers an entirely different way of seeing the poem" (271). In short we have what appears to be a contradiction between, on the one hand, the assertion by McCaffery that language poetry repudiates intention, and on the other, the assertion by Silliman *et al.* that it reclaims intention. But although the language writers I have been discussing here have sometimes engaged in theoretical disagreements with one another, this, I will argue, does not (or should not) count as one of them. For the category of intention refused by McCaffery is precisely not the one reclaimed by Silliman *et al.* What emerges here is the deeper commitment on the part of postmodernism in general to the very opposite of intention, a commitment that will turn out to be identical to the one that dominates the modernist critical tradition that postmodernism supposedly serves to correct.

For while the ostensible target of Silliman *et al.* in "Aesthetic Tendency" was the kind of "workshop" poetry its authors saw represented in the 1985 *Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*, this comparatively recent adversary turns out to be a belated incarnation of a much older one

(273). That is, Silliman *et al.* end their manifesto by announcing their work as "a poetry whose formal values may be the obverse of the autonomous, New Critical lyric" (274). As we have already seen in the examples of the language movement's "open text" and minimalism's "objects," one clear path to destroying the very idea of the autonomous artwork is to make what it is consist above all in what happens to the reader or beholder in her encounter with it. If we recall that Wimsatt and Beardsley's account of the autonomy of the work of art in "The Affective Fallacy" rests on denying the relevance of readers' responses to the work, one way in which language poetry qualifies itself as "the obverse of the autonomous, New Critical lyric" is in its embrace of all that the reader experiences and its simultaneous treatment of those experiences as part of the work itself. And if we further recall that Wimsatt and Beardsley's other account of the autonomy of the work of art, "The Intentional Fallacy," rests on denying the relevance of authorial intention, then the claim to embrace intention, especially to make readers full collaborators in the production of the text, would appear to overturn the theory underlying the New Critical lyric. But what exactly do the writers of "Aesthetic Tendency" mean by intention or (what they appear to think is synonymous with it) "explicit agency in the arts"?

One way to answer the question is to look at what Wimsatt and Beardsley meant by intention. Defined by them as "a design or plan in the author's mind," intention belongs to what they call "external evidence" for the meaning of a poem, by which they mean evidence that does not come from the poem itself.[25] Despite being "external," they explain, such evidence is in fact thoroughly "private or idiosyncratic; not a part of the work as a linguistic fact." "Internal evidence," by contrast – evidence that comes from "within" the poem itself – is "public" rather than "private" because it is "part of the work as a linguistic fact"; that is, it derives from rules of language that "belong to the public" ("The Intentional Fallacy," 5). The examples Wimsatt and Beardsley give of the external evidence they seek to reject – "revelations (in journals, for example, or letters or reported conversations) about how or why the poet wrote the poem – to what lady, while sitting on what lawn, or at the death of what friend or brother" (10) do not, however, correspond at all uniformly to the idea that intention is "a design or plan in the author's mind." While the fact that a poem was addressed to a lady is likely to be relevant to the "design or plan" its author had in mind, it's hard to see how the same is as likely to be true of the lawn on which the poet sat. But among the items listed as the "external evidence" of "intention," the lawn

seems by far the most representative of what Wimsatt and Beardsley object to, particularly when they turn to their chief example of misguided intentionalist criticism, John Livingston Lowes's *Road to Xanadu* (1927). In it, they argue, Lowes treats the books Coleridge is known to have read as the basis for "clusters of associations, like hooked atoms, which were drawn into complex relation with other clusters in the deep well of Coleridge's memory, and which then coalesced and issued forth as poems" (11). In other words, Coleridge's readings become just like the lawn – or for that matter any place he might have been sitting or anything else he might have been looking at or hearing or thinking about or otherwise *noticing* while writing – in that they contribute to what Wimsatt and Beardsley call the "gross body of life, of sensory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some sense causes every poem" but which "can never be and need not be known in the verbal and hence intellectual composition which is the poem" (12). In short, everything that *counts* as intention for Wimsatt and Beardsley actually seems to have little to do with the author's intention and everything to do with his attention – that is, with what John Ashbery means when he describes his poetic "thought" as a matter of what he "noticed," and with what Hejinian means when she says that "the essential question [of the *open* text] concerns the writer's subject position" ("The Rejection of Closure," 42).

Susan Howe vividly illustrates what Hejinian means by "the writer's subject position," when she describes both the physical environment in which the American philosopher C. S. Peirce read and wrote, and the one in which she finds herself reading and writing in the course of making *Pierce-Arrow* (1999). She even includes minute details of the things that caught her attention, from what the air conditioning sounded like to what her photocopy card looked like (which she uses to reproduce the papers of Peirce that become the subject matter for her own meditations as well as images for the pages of her book):

> No one stays for long [in the microform room] because it's freezing and the noise from air-conditioning generators the university recently installed in a sub-basement immediately underneath resembles roaring or loud sobbing. . . The. . . room. . .has new microfilm readers with Xerox copiers attached. At the left of each viewing screen there is a thin slot for a copy card. Above each slot five singular electric letters spell H E L L O in red as if to confide affection. . .[26]

For Howe, such sights and sounds of place (much like the poems Ashbery "notices") are essential to the process through which writing takes form because they are essential to the formation of the writer. As

she explains in a 1989 interview, she thinks the works of any two writers are different not just because of the different formal aims those writers might have had, or even because she thinks their formal aims would have differed on the basis of who they were (in terms of gender, for example), but because of an even purer difference: "The difference between say Melville and Dickinson would be (apart from gender) that Melville is from one side of the Connecticut River, and she is from the other side. Trust place to form the voice."[27] Here, we begin to see the crucial distinction between the "politics of intention" the authors of "Aesthetic Tendency" claim to embrace and the politics of intention McCaffery celebrates them for having destroyed. For what the former mean by poetic "agency" turns out to be "a matter of subject position" *rather than* intention. Or to put this another way, the language poets are interested in an agency that is purely causal, for it requires no intention at all when poems are effects of what side of the river a poet lives on or what sounds she hears in the room where she writes.

And the same is true of the participatory reader/collaborator. After all, while the reader's encounter with the open text may well involve a wide range of deliberate choices and actions on her part, the text that supposedly results from this "active participation" does not require any such "intentions" at all to count as *produced* by her. Which is also to say that the "politics" of the open text (the effort to make readers equal participants in its construction) does not require any such authorial intentions either. For according to the principles of the open text, the poem will be no less the product of the reader's collaborative agency if she encounters it on a placard in a subway car and doesn't stop to think twice about it, than if she encounters it in her book and sets herself to studying it. And once we are committed to thinking that doing these things in the presence of the poem (or in the first case, simply *being* in its presence) is what makes the reader the "author" of the text in question, her agency is indistinguishable from what Wimsatt and Beardsley identify as the "gross body of life, of sensory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some sense causes every poem." As we have seen so far in the case of language poetry (and, by way of the analogy between reader and beholder, in "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror"), the work is imagined to consist of the effects the reader experiences in her encounter with the material presence of the words appearing on the page or issuing from the mouth of a speaker.[28] And as we will see in the final chapter of this book, from the perspective of the efforts to apply cognitive science to literature, efforts that I will argue are the most recent extension of this view, the reader herself starts to look

like the material cause of the effects she experiences, insofar as cognitive science will explain the ways in which her own *body* produces them. That is, when we are talking about the activity of the reader or poet that produces *these* effects, we are precisely not talking about the kind of agency required to produce, as McCaffery puts it, "messages from authors."

Indeed, McCaffery himself explicitly argues that language poetry's emphasis on the politics of productive agency (both writerly and readerly) can only mistakenly be described as a "politics of intention" if what one means by intention is "personal control over the production of meaning":

> . . .it might be argued that Language Writing forms part of a wider, social strategy of protest that would aim at *the politicization of direct experience*, developing reading as a "de-fetishized" autonomous possibility of sign production (i.e., writing inside reading). In this resonance it might be seen as giving human beings – historically deprived of the means of production – a personal control over the production of meaning. This argument is untenable on several grounds. (*North of Intention*, 27)

What McCaffery finds untenable is not the idea that language writing might "politicize direct experience" or that it might "give human beings" the "possibility of sign production." These he fully accepts: "the texts of Andrews, Bernstein, Coolidge, Watten cannot be consumed but only produced" (150). Rather, the untenable part of the argument consists in thinking that the "direct experience" he praises language poetry for providing could ever entail any "personal control over the production of meaning."

But insofar as "meaning" is the sort of thing that occurs in "messages from authors," the only agent who can plausibly control the *intention* of the message is the author herself. When Silliman *et al.* claim that they are offering "new possibilities of agency for the poet" ("Aesthetic Tendency," 274), however, the texts they imagine being produced through such agency consist precisely of effects that (unlike the poet's own intention) vary from person to person in ways that the poet herself *cannot* control: how, for example, the letters and words and lines will look, sound and feel not just to her various readers but even, from one reading to the next, to herself. The reader, in other words, like the players in Ashbery's telephone game, will inevitably experience a whole host of effects that could not have been intended by the author. For McCaffery and the "Aesthetic Tendency" writers alike, the idea that the text consists of these effects – is, in fact reconstituted every time it is read – is the basis for the idea that readers and poets are equal agents in the production of the poem.

At this point we can see that "production" serves as a corrective to the category of intention in a critique whose aims are declared to be both aesthetic and political. And the term serves the same function in Fredric Jameson's account of postmodernism, where reading the *nouveau roman* (like reading language poems) becomes a mode of "production" in just the sense imagined by McCaffery and the other language poets:

> . . .it is the linguistic focus of [Claude] Simon's "new novels" that uniquely – and for one long moment, the one in which we read these texts – renders reception (or consumption) indistinguishable from production . . .Is it possible, then, that the reading of so specialized and highly technical an elite literary artifact as *Les corps conducteurs* might offer a figure or *analogon* for nonalienated labor and for the Utopian experience of a radically different, alternate society? (*Postmodernism*, 146)

For Jameson, the answer to the last question turns out to be a pessimistic "no," while as we have already seen, for Hejinian, Silliman, Bernstein and McCaffery the answer is a celebratory "yes." But regardless of whether this vision of readerly production as "nonalienated labor" amounts to a utopian fantasy or a fully realizable literary practice, the commitment to that vision is for the language poets and Jameson alike an avant-gardist as well as a marxist position.[29] For the idea of intention that that vision serves to correct is understood by all of them as conservative with respect to both the aesthetic and political status quo in American culture (politically conservative, because it preserves a version of the notion of property – the poem belongs to the poet – and the division of labor – the poet writes, the reader reads – that goes along with that notion of property; and aesthetically conservative because it is insufficiently material and hence inadequately indeterminate).

But as we have already seen, Ashbery's critique of intention, which appears to have no political program at all, much less a marxist one, takes exactly the same route. Where the language poets and Jameson make meaning a matter of the reader's subject position by calling what she does "production," Ashbery makes it a matter of the poet's subject position by connecting it to the vicissitudes of his "attention." And as we will see in the final chapter of this book, the same tendency to erase (or disperse) intention will turn out to be true of a supposedly mainstream poet like Jorie Graham, whose aptly titled book *Materialism* explicitly identifies the materiality of objects in the world with modes of (intentionless) attention that in turn stand in for poetic agency. And it will be true as well of one of the leading critical champions of mainstream poetry, Helen Vendler, who attributes the distinctive qualities of poems she admires to what she calls

the poet's "*donnée*" – a pure version of authorial subject position, since it consists, for example, in the case of Graham, of the languages Graham grew up speaking (Italian and French in addition to English) and in the case of Rita Dove, of the poet's blackness.[30] And the purest version by far of this commitment to reading and writing by subject position occurs in literary theory's recent turn to popularized accounts of cognitive science (the work of Gerald Edelman, Antonio Damasio, George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson, for example), where poems become the material effects of neurological production.

What this book is about is thus a broad theoretical trajectory in twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetry. It begins with Gertrude Stein and Laura (Riding) Jackson, that is, with a modernism committed to the autonomy of the work of art, an autonomy that hinges entirely on the view that the artist's intention is central in creating the work, and it ends with a postmodernism committed to the indeterminacy and irrelevance of artistic intention and consequently, to the impossibility of the autonomy of the work of art. If there are any postmodernists *avant la lettre* in the literary history of this trajectory, they are not Stein or (Riding) Jackson; they are I. A. Richards, William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley. For while the hallmark of the New Criticism was certainly its commitment to the autonomy of the poem (this would be its modernism), it was simultaneously committed to the idea that the poem's meaning inheres in its rhythm, measure, and shape – what Ransom calls the "tissue of irrelevance" that separates poetry from prose and makes it unparaphrasable – and to the idea that authorial intention has nothing to do with meaning. Once meaning is imagined as a function of the experiential effects of a poem, it cannot be a function of intention, and for a critic like Richards, meaning itself drops out of the picture: the experience of the poem precisely undoes our interest in its meaning. These commitments lead Richards to argue that poems are different from prose because they appeal to our "interests" (rather than our intellect) in ways that go beyond our or the poet's control or even awareness (his version of "attention"), and thus communicate an experience rather than a meaning. Of course, from this perspective it's hard to tell the difference between a reader's receiving an experience and her producing it. As a result, the New Critical doctrines of the heresy of paraphrase and the fallacy of intention start to look indistinguishable from what Perloff and Hejinian describe as language poetry's commitments to the material form of the text and readerly participation in it. In short, the legacy of the New Criticism is not modernism's "autonomous lyric" but postmodernism's "open text."

I begin with Stein because her own career is organized by this very distinction, only in reverse order. That is, she herself begins with a model of composition that, following William James (and anticipating John Ashbery) she understands as structured by what she, like James, calls "habits of attention." The culmination of this project is *The Making of Americans*. But she goes on to reject this essentially phenomenological model in favor of one that, under the new influences of Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, she understands as essentially logical. What she describes as her breakthrough texts – *Tender Buttons*, for example, and the later *Lucy Church Amiably* – will neither register the experience of the author nor produce new experiences for the reader but will strive instead for a mathematical independence from experience as such; in fact, it's this independence that constitutes the breakthrough. This reading of Stein contradicts a prevailing critical view of her work, which sees her interest in the "liveliness" of words as a commitment to "the poetics of indeterminacy" (the main argument for her status as a postmodern precursor).

But as we will see in the second chapter, which explores Stein's logical turn in terms of what it entails for her theory of meaning, her commitment to the autonomous text is directly bound up with an account of language that insists that, like symbols in Whitehead and Russell's vision of a logically perfect language in the *Principia Mathematica*, words and their meanings stand in a relation of one-to-one correspondence. Indeed, this extraordinary mathematization of meaning is the precondition for the textual autonomy that Stein calls "entity." In the third chapter, we will see a further entailment of that precondition in the work of Laura (Riding) Jackson, who, turning Stein's one-to-one correspondence into what she calls her "one-word-one-meaning" theory, deploys it as the privileged – indeed the only possible – vehicle for the expression of authorial intention. We will thus see, in (Riding) Jackson's critique of her New Critical contemporaries I. A. Richards and William Empson, the clear shape of what both she and Stein seek to resist, namely the interest in the reader's response to the work. (Riding) Jackson, like Stein, locates the value of art in its autonomy (with respect to anyone's experience of it), and in its autonomy, the determinacy of its meaning. And she sees in the New Critics' general interest in poetic ambiguity a theory of language that, by emphasizing the material features of the text and their multiple effects, and thereby rejecting authorial intention, abandons the value of poetry by abandoning the conditions for textual autonomy. Indeed, for (Riding) Jackson, the New Critics abandon the conditions for meaning as such.

The fourth chapter charts some of the emergent technologies within modernist poetry that, unlike those of Stein and (Riding) Jackson, really do point in the direction of postmodernism. The major development, I argue – which I locate in Ezra Pound's early interest in Chinese translations but which takes its most explicit form in William Carlos Williams's poetic imperative, "no ideas but in things" and in Louis Zukofsky's "objectivists" program – involves a critique of metaphor, where metaphor's failure is its requirement that we understand one object in terms of its abstract resemblances to another, forcing us to lose our grip on everything that is proper to the chosen object. If the aim of poetry is to make vivid objects (and thereby, vivid experiences) for its readers, the solution offered by Williams and Zukofsky is to abandon metaphor for more literal (and, I will argue) literalist modes of representation. Indeed, the ultimate turn for both Williams and Zukofsky is to reject representation as such – for Williams this means turning ideas into things; for Zukofsky it means turning them into sounds. This modernist interest in objects becomes the postmodernist interest in materiality.

In the final chapter, we will see the logical culmination of this trajectory in recent efforts to apply cognitive science to understanding poetry. I. A. Richards's claim in "Science and Poetry" that all criticism has needed is a more sophisticated science to describe the physiological effects of poems on their readers has found its fulfillment in the work of cognitive theorists like Damasio and Lakoff and Johnson. When Damasio, for example, remarks that "concern with text and meaning hardly describes all that goes on in your mind," he is apparently making way for cognitive science to step in and describe what "concern with text and meaning" cannot.[31] But the consequences of this turn to cognitive science for poetry have been not to imagine science as a means of describing "all that goes on" apart from "text and meaning," but to imagine "all that goes on" as what constitutes meaning to begin with. And it's this effort to take "all that goes on" into account – to replace, as Ashbery might have put it, intention not only with attention but with everything that escapes attention, too – that serves as the common ground on which writers as different as Vendler and Graham on the one hand and Perloff and Hejinian on the other have, despite their differences, produced what has recently emerged as the primary project of twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetry: materializing the mind.

CHAPTER 1

Gertrude Stein for anyone

In *The Geographical History of America, or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind* (1937), Gertrude Stein describes the effect of flying over the United States and looking at the land from above, which she distinguishes from what happens when you "climb on the land":

> When you climb on the land high human nature knows because by remembering it has been a dangerous thing to go higher and higher on the land which is where human nature was but now in an aeroplane human nature is nothing remembering is nothing no matter how many have been killed from up there it is not anything that is a memory. . .
>
> And so the human mind is like not being in danger but being killed, there is no remembering, no there is no remembering and no forgetting because you have to remember to forget no there is none in any human mind.[1]

What does Stein mean by the "human mind" if it involves no remembering or forgetting (faculties most of us would tend to associate with nothing if not our minds)? The best way to make sense of this counter-intuitive definition is to look at what else Stein aligns with the "human mind" in opposition to what she calls "human nature." She adds to the distinction between climbing on the land and looking at it from above in another passage when she remarks that "the land is flat from on high." And the flatness of the land viewed from above – the flatness that goes with the non-remembering, non-forgetting human mind looking down from an airplane – is a feature she further associates with "master-pieces": "The human mind has neither identity nor time and when it sees anything has to look flat. That is what makes master-pieces makes a master-piece what it is, and when it is only that only no time or identity then it is that" (*Writings*, 450).

What the masterpiece and the human mind share, then, is the ability (or necessity) of looking at things "flat." Certainly the two-dimensionality – what we might call the "flatness" – of the canvases on which many visual

"master-pieces" have been painted has been one of the defining things about painting. That is, it has been the primary sign of painting's status as representation (as we saw in the previous chapter, what Michael Fried would call its pictoriality as opposed to its objecthood). It is important to note, however, that Stein's interest in the land viewed from above is not about the land itself, but about what she calls "geography," which she identifies not with water and mountains and the dangers they pose, but with "the straight lines on the map of the United States" (*Writings*, 392). The difference between "climbing on the ground" and seeing the land "flat" from above is, in other words, that the feeling of danger in the one requires having past experience with ("remembering") heights while the other requires no experience or memory at all but only the conceptual device of the map. Stein also endows the map with a certain conceptual integrity or "wholeness" of the kind that she associates with masterpieces: "the way one piece of it is not separated from any other" (392). The map, like the masterpiece, is not a function of someone's remembering or beholding (what Stein calls "identity") but something that "exists for and in itself" (what she calls "entity") (357). Thus her remarkable claim in the passage I cited at the outset – "And so the human mind is like not being in danger but being killed" – starts to make perfect sense, insofar as everything she associates with the human mind involves "killing" off the subject and thereby making its subjectivity irrelevant. In this respect, the geography of *The Geographical History of America* is to the land itself exactly what art is to objects in Fried's "Art and Objecthood." The one is only what it is on behalf of some beholder while the other is what it is independent of any beholder.

The rest of this chapter will set the stage for Stein's critique of the relationship between the "human mind" and "human nature" – namely, her argument that "there is no relation" – which serves above all as a means of denying any relation between art and subjectivity (*Writings*, 376). In the next chapter I will focus on Stein's effort to apply that critique to poetry and to the structures of meaning as such, but I begin with her early prose because that is where Stein herself locates a major turning point in her thinking about the general project of literary representation. The turning point involves her discovery that the stylistic device of repetition that she uses to document her own "hearing and seeing what every one is telling," and thereby create a similar experience of hearing and seeing for her readers, produces texts whose value as literary representations has, it turns out, nothing to do with either her experience or that of her readers but functions rather within a more general problematic

of "wholeness." As we will go on to see in chapter 3, Stein's concept of wholeness is a version of the more general conception of the autonomy of the text that was emerging around the same time in the professionalized discourse of literary criticism, specifically in the New Criticism. In that context, Stein's insistence on the conditions required for a text to be a "whole" become legible as a direct response to the idea that what makes poetic language special is its actual effect on the reader.

In Stein's view what counts as a whole – whether it be a nation or a text (or a map or a masterpiece) – entails both the ontological question of what makes it whole and the epistemological question of how we know it to be whole.[2] Both are central to her lifelong project of representing the whole in and as writing. This chapter examines Stein's retrospective analysis of her own work and her reconception of the problem of modeling the whole, which she frames as a movement from what she understands as a phenomenological model of composition to a logical one. And her aim in abandoning the one for the other is precisely to preserve the value of wholeness in her work. In accounts Stein gives in her lectures and essays of the mid-1930s about this shift in her prose writing, two texts in particular – *The Making of Americans* (1925, completed *circa* 1908) and *Lucy Church Amiably* (1930) – mark important stages in her theorization of the problem over the span of her career.[3] I will be examining Stein's ideas of wholeness not only as they change over the course of her writing, but also as they shift among several contexts – literary as well as philosophical and mathematical. For Stein these categories were not distinct; the grammatical question of what counts as a completed sentence is as central to her effort to define wholeness as the mathematical question of what it means to count.

The rationale for the tremendous shift from the phenomenological to the logical in Stein's conception of her own literary practice begins to take shape in the differences that separate *The Making of Americans,* with its built-in theory of composition, from her later redescription of that theory in "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans," one of the *Lectures in America*.[4] This transition between Stein's earlier and later periods has always been read in terms of the relationship between language and experience, a relationship which, even when critics construct it as non-referential or "anti-representational," nevertheless depends upon experience being either the source or aim of Stein's literary experimentation. The postmodern idea so often attached to Stein's most opaque literary styles of the later period – that the reader is meant to confront the words apart from their associative meanings, in something like their "pure

materiality" – suggests that the aim of such a style is above all to offer unmediated *experience* of the language. I argue, however, that when Stein abandons her early experience-derived model of representation, her aim is not to improve her representation of experience, but rather to construct the logical conditions of its possibility. Here it may sound as though I am willfully ignoring the fact that experience retains a certain teleological status in this reformulation of Stein's project, but I would insist that seeking the logical conditions of possibility for experience by no means entails seeking the experience those conditions make possible. Moreover, even in the early works like *Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans*, which Stein herself describes as attempts to reproduce the experience of knowing someone whole, the representation of experience is largely incidental to the aim of representing the whole, and it is the latter project which I argue is central to Stein's overall conception of her literary practice.

"I WANT READERS SO STRANGERS MUST DO IT"

The Making of Americans gives a "history," roughly chronological, roughly confined to two generations, of an American family. The novel narrates certain things that happen to its characters – the courtship and marriage of Julia Dehning and Alfred Hersland, for example, which brings together the Dehnings and the Herslands, the two main branches of the novel's family; the births of children; the coming and going of governesses and seamstresses and other hired persons; the making and losing of money; illnesses and of course deaths – but these events in the family history are not what drives the novel toward its conclusion. Rather, the projected end of the novel is its "history of every one," an end repeatedly announced in variations on the sentence "sometime then there will be a history of every one":

> Each one has in him his own history inside him, it is in him in his own repeating, in his way of having repeating come out from him, every one then has the history in him, sometime then there will be a history of every one; each one has in her own history inside her, it is in her in her own repeating in her way of having repeating come out from her, every one then has the history in her, sometime then there will be a history of every one. . .[5]

The many passages like this serve to register the novel's progress toward the whole. I say "progress" not only to take up the terms of the novel's subtitle – "Being the History of a Family's Progress" – but also to note the progression inherent in Stein's use of repetition, where repeated

descriptions accumulate toward a recognizable whole, whether it be an individual person or the whole of everyone.[6]

A set of descriptive epithets revolves around each character in the novel such that variants of the set get repeated wherever that character is called to appear. For example, early in the novel Fanny Hissen (later Hersland) is said to have a "natural way of being" that involves the "feeling of being part of" the "rich living" of Eastern upper middle-class society (*The Making of Americans*, 77). These terms undergo a number of permutations and additions, so that Fanny has at one moment the "feeling of being part of the rich right being that was natural to her" (133), or at another, the "rich way that was the natural way of being to her feeling" (156), or at yet another, the "feeling of being always a right part of right rich ordinary being" (252). Once Fanny marries and moves west, the novel explains, "she was to herself cut off from Bridgepoint living, from eastern travelling, from southern feeling," but "she was not to herself cut off from rich living" (251). Again, the repetition varies: "Always she was cut off from eastern living, she never was to herself cut off from ordinary right rich being" (252).

These repetitions perform a function much like character development in the novel, except that character itself does not develop in any transformational sense, but rather the "whole" of the character emerges through successive repetitions: "Many things come out of each one and as one listens to them listens to all the repeating in them, always this comes to be clear about them, the history of them of the bottom nature in them, the nature or natures mixed up in them to make the whole of them in anyway it mixes up in them" (183). In the example of Fanny, then, the repetitions of her "nature" (her "feeling of being part of. . .rich right being") come to "make the whole" of her to anyone who "listens to them." But the character that emerges belies any notion of development, for it is marked above all by its fixity. While Fanny's repetitions vary, her "nature" stays the same; she simply becomes gradually more recognizable as one who maintains her "feeling of rich living" against various forms of resistance. Moreover, the character who emerges whole through repetition does so *for* someone, which is to say that the whole is contingent upon someone's recognition, someone who "listens." Stein's theory of how repetitions gradually make the whole of a person recognizable to someone essentially amounts to a theory of knowledge based on experience. The theory encompasses not only how one arrives at knowledge and what form that knowledge takes, but even more important, what relationship exists between the knowledge in its final form and the process by which it is attained.

But if the point of attending to all the repeating that comes out of a person is to know the whole of the person, and the whole of a person includes everything, then what constitutes everything? The following passage suggests that as a means of including everything the idea of the whole of a person is related to but separate from the idea of a "kind" of person: "Later in [a man's] living when it comes to be inside him that it all settles down inside him and he begins repeating in him the whole thing he is then it is then easy to begin to know him, any one who stays with him then can learn to know the kind of man he is then" (138–39). Both the "whole thing [a man] is" and "the kind of man he is" are, in this passage, things one comes to know about the man through his repeating, but I want to emphasize that the "whole" of the man and what "kind" he is are not synonymous, even though they both represent versions of all-inclusiveness. That the man only "begins repeating. . . the whole thing he is" when "all" has "settle[d] down inside" suggests that the "whole thing" is an aggregate composed of "all" the "settled" character of the man, and thus, is all-inclusive. The "kind of man he is," by contrast, suggests a general category, abstracted from the aggregate "whole thing"; yet in its way, the "kind" is all-inclusive as well, to the extent that it represents not just the particular man but also all those who are of his "kind."

This distinction between inclusion by abstraction and inclusion by accretion brings the idea of "kind" into a similar relation to the idea of a person's "history":

> Repeating then is always coming out of every one, always in the repeating of every one and coming out of them there is a little changing. There is always then repeating in all the millions of each kind of men and women, there is repeating then in all of them of each kind of men and women, there is repeating then in all of them of each kind of them but in every one of each kind of them the repeating is a little changing. Each one has in him his own history inside him, it is in him in his own repeating. . . (191)

Both one's "kind" and one's "own history" come to be known through one's repeating, but they are opposed to one another in their relation to that repeating. For it is the sameness abstracted from repetition that defines one's kind, while it is the difference among the repetitions – the way in which "the repeating is a little changing" – that defines one's history. In other words, making a kind requires the collapse of all repeating into a unifying generalization, whereas making a history, insofar as it displays the variation among repetitions, entails preserving the differences among repetitions in their succession. Thus, in relation to

kind, history fulfills the function of a "whole thing" according to the terms of the passage I cited previously: it forms by accretion to include the sum total of all the repeating that "comes out" of a person.

According to Stein, repetition constitutes a necessary condition (though not sufficient, as I will show) for making a whole, whether it be the aggregate history of a person, or the abstracted kind of person. A person's history is whole in that it includes all the person's repeating, and a kind of person is whole in that it includes all those who belong to that kind. But while the kind does not preserve the succession of a person's repeating in the way that the history does, repeating is nevertheless the means by which one comes to know the kind and so is as necessary to the making of a kind as it is to the making of a history. It is never clear, however, that the history of a person in any way depends on the person belonging to a kind, and conversely, determining the person's kind does not appear to depend on there being a history (though it does depend on there being repeating). So the question remains, if *The Making of Americans* is aimed at producing a history of everyone, what is the relationship between history and kind such that the novel needs both to accomplish its end? Or to phrase the question more pointedly, if the idea of kind is not necessary to making a history of an individual person, how is it necessary to making a history of everyone?

The Making of Americans is so heavily invested in the idea of a history because history represents a means of capturing all the variations in a series of repetitions. Toward this end, then, a history of everyone would seem to involve thinking of persons – or rather, each of the histories that describe them – as repetitions of one another. Clearly the adequacy of such a history – its completeness or wholeness – would depend on its fidelity to variance. The sets of repetitions surrounding each of the novel's characters, as in the example I gave of Fanny Hersland's varying "feeling of rich living," constitute complete individual histories according to the novel's requirements that histories reproduce the variations in repeating. Thus it would seem that extending this adherence to repetition in such a way that all individual histories came to function as variant repetitions of one another would result in a complete history of everyone. Obviously such a history would be complete by the novel's standards since it would have to include everyone's repeating in all its variation; moreover, by virtue of that variation, which amounts to a set of unique characteristics that distinguish each person from all others, the history would also approach a certain adequacy in its account of the individual person. But

if the history of everyone is to produce all the repeating of everyone, it would seem to require the serial form that repeating inevitably takes. And everyone, by whom Stein means "every one who ever was or is or will be living" (284) suggests an infinite number of persons. A history devoted to all their repeating would thus be faced with producing an infinite number of repetitions, so that in the most general terms, the problem of making a history of everyone becomes the problem of making a list of infinity. It is here, in the context of this problem of listing infinity, that the idea of kind proves indispensable to the novel's historiography.

The variation among repetitions produces difference not just from one instance of repeating to the next, but also from one person to the next. At the same time, however, repetitions can only be thought of as such by virtue of their intrinsic likeness. For the novel's purposes, that intrinsic likeness finds its concise form in the idea of kind, but as the following passage suggests, variation is no less constitutive of a kind than likeness:

> Slowly every kind of one comes into ordered recognition. More and more then it is wonderful in living the subtle variations coming clear into ordered recognition, coming to make every one a part of some kind of them, some kind of men and women. Repeating then is in every one, every one then comes sometime to be clearer to some one, sometime there will be then an orderly history of every one who ever was or is or will be living. (284)

Clearly there can be no kind without the differences implied in "subtle variations," for what is the point of any kind, if not to bring unlike things into a relation of likeness? In the context of the novel, however, the purpose of a kind is not simply to construct a relation among different persons, but to construct an "ordered" relation. Insofar as "every one" becomes "a part of some kind," one function of a kind must be to group persons, and any grouping is in some respect an ordering. The passage above implies that the ordering performed by kinds follows a hierarchical logic. Because there are different kinds of persons, certain kinds must include some people but exclude others, and yet the statement that "every one" becomes "a part of some kind" suggests that "some kind" exists which includes everyone and excludes no one, a kind that encompasses all kinds. Or, as Stein announces it, "This is then a universal grouping" (344).

A "universal grouping" offers the technology for representing everyone, even if everyone includes an infinite number of persons. But *The Making of Americans* doesn't end with the advent of this technology. Its stated aim, after all, is not to produce a kind of everyone; it is to produce a history of everyone, and, as I have already shown, the novel's idea of a

history is quite a different thing from its idea of a kind. Nevertheless, the "history of every one" shares the kind's "orderly" quality ("sometime there will be then an orderly history"), which suggests that it does in some fashion incorporate the principle of abstraction by means of which persons can be ordered according to kind. The question is, how can the history of everyone incorporate any kind without losing variation? For although the idea of the kind is useful to a project of representing everyone insofar as it can represent with great economy a theoretically infinite number of variants, the very economy of the kind depends on the degree to which it elides variation. The novel's solution to this problem relies on the fact that the kind, in its abstraction from variation, derives from the very series of differences that it serves to erase.

As *The Making of Americans* nears its end, the projected history of everyone becomes a projected list of kinds of persons: "There is coming to be a list of kinds in men and women. There will be a list of them. This has been some description of a piece of a list of them. There will be a list of them" (910). By imagining kinds in the serial form of a list, Stein treats them like the repeating variants constitutive of a history. In other words, listing all the "kinds in men and women" is a way of returning them to their source in variation, effectively reinscribing the abstracting function of the kind within the accretive, serializing function of the history. The list of kinds still represents the potential for a truly all-inclusive abstract, the kind of kinds to which everyone would belong, but this kind of kinds would now have to derive from something like a history of kinds. In this way, the novel is able both to exploit the inclusive technology of abstraction to account for everyone and to maintain its commitment to the variation through which any recognition of identity in individual persons, whether of their sameness or difference, is made possible.

That the list of kinds is announced in the future tense, and the claim that all that has come before "has been some description of a piece of a list" means that the list is in progress; indeed, it never ceases to be in progress, even in the last sentence of the novel. Stein first mentions the list in progress in the final chapter, whose title, "History of a Family's Progress," repeats the subtitle of the novel. The title encapsulates the way in which the kind – i.e., the "family" – by assuming the serial form of a history, can itself make a history. The Dehnings and Herslands, in the course of their "family living," embody the kind, not just in the colloquial sense in which one can speak of one's family as one's "kind," but also in the novel's sense of an abstract category. Moreover, like the novel's

abstract kind, the family can assume a serial form. The family can be represented in terms of lineage, for instance, which is inevitably serial insofar as any given member of a family is someone's predecessor and another's successor, and Stein suggests a version of this kind of seriality when she remarks on the relative ages of people in a family: "Anyone in family living is younger than some other one in the family living, has been younger than some other one in the family living. Any one in a family living is older than some other one in the family living. Some in the family living have been older than any other one in the family living" (922). Here Stein implicitly positions members of a family in a successive relation ordered by age, a progression to the extent that any given family member stands in a determinate relation to the one who precedes and the one who follows. But Stein extends the "family's progress" even further, taking it beyond the family itself, or rather, she extends the family to include strangers who partake of its progress.

As important to Stein as the family's own seriality is the way in which it serves as the basis for someone else's recognition, or even more specifically, of someone else's "remembering." And remembering, by the novel's account in its final sentences, repeats the serial structure of the "family's progress," but such that the progress is no longer confined to the novel's family or, implicitly, to the novel itself:

> Every one in a family living having come to be dead ones some are remembering some such thing. Some being living not having come to be dead ones can be ones being in a family living. Some being living and having come to be old ones can come then to be dead ones. Some being living and being in a family living and coming then to be old ones can come then to be dead ones. Any one can be certain that some can remember such a thing. Any family living can be one being existing and some can remember something of some such thing. (925)

Even when a family member dies, indeed, even when "every one in a family living. . .come to be dead ones," remembering can still go on, but the crucial implication of these concluding sentences is not merely that remembering can go on, but that it can go on beyond any conclusion the novel can make. Someone – say, a reader, or to use Stein's term, a "stranger," for whom all of the novel's repeating might come into "ordered recognition," either abstracting into an all-inclusive kind or accumulating toward an "orderly history" – can always continue to remember the repeating, that is, to repeat the repeating. What is more, anyone, in doing his or her own repeating, can provide the memory for someone else's ordered recognition. An endless progression of strangers

would thus seem capable of carrying on the "history of a family's progress," which itself is endlessly in progress. So when Stein writes in the critically overquoted and underread opening of *The Making of Americans*' third chapter, "I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way that I can do it" (289), she means it, for finally it is by enlisting strangers as her successors that she secures the terms of possibility for her history of everyone and at the same time relieves herself of an impossible authorial obligation to complete that history.[7]

"EVERYTHING IS A HABIT"[8]

Twenty-seven years after ending *The Making of Americans*, Stein explains the novel's framework to her American audience and reiterates her claim to a compositional posterity for the novel. Once again the possibility of completing a history of everyone, or as Stein revises, a "description" of everyone, depends on a series of successors who will continue the project. In "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans" Stein derives its terms of possibility from her understanding of science and how science sets about "completely describing everything":

> When I was working with William James I completely learned one thing, that science is continuously busy with the complete description of something, with ultimately the complete description of anything with ultimately the complete description of everything. If this can really be done the complete description of everything then what else is there to do. We may well say nothing, but and this is the thing that makes everything continue to be anything, that after all what does happen is that as relatively few people spend all their time describing anything and they stop and so in the meantime as everything goes on somebody else can always commence and go on. And so description is really unending. When I began The Making of Americans I knew I really did know that a complete description was a possible thing, and certainly a complete description is a possible thing. But as it is a possible thing one can stop continuing to describe this everything. That is where philosophy comes in, it begins when one stops continuing describing everything. (*Writings*, 283–84)

With science, as long as "somebody else can always commence and go on," there will be no end to its "description"; likewise, with *The Making of Americans*, as long as somebody else can commence and go on, there will be no end to its description. But aside from Stein's claims to the possibility of an unending description beyond the novel's covers, the novel itself does reach a finish. Which raises a question: what determines the novel's stopping point? Or rather, since the answer to that question is contingent

upon the answer to another: what is the finished novel's status in relation to its projected aim of a "complete description"?

An answer to the second question is explicit in a passage I cited earlier from the novel, where Stein announces the list of kinds of persons. Her assertion that "this has been some description of a piece of a list" comes so close to the end of the novel that not only must the finished novel not complete the whole list, as I have already remarked, but the novel itself constitutes "a piece," that is, a part of the imagined whole. The novel is a special kind of part, however, one intended to approximate the whole. The answer to the first question of what determines the novel's stopping point has everything to do, then, with the novel being an actual piece of an ideal (and necessarily much longer) list. Which is to say that the boundaries of any part that serves as an approximation to a whole are finally a matter of choice, and indeed, in her lecture Stein portrays her decision to end the novel as a purely arbitrary one: "I went on and on and then one day after I had written a thousand pages, this was in 1908 I just did not go on any longer" (278). But of course, when it comes to choosing an approximation, more is better. Whenever Stein mentions the novel – not only here, but in other explanatory essays and lectures – she emphasizes just how much of *The Making of Americans* there is, usually by referring to its thousand pages and to the "going on and on" that they required. Whatever the length of the partial list in relation to the whole list, its adequacy as an approximation of the whole still depends on its amounting to *enough* of the list: "If only I could go on long enough," Stein speculates, and again, "if I went on and on and on enough I could describe every individual human being. . . I did proceed to do as much as I could" (275). Which returns me to a somewhat different version of my first question: how much is enough, and how do you know when you have enough?

It is, Stein suggests, a question for philosophy: "That is where philosophy comes in, it begins when one stops continuing describing everything" (284). We can imagine that for *The Making of Americans* philosophy must come in at the point of "stopping describing everything," because where the novel ends – at the moment of projecting its need for others who can continue the description it has discontinued – marks the boundary between the novel's actual completion and its history's possible completion. So it is possibility that comes in at the end, and with it, philosophy, for in a sense only philosophy can account for possibility. Or rather, only philosophy can account for the discrepancy between the repeating that adds up to the completed novel and the repeating it would take to

complete the history of everyone, that is, between what counts as enough to approximate the whole and the whole itself.

In the novel, as in science, the accumulation of descriptions functions in the service of knowledge, which is simply to say that knowledge is the end of description: knowing something is what allows you to stop describing it. There is, in other words, no difference finally between describing everything to have the whole of everything and describing everything in order to know it. In the novel's terms, then, you come to have the whole, whether it be the history of one person or of everyone, when you come to know the whole. And apparently for Stein knowing the possibility of the whole is as good as knowing the whole. The approximation of the whole comes to suffice for the whole in the sense that it establishes the possibility of the whole. But as soon as the approximation suffices for the whole, albeit only provisionally, the scientific methodology by which the novel had approached that approximation (that is, the methodology of describing everything) fails to account for the adequacy of the approximation. At that moment the novel must replace its empirical methodology with a speculative one: "That is where philosophy comes in."

But the inevitable inaccuracy in approximation arises not so much out of the degree to which deciding how much is enough becomes a matter of speculation, but rather out of the fact that with respect to knowing the whole of something, a discrepancy always exists between any selection of the parts – even one including all the parts – and the whole of which it is constitutive. *The Making of Americans* itself underlines this discrepancy when it presents something of an exception among kinds of persons, the kind whose repeating never amounts to a whole:

> Sometimes I know and hear and feel all the repeating in some one, all the repeating that is the whole of some one but it always comes as pieces to me, it is never there to make a whole one to me. Some people have it in them to be in pieces in repeating the whole of them, such of them almost come never to be a whole one to me, some come almost all their living in repeating to be a succession not a whole inside me . . .There are very many of them and this is now a little description of the nature in this kind of them, this is now a little description of learning to know them to make of them a complete one. (*The Making of Americans*, 311)

Here the apparent exception proves the rule, for repetition in and of itself can really only ever be "a succession not a whole one" due to the basic non-identity between a given person's repeating (or, I should add, a novel's repeating) and the knowledge someone comes to have from it.

In part this discrepancy serves to make the point I mentioned earlier in passing, that insofar as the whole is Stein's way of figuring a completed knowledge, repeating, however necessary, is not a sufficient condition for it. Repeating, moreover, is really a way of figuring experience – after all repeating is only repeating insofar as it happens for someone who "listens" – but the fact that repeating entails experience does not mean that it entails knowledge. The novel's composition nevertheless is predicated on the idea that experience makes knowledge, that repeating makes a whole, and its implicit account of how repeating makes a whole – or, to use the terms from the passage above, how "learning to know" the "pieces" of someone comes "to make of them a complete one" – is based on a specific phenomenology.

In the passage I cited at the beginning of this section, the point Stein makes about science wanting to describe everything derives from the commonplace that science is a method for obtaining knowledge. Stein's invocation of William James at that moment is particularly significant for how she explains the composition of *The Making of Americans* in her 1934 lecture, because the philosophy that comes in where description ends is James's psychology, or more precisely the cornerstone of that psychology: the phenomenology of habit. Stein's model for how repeating makes a whole is based on James's idea of the structure of habit. I want to stress, however, that by linking Stein's idea of repetition to James's idea of habit I am not just trying to exploit Stein's well-known affection for name-dropping. The novel itself depicts its most paradigmatic example of repetition as a version of habit. When Fanny's husband David Hersland comes "in his middle living" to be most "settled" in his "repeating," his repeating approaches a kind of limit or minimum of variation, or to put it another way, his repeating is at its most repetitive: "Repeating is always in every one, it settles in them in the beginning of their middle living to be a steady repetition with very little changing" (*The Making of Americans*, 245). And as the variation in Mr. Hersland's repeating is diminishing, Stein writes, "habits were beginning in him" (245). If habit is in fact something like the sign of repetition's sameness, it would seem to exist in the same relation to repeating as the idea of "nature" or character that I discussed earlier in the example of Fanny Hersland's repeating. For insofar as Fanny's character is what stays the same through all the variations in her repeating, character would seem to be little different from the "habits" that "were beginning" in Mr. Hersland when his repetition becomes most "steady."

Stein reinforces this idea in her lecture on *The Making of Americans* when she discusses her college psychology experiments, work that she claims formed a significant part of her "preparation" to write the novel. In her account of the laboratory work, Stein makes a direct correlation between character and habit, and in doing so uses a phrase taken from James's own textbook on psychology: "In these descriptions [the lab reports on the experiments] it will be readily observed that habits of attention are reflexes of the complete character of the individual" (*Writings*, 271–72). "Habits of attention" is James's phrase, and indeed, for both James and Stein, character comes down to habit.[9] "Attention" is a complicated term in this context, since, as we will see, it refers at once to a deliberate act of will that sets the process of habituation in motion, as well as an act that itself is imagined to be prompted by previously established "reflexes," which are anything but deliberate.

In *Psychology: Briefer Course* James begins his chapter on habit with an account of its foundations in neural functioning. In this account, James correlates the repetition synonymous with habit to structural limitations in the body's responsive mechanisms. Habits form under the conditions of what he calls "plasticity" in human organs, including the brain: "*Plasticity*. . .means the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once. Each relatively stable phase of equilibrium in such a structure is marked by what we may call a new set of habits."[10] In "yielding to an influence," an organ "discharges" its response along a neural "pathway." Each time the influence repeats, and the response is discharged anew, the same neural pathway further establishes itself. Habitual responses, according to James, simply follow the most established neural pathways. The significance of plasticity in the formation of habits has to do, then, as much with the idea that any given influence must be strong enough initially to force the organ to yield as with the capacity for yielding in the organ itself. Furthermore, the influence must repeat if the pathway is to become established enough for a habitual response (the organ does not "yield all at once"). When there have been enough repetitions – when they have reached a limit – the pathway enters its "relatively stable phase of equilibrium," which suggests that the force of discharge needed to modify the pathway tends to diminish the more the pathway settles into its phase of equilibrium. This equilibrium of habit would seem to consist in the relation between repetition and resistance, in that with each additional repetition, the resistance of the organ decreases, rendering the pathway ever more accommodating to the responsive discharge. Meanwhile, the more the

pathway establishes itself, the more it comes to function as part of the organ's constitutional resistance to new influences. Thus, "equilibrium" in James's account refers to the way in which habits "economize the expense of nervous and muscular energy" (*Psychology*, 128), since little energy is required for the habitual response to discharge itself along a path which offers no resistance.

According to James, the neural matter of the brain, while protected from all but the most violent external forces, nevertheless undergoes modifications by virtue of the same "law of habit" that shapes other organs' reflexive responses to outside forces. Plasticity works the same in the brain as in other organs, except that those forces strong enough to modify it come from within the body – even within the brain itself – rather than from outside: "the only impressions that can be made upon it are through the blood, on the one hand, and the sensory nerve-roots, on the other" (127). For James not only simple physical movements, such as "snuffling" or "putting one's hands in one's pockets" (127–28), but complex ones requiring higher orders of conscious thought, conform to the "law of habit in the nervous system": "The most complex habits are. . . nothing but *concatenated* discharges in the nerve-centres, due to the presence there of systems of reflex paths, so organized as to wake each other up successively. . .until a final impression inhibits the process and closes the chain" (128). So even actions involving multiple or elaborate responses can be performed with a minimal expense of energy as long as a habit-formed "system of reflex paths" exists for their discharge:

> One may state it abstractly thus: If an act require for its execution a chain, *A,B,C, D,E,F,G,* etc., of successive nervous events, then in the first performances of the action the conscious will must choose each of these events from a number of wrong alternatives. . . but habit soon brings it about that each event calls up its own appropriate successor without any alternative offering itself, and without any reference to the conscious will, until at last the whole chain, *A,B,C,D,E,F,G,* rattles itself off as soon as *A* occurs. (129)

James's "abstract" example describes the kinds of responses involved in *physical* movements, ranging from simple ones such as undressing to elaborate ones like playing a musical instrument, but it is also meant to account for those that might be thought of as purely mental, such as certain emotions, modes of reasoning, or aesthetic preferences. James portrays all habits – whether simple motor responses or complex thought processes – as the consequences of a particular physiological economy, but even as he turns his attention from the physiology of habit to its

phenomenology, the structure of that economy continues to reproduce itself in the relationship between knowledge and experience.

In James's abstract example of a complex habit, "conscious will" or "attention" gets eliminated by the process of habituation and so would seem to fall under one of the categories of energy (the "nervous" kind) which habit functions to conserve. But while the effort of conscious attention disappears through the economizing effects of habit, it also must be said to inaugurate the very processes by which it is eliminated. "In action grown habitual," James writes, "what instigates each new muscular contraction to take place in its appointed order is not a thought or a perception, but the *sensation occasioned by the muscular contraction just finished*" (130). When the series of actions making up a potential habit is being learned, however, each sensation instigating a muscular contraction "becomes the object of a separate act of attention by the mind" (130–31). Learning something, in other words, requires both an initial act of attention, that is, a sufficient burst of nervous energy to overcome the brain's resistance, and enough repetition to establish pathways for the new knowledge. But as soon as that knowledge submits to habit, it sets, becomes that which resists rather than accommodates the effort of attention required to learn. Thus for James habit is intimately bound up with the ways in which the mind acquires knowledge, and in this respect, it has a double edge: any given habit is at once the evidence of learning and the termination of learning. Or to put this in James's terms, habit is at once the sign of our having paid attention and of our having ceased to pay attention.

This duality provides James with the grounds for an ethical imperative. On the one hand, the economizing effects of habit aid the development of the mind: "The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers of mind will be set free for their own proper work" (134). But on the other hand, because the "higher powers of the mind" are themselves subject to habituation, they are always at risk of losing the very energy and mobility of conscious attention that constitutes their "power." Indeed, "character," James suggests, is nothing other than the sum of one's habits – a habit writ large – and like the neural pathways that direct habitual response, it tends to "set like plaster, and. . .never soften again" (133). To keep the mind and the character it shapes from lapsing into a habit-induced torpor, James proposes an ethical solution, framed in financial terms: "The great thing, then, in all education is to *make our nervous system our*

ally instead of our enemy. It is to fund and capitalize our acquisitions, and live at ease upon the interest of the fund" (134). The idea seems to be that somehow the mental energy conserved by habit becomes available as "interest," a term which elsewhere in James's *Psychology* is synonymous with "attention" such that our "interests" are formed exactly as "habits of attention." But of course, for James "attention" is not some spontaneous by-product of habit; it requires cultivation through repeated effort of will. The mind cannot attend to everything at once but must choose among available alternatives. And if every act of attention represents a burst of nervous energy – the sort of energy needed to set the process of habituation in motion – then James's ethical imperative to cultivate attention translates into the imperative to choose one's habits. So character building for James is precisely habit forming.

The character that emerges from habit is not, however, identical to the process of its formation. James argues that "what is called our 'experience' is almost entirely determined by our habits of attention," (156) but since habit "depends on sensations not attended to" (131), much of what goes on in the unfolding of a habitual response escapes experience even as it can be said to constitute that experience. In other words, the subjective experience of habit would seem to be limited to the experience of successive moments of attention, each of which either triggers an existing habit or belongs to the process of forming a new one. Character, as one comes to know it, is an "aggregate thing" (180) or as I have already suggested, the sum of one's habits. "Experience," by contrast, occurs in successive states but is never the additive sum of those states. What differentiates character from experience – that is, the difference between accretion and succession – forms the basis for James's phenomenology of "the Self."

For James the Self has both subjective and objective aspects; it is at once an object of knowledge as well as the subject who knows. He summarizes the difference between the "Self as known," or the "Me," and the "Self as Knower," the "I," in terms of accretion versus succession: "This Me is an empirical aggregate of things objectively known. The *I* which knows them cannot itself be an aggregate. . . It is a *thought*, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but *appropriative* of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own" (191). James uses Kant's image of elastic balls in motion together to illustrate the way in which the I's successive apprehensions of the Me constitute an experience of unity or self-sameness but remain fundamentally distinct from one another:

> As Kant says, it is as if elastic balls were to have not only motion but knowledge of it, and a first ball were to transmit both its motion and its consciousness to a second, which took both up into *its* consciousness and passed them to a third, until the last ball held all that the other balls had held, and realized it as its own . . .It is impossible to discover any *verifiable* features in personal identity which this sketch does not contain, impossible to imagine how any transcendent principle of Unity (were such a principle there) could shape matters to any other result, or be known by any other fruit, than just this production of a stream of consciousness each successive part of which should know, and knowing, hug to itself and adopt, all those that went before, – thus standing as the *representative* of an entire past stream with which it is in no wise to be identified. (182–83)

By figuring the relationship between a present conscious state and those which have gone before as representational, that is, by emphasizing the way in which the immediate state represents the previous states but is not identical to them, James reproduces in his phenomenology of self-consciousness the same discrepancy that operates in the physiological economy of habit. The mind in its present state "is in no wise to be identified" with the aggregate of its successive states, despite their cumulative contribution to that present, and likewise a habit at any moment of its performance "is in no wise to be identified" with the successive moments of attention that formed it.

The fundamental non-identity between the "self as knower" and the "self as known" is for James no different from that which he says exists between any "cognitive" subject and object: "Our inner states succeed each other. They know themselves as they are; then of course, we say, they must know their own succession. But this philosophy is too crude; for between the mind's own changes *being* successive, and *knowing their own succession*, lies as broad a chasm as between the object and subject of any case of cognition in the world" (249). Of course it is difficult to map the terms "subject" and "object" onto either side of the "chasm" that "lies" between a habit and the experience that forms it, but I note the similarity, because while in James the way experience becomes a habit remains an implicit analogy for the way a subject knows an object, the terms of that analogy exist in a deeper functional relation in Stein's *The Making of Americans*. There habit is a matter of recognition, or what we have seen her refer to in her later writing as "identity." Synonymous with character, it emerges through resemblances in a person's successive repeating, and repeating really only counts as such when someone listens to it and recognizes it as repeating. In this respect, the habits that are said to begin with Mr. Hersland's settled repeating, for example, signify the degree to

which his character has become knowledge to a subject who listened, the subject in this case being the novel's narrator. Backed by James's phenomenology of habit, the novel portrays repetition as constitutive of character, and in doing so establishes repetition as the experiential basis of knowledge.

"REMEMBERING IS REPETITION. . .THERE WAS NO REPETITION"

Stein, in her 1935 lecture account of *The Making of Americans*, notes that she was able to write persons as the kinds she found them to be ("types of people I could put down"), and clearly from the novel's repetitious style, she was able to write each character's "repeating." She encountered difficulty, however, wherever she tried to depict the whole person in the instant of being known: "the whole human being felt at one and the same time, in other words while in the act of feeling that person was very difficult to put into words" (*Writings*, 276). As Stein explains it, this difficulty is a function of the discrepancy between experience as it accumulates and the knowledge that comes of it:

> When I was up against the difficulty of putting down the complete conception that I had of an individual, the complete rhythm of a personality that I had gradually acquired by listening seeing feeling and experience, I was faced by the trouble that I had acquired all this knowledge gradually but when I had it I had it completely at one time. Now that may never have been a trouble to you but it was a terrible trouble to me. And a great deal of The Making of Americans was a struggle to do this thing, to make a whole present of something that it had taken a great deal of time to find out . . . (277–78)

"The complete rhythm of a personality" is a version of the variation in repetition which the novel so insistently commits itself to representing. But as soon as the "complete rhythm of a personality" becomes a "complete conception. . .of an individual," that is, becomes whole knowledge, Stein suggests, that knowledge must be understood as belonging to a different order entirely than the cumulative experience from which it derives. In this respect, Stein is simply reformulating the same discrepancy between experience and knowledge that arises in the novel's example of people whose repeating sometimes doesn't make a whole. But in this much later account of that discrepancy, Stein calls attention to the way in which experience is inextricable from the successive – or rather, by virtue of its accumulation – progressive, form it takes. In other words, experience is accretive, each successive moment building upon what has come

before. Since experience takes the form of repetition in *The Making of Americans*, the novel's very structure is bound up with the past.

This would hardly seem to be a problem for a work whose stated aim is historiographic and whose conclusion invokes memory as the means to its accomplishment. But by 1934–35, when Stein lectures in America, the passage from "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans" in which she remarks upon the discrepancy between the accumulation of experience and the immediate wholeness of knowledge can only be read as a preliminary articulation of her eventual renunciation of memory (and the experience it entails) in favor of what she will call the "present immediacy" of "knowing anything." In a lecture delivered at Choate the same year, Stein rearticulates that discrepancy precisely in terms of memory versus immediacy:

> In *The Making of Americans*. . .I gradually and slowly found out that there were two things I had to think about; the fact that knowledge is acquired, so to speak, by memory; but that when you know anything, memory doesn't come in. At any moment that you are conscious of knowing anything, memory plays no part. When any of you feels anybody else, memory doesn't come into it. You have the sense of the immediate.[11]

Stein goes on to claim that the novel's project of a complete description of everyone had been aimed at achieving this "sense of the immediate": "I had an idea that I could get a sense of immediacy if I made a description of every kind of human being that existed, the rules for resemblances and all the other things" (*How Writing is Written*, 156). What had been called "variation" in "repeating" in the novel is now referred to as "resemblances," which, Stein claims, are finally "a matter of memory": "Then I found this contradiction: that the resemblances were a matter of memory. There were two prime elements involved, the element of memory and the other of immediacy . . .The element of memory was a perfectly feasible thing, so then I gave it up" (156–57). If resemblances are a matter of memory, then Stein's claim that "memory is a perfectly feasible thing" is not far removed from her claim in "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans" for how much easier it is to represent "types of people" than "the whole human being felt at one and the same time." This is because "types of people," determined as they are by "resemblances," are "a matter of memory," while the "whole human being" is a matter of "present immediacy."[12]

It is in her "Portraits and Repetition" lecture that Stein most fully articulates her commitment to "present immediacy." The account she

gives there of *The Making of Americans* rids the novel of any connection whatever to remembering. And given that remembering is inextricable from repetition, Stein follows the logical extension of her revision, claiming that in *The Making of Americans* "there was no repetition" (*Writings*, 289). Instead, she says,

> I was making a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was until I had not many things but one thing . . .And I did a great many times, say it, that somebody was something, each time there was a difference just a difference enough so that it could go on and be a present something. . . .You see that in order to do this there must be no remembering, remembering is repetition . . . (294–95)

The point of a "continuous succession" with no "remembering" and hence, with no "repetition," is to secure for each moment in that succession its "present immediacy." Given Stein's deep interest in "present immediacy," it would seem that by getting rid of repetition, she means to remove knowledge from any necessary relation to the past. But even in this revised model of composition, the idea of "continuously" making a "statement" "until" it becomes "not many things but one thing" still involves the accumulation of "many things," and hence, a certain interdependence among those "things" in their "succession," even if in the end the "one thing" remains fundamentally distinct from the "many." In other words, the "one thing" of which Stein speaks here is little different from the idea of the "kind" of person that forms such a key part of the novel's built-in theory of composition. Like the "one thing," the kind emerges out of what can only be called a "succession" of descriptive statements, so that while the kind is fundamentally non-identical to that series of statements, it nevertheless depends on there having been such a series.

This apparent inevitability of a relation to the past extends to the novel's Jamesian concept of habit as well. For even as, by James's account, a given action is said to be a habit to the extent that it escapes our attention in the performance of it, the habit can only arise in the first place through a cumulative succession of attentive moments. Stein may be able to bypass remembering by rejecting repetition, but as long as she retains the serial form of repetition as a part of her concept of what makes a whole – which she does wherever the whole is preceded by a cumulative, experiential succession – she remains unable to bypass the past. Only when Stein dispenses with experience itself as the defining feature of knowledge does she arrive at a model of wholes that does not require

any relation to the past. That is to say, Stein finally turns from a phenomenological model of wholes to a logical one, where the whole, instead of being attained through the cumulative experience of its parts, exists in an abstract form prior to and independent of any experience of its parts.

For Stein the desire to bypass the past is indistinguishable from the desire for "present immediacy," and that desire is no doubt at work in the arguments she makes to discredit the literary practices of the nineteenth century in "What Is English Literature." In fact, I will argue, the very logical technology Stein develops for abandoning experience is what leads her to dismiss the nineteenth century as obsolete in "What Is English Literature." In that lecture, she figures nineteenth-century literary practices in terms of a cumulative progression toward a whole, a progression that can never achieve but only approximate the whole. In a remarkable moment from a different lecture delivered at Choate, Stein uses the quintessential American invention, the automobile, to illustrate the difference between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' approaches to making a whole: "The Twentieth Century conceived an automobile as a whole, so to speak, and then created it, built it up out of its parts. It was an entirely different point of view from the Nineteenth Century's. The Nineteenth Century would have seen the parts, and worked towards the automobile through them" (*How Writing Is Written*, 152–53). In this illustration, the twentieth century's prior formal conception of the car is a practical necessity for any actual building of a car, while in the nineteenth century, the inevitable outcome of building from the parts toward the whole without the prior formal conception of the whole is that the car does not get built.[13] This characterization of the nineteenth century makes it hard not to see *The Making of Americans* as a nineteenth-century novel by Stein's own standards. But it also isn't surprising that she would want retroactively to commit her earlier compositional models to the same formal principles as her later ones. Hence the claim that "there was no repetition" in *The Making of Americans*.

Yet if the ideal whole of *The Making of Americans* – its projected "history of every one" – is marked above all by a commitment to the absolute integrity of difference among its parts, there is a way in which Stein's revisionist account of the novel remains true to the project's original aims. In effect, what Stein draws from *The Making of Americans* for her later compositional model is an ideal of the abstract whole that is closely related to the novel's concept of a kind. Only instead of deriving

from a set of descriptions collected through experience, the abstract whole precedes experience; indeed, the abstract constitutes the formal condition under which all variety of experience becomes possible. In structural terms, Stein puts the whole before the parts, and the advantage of this reversal becomes obvious in the case of wholes whose parts are infinite in number (the whole of "every one," for example), since any attempt to arrive at the whole through the parts can only result in an approximation of the whole. The relation between the whole conceived of before the parts and the whole arrived at through the parts is, ultimately, that of a solution to a problem of approximation, a solution that Stein claims to have discovered in her 1930 novel *Lucy Church Amiably*.

"AS EXACT AS MATHEMATICS," OR WRITING THAT COUNTS

In keeping with her desire to avoid approximation, Stein claims in "How Writing Is Written" that she has strived throughout her work to achieve a certain precision:

> I wanted as far as possible to make it exact, as exact as mathematics; that is to say, for example, if one and one make two, I wanted to get words to have as much exactness as that. When I put them down they were to have this quality. The whole history of my work, from *The Making of Americans*, has been a history of that. I made a great many discoveries, but the thing that I was always trying to do was this thing. (*How Writing is Written*, 157)

The history of Stein's work that emerges from her American lectures, the history in which she moves from a model of the whole based on experiential accretion to a model of the whole based on formal abstraction, is a mathematical history in which the phenomenological problem of approximation is solved logically by means of a general form. Certainly *The Making of Americans* is something of an exercise in approximation. Translated into mathematical terms, the "history of every one" is based on the idea of adding up all the terms in an infinite series – "adding" because the term "every one" suggests a sum, the "history" being the series through which one arrives at that sum. If every individual were, say, a natural number, then the history as it unfolded would look like the series of natural numbers: 0 + 1 + 2 + 3. . . and so on to infinity. And "every one," apprehended in its whole and "present immediacy," would be the sum of that series (the sum is not identical to the series). But as long as the novel is committed to its project of listing, it can't obtain the whole sum of everyone because it can't complete the list. Rather, it must resign itself

to a partial sum, an approximation. The novel's own alternative to the sum is its idea of a kind, but because the kind is abstracted from the same infinite series that the history is supposed to represent, the kind's accuracy as a representation of the whole is still determined by the extent to which the series is enumerated. Mathematics solves the problem of approximation (and so does Stein) by means of something very like the idea of kind in *The Making of Americans*, except that it retains no ties to enumeration.

Representing infinity without recourse to enumeration becomes, in the mathematics of Stein's contemporaries Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, a matter of defining number itself on the basis of logic.[14] The project of the notorious *Principia Mathematica* is essentially one of conforming the strictly numerical branch of mathematics, arithmetic, to a logical system. At the heart of that project is a definition of number that dispenses with enumeration. Russell gives an accessible account of that definition in his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, where he describes the difference between knowing an infinite collection of things through enumeration and knowing it in principle. The distinction is that of defining the collection by "extension," i.e., by enumerating its members, versus defining it by "intension," i.e., "by a property common to all its members and peculiar to them." It is possible, Russell says, to know a great deal about a "class" without enumerating its members:

> That is enough to show that definition by extension is not *necessary* to knowledge about a class. But when we come to consider infinite classes, we find that enumeration is not even theoretically possible for beings who can only live for a finite time. We cannot enumerate all the natural numbers: they are 0, 1, 2, 3, *and so on*. At some point we must content ourselves with "and so on." . . .Thus our knowledge in regard to all collections can only be derived from a definition by intension.[15]

Any attempt to enumerate the members of an infinite collection only ever approximates the whole of the collection, which means, as Russell points out, that arriving at an infinite number through enumeration is "not even theoretically possible." The advantage of defining an infinite collection such as the natural numbers by intension is that the collection becomes representable as a class of such collections. And because "numbers themselves form an infinite collection," defining number by intension, Russell argues, is the only "way that infinite numbers may be possible" (*Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, 13).

Defining infinite numbers by intension is like Stein's idea in *The Making of Americans* of defining "every one" by kind, only Russell's

"kind" does not depend on any enumeration. Being able to define an infinite number without recourse to enumeration is the very principle on which the mathematics of calculus operates; indeed, calculus can be understood as a solution to the long-standing problem of infinitesimals – numbers related to infinities, but which are infinitely small rather than infinitely large. Infinitesimals are often represented in problems to be solved through approximation: e.g., how to calculate the rate of increase for a point moving along a curve. Suppose the curve is defined by a function of *x*. We then evaluate *x* as it traverses a given interval of distance *h*. The smaller the interval between *x* and *x*+*h*, the better the approximation of the rate of increase of *x*, such that, ideally, one would want to bring *h* infinitely closer to zero without actually reaching zero. One way to bring the interval infinitely closer to zero is to shrink it by partitioning it into infinitely smaller and smaller increments, thereby producing an infinite series, albeit diminishing rather than expanding. Representing the rate of increase across the infinitesimal interval requires approximating to the limit of that interval, which is to say it requires approximating to the sum of the interval's partitions.

Obviously, solving this problem by approximation poses the same difficulties that attend any effort to approach the limit of an infinite series through summation (that is, through enumeration): "The summation of a series approximates to a limit," Whitehead explains, "when the sum of any number of its terms, provided the number be large enough, is as nearly equal to the limit as you care to approach." Whitehead notes the inevitable imprecision of this method: "What is meant by *large enough*, and by *nearly equal*, and by *care to approach*?"[16] But with respect to the rate of increase problem, the validity of the solution depends on precisely what Whitehead lists as the sources of imprecision in the method of approximation. Put simply, if the sum of the infinite series of partitions actually were to reach zero, the solution would be invalid. According to Whitehead, the advance that calculus makes in approaching this problem is that it subscribes approximation itself to the logic of intension: "we use the notion that corresponding to *any* standard of approximation, *some* interval with such and such properties can be found" (*Introduction to Mathematics*, 175). Thus what would seem to be an impossibility, an interval infinitely near to zero, becomes a possibility once its approximation can be defined intensionally. The difference between defining approximation by extension and defining it by intension, Whitehead says, "is that we have grasped the importance of the variable" (175).

"Mathematics as a science commenced," Whitehead speculates, "when first someone, probably a Greek, proved propositions about *any* things or about *some* things, without specification of definite particular things" (7). The variable provides the technology for constructing such propositions; indeed, such propositions *are* variables. In propositions involving infinite collections, the great advantage of not having to specify "definite particular things" is that it relieves us of the need to enumerate the parts of those collections. Clearly, then, the variable offers a solution to the problems of representation that Stein faces in *The Making of Americans*, and the variable is exactly what she winds up with in her later compositional method. Stein arrives at that solution the same way mathematics does, by discovering the limits of enumeration, or, to use her term, "progression." Progression is at the heart of all prose narration for Stein, so when she discovers the limits of progression she also discovers the limits of a generic distinction. Stein's retrospective account of that discovery forms another chapter in the "history" of her work that emerges from the *Lectures in America*.

In the lecture entitled "Poetry and Grammar," Stein meditates upon elements of writing – nouns, verbs, sentences, paragraphs, punctuation – and attempts to arrive at a distinction between poetry and prose on the basis of her understanding of these elements. In searching for that generic distinction, she confesses a persistent worry: "Narrative is a problem to me. I worry about it a good deal these days and I will not write or lecture about it yet, because I am still too worried about it worried about knowing what it is and how it is and where it is and how it is and how it will be what it is" (*Writings*, 328). In fact, some weeks after the "Poetry and Grammar" lecture, Stein would give a series of four lectures on narration at the University of Chicago, and she would conclude that modern writing no longer had any need for narration as a form based on progression, or as Stein put it, the "progressive telling of things that were progressively happening."[17]

In both "Poetry and Grammar" and the lectures on narration given at the University of Chicago, Stein draws a formal distinction between the function of naming, which she provisionally aligns with poetry, and the function of registering movement from one point to another, which she aligns with prose. Poetry, Stein claims, is primarily dependent upon nouns to achieve its ends, while prose depends upon sentences and paragraphs. Basically, nouns name, and as for sentences and paragraphs, they create the sense of movement from one point to another if for no other reason than, to make a paragraph, one sentence must lead to the

next. Eventually, however, the poetry/prose distinction becomes subservient for Stein to the distinction between naming and rendering movement.

In the "Poetry and Grammar" lecture, Stein suggests that *Lucy Church Amiably* led her to see a basic difference between naming and movement: "I decided and Lucy Church Amiably had been an attempt to do it, I decided that if one completely replaced the noun by the thing in itself, it was eventually to be poetry and not prose which would have to deal with everything that was not movement in space" (*Writings*, 336).[18] At this point Stein clearly maintains a distinction between poetry and prose, but by locating that distinction at the boundary between the functions of naming and of registering movement, Stein is in fact delineating the very grounds on which she will ultimately relinquish the poetry/prose distinction. But even more importantly, Stein is delineating the grounds on which she will evacuate progression from narrative. Basically, progression proves to be a mere instance of the larger category of movement, and the function of naming is crucial to that discovery.

Throughout her mid-1930s lectures Stein characterizes her literary efforts as the search for a form that will allow for maximum variation, a search that involves relentless discarding of one literary property after another. For example, Stein takes the function of naming and explains how she created a literary form in which, through "replacing nouns with the thing itself," she could achieve a certain effect of names, or as she puts it, "mean names without naming them" (*Writings*, 330). Similarly, she takes the function of registering movement and explains how she tried to replicate, without recourse to sentences and paragraphs, an effect of movement that otherwise would have to be produced as progression by means of sentences and paragraphs. As a formal experiment that instantiates what Stein tried to do with both the function of naming and the function of registering movement, *Lucy Church Amiably* reveals the limits of progression and naming. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* Stein describes the novel as a kind of schoolbook: "she wanted. . .Lucy Church Amiably to look like a school book and to be bound in blue."[19] That it should be conceived as a school book is fitting, for the novel is both a grammar and a mathematics: it is about nouns that don't name and numbers that don't add up.

I have suggested that *Lucy Church Amiably* leads Stein to recognize the limits of progression as a characteristic of literary writing, but Stein makes this point quite clearly herself when she illustrates the project of *Lucy Church Amiably* in terms of counting: "The natural way to count is not that one and one make two but to go on counting by one and one as

chinamen do as anybody does as Spaniards do as my little aunts did. One and one and one and one and one. That is the natural way to go on counting" (*Writings*, 324). The difference between counting by "one and one" and counting by "one and one make two" is that the latter, which is equivalent to counting "one, two, three," depends upon a principle of progression, whereas the former does not. In counting "one, two, three," the operation of adding one is performed on each successive term in the series, which places each term in a fixed relationship to its predecessor. The succession of terms in counting "one, two, three" thereby constitutes a progression. Counting by "one and one" does not constitute a progression, however, since the counting of any successive "one" does not depend upon having counted a previous "one."

In *Lucy Church Amiably,* this structural difference between counting "one, two, three" and counting "one and one" gets reproduced thematically as an opposition between owning and renting. Stein associates owning with inheritance, where someone who inherits property comes to it through a highly determined relationship to his or her predecessor. But a renter simply comes to replace the predecessor without having any necessary relation to that predecessor. Thus for Stein the acquisition of property through ownership is based on a progressive model of inheritance, while renting is based on a non-progressive model of substitution, and in this respect, ownership is like counting "one, two, three," and renting is like counting "one and one."

The plot of *Lucy Church Amiably*, insofar as the novel has one, is that some people find a house they like and rent it: "Lucy Church rented a valuable house for what it was worth. She was prepared to indulge herself in the pleasure and did so. She was not able to take possession at once as it was at the time occupied by a lieutenant in the french navy who was not able to make other arrangements. . ."[20] What is important here is not just that Lucy Church "rent[s] a valuable house for what it [is] worth," but that she must wait for the French naval officer to leave before she can occupy the house. The word "leave," in all its verbal permutations – "leave," "leaves," "leaving," "left" – functions throughout *Lucy Church Amiably* as the pivot for a set of turns on the difference between literally leaving a place and leaving it to someone, that is, on the difference between renting and owning. The following passage demonstrates several of these turns: "Who knows the difference between once and twice and John Mary interchanges left to right. Interchanges. Very quickly interchanges might leave it to them he leaving with them with them in place of eight and forty two" (*Lucy Church Amiably*, 65–66).[21] "Left to right,"

"might leave it to them" and simply "leaving" by itself, along with other such phrases built around "leaving," recur so frequently in the novel that this relatively early passage becomes by the end merely one of many variations on the motif.

Of course it might seem eccentric to speak of the phrase "left to right" as a modulation of "leaving," since "left" merely signifies the direction or position of left relative to right and would seem to have nothing to do with "leaving." But "left to right" has everything to do with "leaving" to the extent that it suggests progression. The primary tension in the passage above springs from the opposition between "might leave it to them," with its allusion to ownership through inheritance, and "leaving" by itself, which serves the theme of renting. "Leaving" thus constitutes a counter-phrase to "might leave it to them," and represents the alternative to progression. The phrase "left to right," however, seems to work against the very idea of an alternative to progression by suggesting its potential ineluctability. Obviously "left to right" signifies one-directional movement, which Stein associates with progression, but moreover it represents both the way one is made to read the words on the printed page (left to right, progressively) and a way of seeing the passage of time itself as progressive: "Time, as you may or may not know," the *Lucy Church* narrator declares, "is known to be left and right" (38). In a novel aimed at privileging renting over owning, substitution over progression, reading and the left-to-right version of temporality would seem to constitute a formidable force on the side of progression. But in fact, instances of progression in *Lucy Church Amiably* generally come to function in the service of substitution, as the very first sentence of the passage on "leaving" demonstrates.

The sentence begins with a reference to counting of the "one, two, three" kind: "Who knows the difference between once and twice and John Mary interchanges left to right." But the syntactical ambiguity of this sentence works against the progression of counting "once and twice." Consider two possible readings of the sentence. One way to read it is as two independent clauses conjoined by an "and," where "who knows the difference between once and twice" is one clause, and "John Mary interchanges left to right" is the other. But in a different reading of the sentence, the "and" which had conjoined the two independent clauses in the first version can serve instead to conjoin two objects of the preposition "between," specifically, "once and twice" with "John Mary." In this case, the syntax yields a sentence where the main clause reads "the difference

between once and twice and John Mary interchanges left to right." Here, "difference," followed by the prepositional phrase "between once and twice and John Mary" becomes the subject of the verb "interchanges," and what gets interchanged are "left" and "right." This second version of the sentence is perfectly in keeping with Stein's project of varying "movement" beyond the limited directionality of progression: "the difference" between "once and twice" and "John Mary," or more generally, between a progressive model of counting and a single instance of naming, results in "interchanging left to right," that is, in undoing the "left to right" directionality of progression.

The syntactical ambiguity of "Who knows the difference between once and twice and John Mary interchanges left to right" hinges primarily on the preposition "between," the conjunction "and," and the verb "interchanges." Stein takes advantage of this capacity for ambiguity to illustrate the limits of progression, basing her entire project of rendering movement in prose on the mistakes one can make with parts of speech. As she explains in "Poetry and Grammar":

> Verbs can change to look like themselves or to look like something else, they are, so to speak on the move and adverbs move with them and each of them find themselves not at all annoying but very often very much mistaken . . .Then comes the thing that can of all things be most mistaken and they are prepositions. Prepositions live one long life being really being nothing but absolutely nothing but mistaken and that makes them irritating if you feel that way about mistakes but certainly something you can be continuously using and everlastingly enjoying. (*Writings*, 315)

Given the kinds of sentences one finds in *Lucy Church Amiably*, it isn't hard to see how, as long as one isn't irritated by mistakes, the pleasures to be had from them might very well be everlasting, for such mistakes produce the effect of unending oscillation among alternatives. In other words, the continual possibility of mistaking the past participle of "leaving" for the "left" in "left to right," for instance, or mistaking whether "John Mary" is an object of the preposition "between" or a subject of the verb "interchanges," creates the avenues for what Stein calls "movement" in prose, but it is a movement that is confined to what she would come to call the "present immediacy" of an instant rather than being something that takes place over an extended period of time.

In "Composition as Explanation," an essay Stein composed in 1926 after being invited to lecture at Oxford and Cambridge later the same year, she describes the temporality inherent in progression as a "continuous

present" which she differentiates explicitly from "beginning again and again," and implicitly from what she means by "present immediacy." And she identifies the "present immediacy" of "beginning again" with work she undertook directly in response to her critique of phenomenology following *The Making of Americans*. Indeed, as we have already seen, and as Stein herself explains in "Composition as Explanation," *The Making of Americans* is a work built around the progression of a "continuous present" rather than "beginning again":

> I did a book called *The Making of Americans* it is a long book about 1000 pages.
>
> Here again it was all so natural to me and more and more complicatedly a continuous present. A continuous present is a continuous present. I made almost a thousand pages of a continuous present.
>
> Continuous present is one thing and beginning again and again is another thing.[22]

Stein's early effort to make a "continuous present" in literature certainly counts as a version of the more general modernist project of "making it new" (to invoke Pound's famous imperative). But that version of modernity also became, for a few writers – like Stein and, as we will see in the third chapter, Laura (Riding) Jackson – a way of failing to meet not just the imperative of newness but what they saw as an even more fundamental ontological imperative for all art, its quality of final or absolute "existence."

Upon returning a decade later to lecture again at Oxford and Cambridge, Stein describes this absolute existence in "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them" precisely as an existence outside time: "It is another one of the curious difficulties a master-piece has that is to begin and end, because actually a master-piece does not do that it does not begin and end" (*Writings*, 359). And what makes the masterpiece a matter not of "beginning" and "ending" but of what she describes elsewhere (in "Composition as Explanation" and in her *Lectures in America*) as "beginning again and again" is the fact that it exists "as an end in itself":

> The manner and habits of Bible times or Greek or Chinese have nothing to do with ours today but the master-pieces exist just the same and they do not exist because of their identity, that is what anyone remembering then remembered then . . . they exist because they came to be as something that is an end in itself and in that respect is opposed to the business of living which is relation and necessity. (*Writings*, 358)

The work's ability to "exist just the same" independent of the historical contingencies ("relation and necessity") that constitute its contemporan-

eity are what make it, as we have already seen, an "entity" instead of a function of "identity" or, as Stein reiterates here, a product of remembering. Moreover, "remembering" and "identity" go along with "the business of living," a phrase that is central to the phenomenological foundations of *The Making of Americans*. Despite Stein's claim in "Plays" that "[t]he business of Art. . .is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present," the "business of Art" and the "business of living" are for her thoroughly opposed (*Writings*, 251). Or to put it another way, "liv[ing] in the complete actual present" has nothing to do with the "business of living" and everything to do with the "business of Art." Certainly "liv[ing] in the complete actual present" makes only tautological sense as a directive for "living," since no human can help but do so. But an art that "expresses" a "complete actual present" requires something altogether different from what a person does in living. Another way Stein has of putting this opposition is to insist that while masterpieces "begin" and "end" (by which she means that there is a process of creation required to bring them into existence, a process that necessarily has duration), they are themselves, *as* works of art, completely devoid of "beginning" and "ending," of any sense of lived duration. Art by this definition does exactly what Fried ascribes to modernist painting in "Art and Objecthood": it appears to us as if it "has no duration."[23] The "present immediacy" of the masterpiece is, in other words, a "present" whose presence is thoroughly atemporal. If art by this definition can never exactly be "new," by the same token, it can never be old, and never being old, it can never be understood to involve what anyone "remembers."

Stein exposes the limits of temporal duration or "progression" in *Lucy Church Amiably* by writing sentences in which instances of progression are overwhelmed by the forces of multilateral movement and "present immediacy" inherent in grammatical structures, but she makes clear in the "Poetry and Grammar" lecture that she associates *Lucy Church* not just with the effort to render movement, but also with the effort to "mean names without naming them," which, as we are about to see, involves above all a refusal of memory and history with respect to language. Stein claims that nouns – as opposed to verbs, prepositions, and other mistakable parts of speech – are primarily responsible for the function of naming in writing, which she says is one of the central aims of poetry. Stein finds much to dislike about nouns, however – primarily their tendency to be unmistakable: "Nouns never can make mistakes can never be

mistaken. . . Generally speaking, things once they are named the name does not go on doing anything to them and so why write in nouns" (*Writings*, 313). The only thing that nouns "do" is to "name," but the act of naming associated with the noun does not continue beyond the initial reference to the thing named. It is like the moment of attention that disappears in the formation of a habit, and all the subsequent uses of the noun are like the habit's mindless execution.

In "Poetry and Grammar," certain parts of speech associated with nouns but not themselves nouns are, by contrast, "varied and lively," in a way that absolves them of the overused, dead quality she so dislikes in nouns.[24] Pronouns, she claims, "represent some one but they are not its or his name. In not being his or its or her name they already have a greater possibility of being something than if they were as a noun the name of anything" (316). In any given context, the pronoun substitutes for a particular something named, but for Stein the pronoun's "possibility" resides in its variability, that is, in its capacity to substitute for *anything* named. The other part of speech Stein associates with variability is the article. Articles, she says, "are interesting because they do what a noun might do if a noun was not so unfortunately so completely unfortunately the name of something" (315). Articles, in other words, do not recirculate a prior reference the way that nouns do but simply indicate that a noun is coming. Moreover, nothing inherent in the article itself determines which particular noun follows it; any noun at all may appear. Hence, like pronouns, articles enable substitution and, thereby, variability.

Throughout *Lucy Church Amiably* Stein uses proper names in such a way that they function not with the habitualized quality of nouns, but with the variability of pronouns or articles. Lucy Church, for example, is at various moments the name of a character, of the house she rents, of a place in France, of a church, and of the steeple on the church which looks like a pagoda. In short, as the narrator claims, "Lucy Church may be any one" (*Lucy Church Amiably*, 132). Other names in the novel, such as Simon Therese, William Mary, and John Mary, exhibit a similar variability. Thus, in the sentence I discuss above, when "John Mary" is counterposed to "once and twice," and the difference between them is what "interchanges left to right," the very choice of a name to represent the alternative to progressive counting becomes especially significant with respect to the two models of counting which Stein differentiates to illustrate the project of *Lucy Church Amiably*. Counting "one and one" illustrates the effort to create the effect of names without naming

them precisely because it involves an act of naming, but only insofar as it treats numbers in a manner analogous to the way in which Stein treats names in *Lucy Church Amiably*, that is, with the understanding that they function variably. Like an article, the number "one" in any given instance of counting "one and one" points to a thing to be counted; however, nothing inherent in the number "one" itself determines what the thing counted must be.[25] Thus counting "one and one" is not only not progressive, as I have explained, but in each instance of counting "one," the reference enacted by calling out "one" is independent of any prior use of the number. In this respect, calling out "one" can in principle indicate anything.

The number "one" thus functions in Stein's model of counting as a kind of variable, and conceiving of number in terms of the variable is, I have already suggested, consistent with contemporary mathematical definitions of number. As Russell explains, any particular number, such as "one," is not really particular at all insofar as it represents the class of all possible instances of that number. Likewise counting "one" in the manner of Stein's preferred model is in principle a way of indicating any possible instance of "one." Conceiving of the number as a variable also renders the idea of progression in counting accidental rather than essential: "for what we do," Russell writes, "when we count (say) 10 objects is to show that the set of these objects is similar to the set of numbers 1 to 10. In counting it is necessary to take the objects counted in a certain order, as first, second, third, etc., but order is not of the essence of number: it is an irrelevant addition" (*Introduction*, 17). Addition, here understood to be no more than a superfluous and artificial imposition of order, is a version of progression. To dismiss addition is thus to dismiss progression. Russell thinks of addition as essential to counting but not to number; Stein, however, understands that in fact it is quite possible to count without adding, and what makes it possible is precisely the concept of number to which Russell subscribes. One of the chapters of *Lucy Church Amiably* begins: "She liked to know that he loved her so and apart from adding how many. . .he loved her so and with it fresh from a statue of a mathematician set in trees" (134). This reads like a variation on "How do I love thee, let me count the ways," and indeed, "she" may well "know that he loved her so" by his having counted the ways. What is important, however, is that she knows it "apart from adding how many."

Counting without "adding how many" is, in a very exact way for Stein, what makes "anything" possible. If Stein made *The Making of Americans*,

her "history of every one," out of what she calls a "profound need of hearing and seeing what every one is telling" (*The Making of Americans*, 270), she found in *Lucy Church Amiably* the means of including everyone by creating the formal conditions under which she could include anyone. *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein's 1937 sequel to the hugely successful *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, depends on those very conditions. In one sense *Everybody's Autobiography* is simply a "history of every one," but unlike *The Making of Americans*, whose account (in precisely the numerical sense of the term) of everyone derives from additive experience, the autobiography of "everybody" isn't based on experience at all, but rather on a logical principle of substitutability. The principle extends, in fact, from the earlier *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, where one person's autobiography (Stein's) is shown to serve as another's (Toklas's). Clearly one person's autobiography can only serve as another's as long as the validity of the representation it offers is not contingent upon either person's experience, and therein lies the extension: as soon as an autobiography no longer requires the experiences of the self whose story it tells, it might as easily be anyone's, and in being anyone's be everyone's.[26] As Stein herself remarks in her lectures, "by any one I mean every one" (*Writings*, 298). But while anyone *must* mean everyone for *Everybody's Autobiography* to be for everybody, anyone and everyone are not the same. As a kind of linguistic variable, "anyone" constitutes the formal condition of representability without which "everyone" can only ever amount to an approximation, without which the whole of "everyone" must remain a representational impossibility.

An illustration of the formal condition at work occurs at the beginning of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, where the narrator, Alice, tells of her first evening at Stein's apartment and her observations of how new guests came to be received. In order to gain entrance to the salon, she explains, one had to abide by the terms of a certain protocol, a "formula" which, in its capaciousness, is nothing if not a variable:

> [Gertrude Stein] usually opened the door to the knock and the usual formula was, de la part de qui venez-vous, who is your introducer. The idea was that anybody could come but for form's sake and in Paris you have to have a formula, everybody was supposed to be able to mention the name of somebody who had told them about it. It was a mere form, really everybody could come in and as at this time these pictures [paintings by Matisse, Cézanne, and Picasso, among others] had no value and there was no social privilege attached to knowing any one there, only those came who really were interested. So as I say anybody could come in, however, there was the formula. (*Writings 1903–1932*, 670)

By this account, if Stein is to admit anyone the formula has to come first – prior to the admission of any particular person – and it has to be strictly binding. For it is the very contractedness of the formula that creates the conditions of possibility (even for mistakes)[27] whether it defines the terms of entry into a salon or into a book. In a way that no expanding, progressive narration can, writing "as exact as mathematics" guarantees for Stein the "everlasting" pleasures of substitution and variation: "anybody could come in."[28]

CHAPTER 2

Making the rose red: Stein, proper names, and the critique of indeterminacy

To readers operating in the wake of poststructuralist theory – particularly those affiliated with the language movement – Stein's poetry has been the irrefutable evidence of her proto-postmodernism.[1] Take, for example, the lines "So great so great Emily./Sew grate sew grate Emily" or "A go to green and a letter spoke a go to green or praise or/Worships worships worships" from Stein's 1913 poem "Sacred Emily," where her famous line "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" first appears.[2] In lines like these, meaning becomes indeterminate, the postmodernist argument runs, because we can't decide whether a word like "go" is being used as a noun or an infinitive or an imperative verb, or because we are confronted with the fact that the same sounds – sō grāt – correspond to multiple meanings. And for readers in search of Stein's postmodernism, ambiguities like these seem all the more urgently underscored by Stein's own remarks about the literary aims of her trademark ruptured syntax, interchanged parts of speech, and homophonic puns in her much cited lecture "Poetry and Grammar." Certainly the conclusion of the previous chapter – that Stein's work is designed above all to reveal (and continually rehearse) the logical conditions of possibility for representing "any thing" and "any one" – would seem to add to the evidence. When, as we saw in the last chapter, she extols the virtues of verbs, pronouns, and articles, insisting that the former are "varied and lively," able to "make mistakes" and "be mistaken," and when she simultaneously repudiates nouns which, being merely "the name of anything" do "not go on doing anything" she appears to be arguing for nothing short of what Marjorie Perloff calls a "poetics of indeterminacy."[3]

The proper name, meanwhile, with its long philosophical standing as the one category of sign that, as Stein puts it, "never can make mistakes can never be mistaken" (*Writings*, 315) – the sign, in other words, whose structure of meaning is the very paradigm of determinacy – turns out in

deconstructive accounts of language (most prominently in the work of Jacques Derrida) to be instead the very paradigm of indeterminacy. Indeed, according to the linguistic theory that underwrites the critical reception primarily responsible for Stein's postmodernization – namely that offered by the language movement – not only is the name intrinsically indeterminate, but insofar as it is imagined to represent the underlying structure of all meaning, it is also what defines the indeterminacy of the entire linguistic system. Stein's own account of names, which we have already seen elaborated in "Poetry and Grammar" and which is further elaborated in her counterfactual history *Four in America* (also completed in 1934), does correspond to the Derridean one to the extent that the name becomes a paradigm for what all words do. What I will argue in this chapter, however, is that Stein's theory holds the name to be rigidly determinate; moreover, far from renouncing the name's traditional poetics of determinacy in favor of a more modern (or postmodern, as language poetry affiliates would have it) "poetics of indeterminacy," Stein's modernism is absolutely devoted to the name and the determinacy it entails.

For Stein, writing poetry at all necessitates recognizing its essential features, which for her means recognizing that poetry is "a vocabulary entirely based on the noun." And insofar as "a noun is a name of anything by definition," poetry's most essential feature proves to be its naming function (*Writings*, 327). As we saw in the last chapter, Stein's particular project of modernizing poetry becomes a matter of reinventing the name: "Was there not a way," she asks, "of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them" (330). Contrary to the deepest desires of her postmodern audience, however, what is required for Stein's poetry to "mean names without naming them" is a logical formalism irrevocably at odds with both the phenomenological commitments of poststructuralist linguistics and the materialist commitments of language poetry.

A NOVELIST COMMANDS AN ARMY, A GENERAL COMMANDS A PEN

What if George Washington had been a novelist instead of a general? In asking hypothetical questions of this kind – "what if so-and-so had done things differently" or "what if such-and-such had happened differently" – we are usually interested in whether, if certain causally marked acts had been different, history would still be the same. A familiar example of this type of hypothetical inquiry – versions of which can also be found in almost any science-fiction story about time travel – is "Peabody's Improbable

History," a series of recurring segments in the 1960s cartoon, *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*, where the genius dog Mr. Peabody and his hyper-enthusiastic sidekick Sherman use their "Wayback Machine" to travel back in time and encourage important historical figures to fulfill their destinies. The premise of these "improbable histories" is rigidly deterministic; Mr. Peabody's "Wayback" adventures are always urgent precisely to the extent that subsequent history will depend on a figure like George Washington completing some causally decisive act. There happens not to be a "Peabody's Improbable History" about what would happen if George Washington were a novelist, but if there were, the Wayback Machine would no doubt send Peabody and Sherman off to disabuse Washington of his literary aspirations, expressly in order to keep him from becoming a novelist instead of a general. The determinist logic of their effort would operate on the assumption that were Washington to have been penning a romance instead of, say, crossing the Delaware on Christmas night in 1776, he never would have gone on to become "the father of his country" or the "first president of the United States," for America itself would have failed to materialize as a nation.

When Gertrude Stein addresses this question, however – that is, the question of what would happen if George Washington were a novelist – she is less interested in whether history would still be the same than in whether Washington himself would be the same. In other words, for Stein the hypothetical possibility of Washington's doing something different – writing novels instead of crossing the Delaware – raises the question of what changes in his identity, if any, that difference would bring. Both the standard interest in whether history would be the same and Stein's specific interest in whether Washington would be the same derive from the idea that actions are highly determinate. Certainly under the Peabody world-view, American history in general and George Washington's identity in particular would both be decided by Washington's military actions, so that his doing anything differently would change everything completely. Stein, on the other hand, far from believing there would be a discrepancy in either American history or Washington's own identity were he to do different things, obliterates the very idea of a discrepancy by suggesting that it could never exist to begin with. According to her there could never be a discrepancy for the simple reason that Washington, whether novelist or general, could never do different things.

In Stein's *Four in America*, George Washington appears as the fourth of her four. Like Washington, the other three – Ulysses S. Grant, Wilbur Wright, and Henry James – are American cultural icons, for each of

whom Stein makes the same basic argument, namely that they could not have been different from what they were. Each argument develops out of a hypothetical question of the "what-would-happen-if-so-and-so-had-been-such-and-such" kind: "If Ulysses S. Grant had been a religious leader who was to become a saint what would he have done. If the Wright brothers had been artists that is painters what would they have done. If Henry James had been a general what would he have had to do. If George Washington had been a writer that is a novelist what would he do."[4] In the case of George Washington, Stein shows how all the things that George Washington the general and statesman did – that is, all the things that make him the George Washington we identify with that name – also characterize George Washington the novelist. Being a novelist does not preclude Washington from being "the first president of the United States of America" or "the father of his country"; rather, these identifying characteristics are part of who he is as a novelist: "I can say what I have to say. George Washington did not write a play. He wrote at a novel every day. He who was the father of his country" (*Four in America*, 168). And thus it isn't that Washington remains the same despite doing different things; rather, he remains the same because as a novelist he does the same things he would have done as a general.

Stein reverses the formula with Henry James, making him a general instead of a novelist. The result is the same, however, if not more exaggerated, for James's acts as a general are not only coextensive with his acts as a novelist but identical to them, such that what he does as a general can only be described in terms of what kind of writing he does: "Remember that there are two ways of writing and Henry James being a general has selected both, any general has selected both otherwise he is not a general and Henry James is a general and he has selected both" (138). That George Washington and Henry James appear to be the same whether they are novelists or generals implies that they could not have been different from what they were, and Stein makes this point explicitly in the chapter on Wilbur Wright, where she asks what would happen if he had been a painter instead of an aviator: "If Wilbur Wright had been a painter, just like there are painters American painters would he have been different from what he was. Not at all" (86). Thus Stein produces in the answers to her hypothetical questions about Washington, James, and Wright a different kind of determinism than we get in the standard-interest answer to "what would have happened if." On the model of "Peabody's Improbable History," we locate the determinism in particular acts, such as building the airplane at Kitty Hawk or surprising the Hessian troops on

Christmas night, in such a way that the acts bear a causal charge in relation to history and identity. For Stein, however, those same acts are not so much determining as themselves determined. In other words, she pushes the determinism even farther back, so that it's not a question of what you do determining both history and who you are, but rather a question of something else altogether determining what you do.

Indeed, the only way for there to be no discrepancy between a Washington who writes novels and a Washington who leads armies is if the mere fact of being Washington determines that you will write novels and lead armies. But what is the mere fact of being Washington? What is it about being Washington that determines the actions that Washington will perform? From the very beginning in *Four in America*, the answer is "George Washington," that is, the proper name itself, for as Stein puts it, names "denote character and career" (3). In these terms, it looks as though Stein is simply stating a rather extreme form of what would otherwise be a perfectly plausible explanation for the lack of discrepancy between the two Washingtons: that even in a hypothetical world where George Washington had chosen a career as a novelist, the name would still refer to the same man who was a general in the actual world. But Stein goes on to argue that all people named George, not just the hypothetical novelist and actual general George Washington, will be alike in some basic way, suggesting that far beyond denoting character and career, names determine them: "I have known a quantity of Georges, a quantity of Georges. Are they alike. Yes I think so. I may even say I know so. Have they the same character and career. Certainly certainly" (5). And just as all Georges will have the same character and career, so for Stein will all people named Paul and all people named Helen and all named Marguerite and so forth, in such a way that the likeness of all those bearing the same name becomes the sign of their having been wholly determined by that name.

In Stein's catalogue of name-destinies, Paul is among those that fare the worst:

> I have known a great many Pauls. One of them I have even tried to change the name, unsuccessfully. I know just what Pauls are like even though they differ. What are they like. They are alike that insofar as it is possible, nobody, that is not any woman ever really loves them. Now just think of that and think how true it is. None of them not one of them have been really loved by any woman. They have been married and sometimes not married, and anything can be true of them, but they have never, dear me never, been ever loved by any woman. That is what no Paul can say. (5)

For all Pauls to be destined not to be loved by any woman, it would seem that the power Stein has invested in the name would have to go well beyond the function of mere reference. After all, if the name were strictly a matter of reference, there would be no reason that a lovelorn Paul couldn't simply switch to some other name better suited to bring him the love he is missing. But when Stein says that the effort to change the name of one such Paul failed, she suggests that something about his having been named Paul makes him intrinsically a Paul-type person even if people no longer refer to him that way. Of course in this light, the idea that names denote, and by denoting, determine, character and career, becomes entirely implausible, not merely because it would take but one Paul being loved by a woman to disable the whole claim, but because it is unreasonable to imagine that a name could ever possess such a determining power.

However absurd or tragic it may strike us that Paul will never be loved by any woman because he fails to change his name, it turns out that while Stein is positively committed to a determinism of names, she is not committed to the impossibility of changing one's name. Indeed, her argument for name determinism is articulated most explicitly in a chapter of *Four in America* that is all about someone who changes his name successfully and, in changing his name, also manages to change his character and career: Ulysses S. Grant. Given the hypothetical question that frames Stein's discussion of him – "if Ulysses S. Grant had been a religious leader who was to become a saint what would he have done" – we might assume that his story must follow the same rule that appears to govern the others, and that Grant the religious leader will turn out to be identical to Grant the general. But in fact, Grant the religious leader proves to be a completely different man from Grant the general, and the discrepancy between the two is a function of Grant's choosing to change his name from Hiram Ulysses to Ulysses Simpson. The focus of the Grant chapter thus differs from the others in *Four in America* insofar as Stein's interest is not so much in whether Grant would be the same man if he were a religious leader instead of a general, as in whether he would be the same if he had kept the same name. In one respect, the answer is no, to the extent that Stein's reasoning will never allow Grant to become the general we identify with that name if he remains Hiram Ulysses. Hiram Ulysses, she argues, is destined to be a religious leader:

> If he had remained Hiram Ulysses Grant would it, in the meantime, have had something to do with what he would do if he were a religious leader or saint. I mean by this, if he had been Hiram Ulysses Grant would he have been a religious leader or saint, would he have had to be. I cannot doubt it. (3).

Since Hiram Ulysses will have had to be a religious leader or saint, by extension, then, it appears that once Grant has changed his name to Ulysses Simpson, he will have had to become a general.

If it is the name that denotes character and career, then two different names will denote two completely different characters and careers, which for Stein means that Grant's name change yields two completely different Grants: "You begin to see just by their name that Hiram Ulysses Grant and Ulysses Simpson Grant are not the same. This is the power of a name and a name is in war and a name is in religion. It is not the same name, and the name is not the same" (18). But this very discrepancy – the difference between religious leader Grant and general Grant, which looks on the surface exactly like the discrepancy that the chapters on Washington, James, and Wright seek to erase – is also what ensures that both Hiram Ulysses and Ulysses Simpson, like Washington, James, and Wright, could not have been different from what they were. In this respect the answer to the question of whether Grant would be the same if he had kept the same name is yes: Hiram Ulysses Grant could not have been different from the religious leader he was destined to be, and likewise Ulysses Simpson could not have been different from the general he was to be. The discrepancy that does emerge, therefore, is not an effect of there being one man with two different names, but rather of there being two different names, and hence, two different men.

If all Georges and all Pauls look roughly alike in their character and career, then Stein would seem to be making the argument by analogy that all Ulysses will look roughly like generals, and all Hirams, like religious leaders or saints. Or to reformulate this using Stein's terms, the name Ulysses denotes being a general, and the name Hiram denotes being a religious leader or saint. But if Stein's account of Grant adheres to the same logic that governs her accounts of Washington, James, and Wright – and I am arguing that it does – that logic would necessitate the possibility of both a Hiram who was a general and a Ulysses who was a saint. That is because Stein's understanding of career is abstract – closer to the sense of a trajectory or directional movement, like the career of a planet, than the particular sense of a vocation, like the military or the ministry. Two different careers in the vocational sense – general and religious leader – can thus be the same career in the abstract. For Stein, therefore, even if Hiram Ulysses were to be a general, he would still be the same person and do the same things he would do if he were a religious leader or saint, and likewise with Ulysses Simpson. The point is that by virtue of their

different names, Hiram and Ulysses would be two different generals and two different religious leaders or saints.

By this logic, however, when Stein says that Hiram Ulysses Grant "would have had to be" a religious leader, the statement can only make sense if we understand the determinism it invokes to be dictated by something other than causality. To return to Washington for a moment: it can't be the case that because George Washington is named George Washington he must become a general, or, for that matter, that he must become a novelist, if for no other reason than that by virtue of his name, Washington possesses the same character and career no matter which vocation he chooses. Similarly with Grant, the name Hiram can't exactly cause him to be a religious leader in any predictive sense, and neither can the name Ulysses cause him to be a general, but the name can mean that Hiram possesses a Hiram-type character and career whether he is a religious leader or general, and that Ulysses likewise possesses a Ulysses-type character and career. The name, in short, doesn't cause a given character and career; having that character and career are, for Stein, what it means to bear that name.

A GREEK BY ANY OTHER NAME

To read the determinism of Stein's claim that names denote character and career as an expression of causality, then, is to miss the force of the term "denote." To denote, after all, is not to cause but to mean, and to mean in a certain way. In this respect, once naming becomes a matter of signification rather than causation, what I have been calling Stein's name determinism must be understood more properly as name determinacy. But what exactly is it that names do when they mean in the determinate way Stein proposes? My commitment to answering that question arises in part because Stein's idea of what names do, along with the highly specific kind of determinacy that it involves, is key to understanding her poetic ambition. What is equally important for my purposes here, however, is the bearing Stein's theory of names has on arguments that seek to align her work with a postmodern "poetics of indeterminacy." As I suggested in the opening section of this essay, Stein's theory of names and the poetics it entails are antithetical to the very idea of linguistic indeterminacy.

Nevertheless it is easy to see, just taking the example of Grant from *Four in America,* how at least one form of indeterminacy can emerge with respect to proper names. Stein begins the chapter on Grant with the claim that "names have a way of being attached to those that bear them" (3). On

the one hand, this claim encapsulates one version of the determinacy of names that I have been arguing Stein asserts throughout the book; certainly in the case of Paul, who couldn't change his name, the name is about as attached to its bearer as it can get. Moreover, in being so attached, the name also invests Paul with all the character and career that it denotes, and the case is essentially the same with Washington, James, and Wright, each of whom, by virtue of his respective name, winds up with the same character and career even when his career differs from the one we ordinarily associate with the name. Meanwhile, Grant, on the other hand, conforms to this model of how names denote character and career, except that his name seems to be marked precisely by its ability to be detached from its bearer: unlike Paul, Hiram Ulysses can change his name. It appears that as long as Hiram can change his name, he can, in effect, have any character and career, which suggests not only that Hiram can be anyone, but that anyone can be anyone, a sure sign of indeterminacy if ever there was one. But in Stein's account, anyone cannot be anyone, for the simple reason that a particular name, far from denoting any character and career, can only denote the character and career of its bearer. Thus Grant's name change does not in fact detach the name from its bearer; rather it introduces a new name attached to entirely different bearer. Stein's claim, then, stands firm: names truly do have a way of being attached to those that bear them. But what is the nature of this attachment? What exactly is it that names do?

There's an old academic joke that the *Odyssey* wasn't written by Homer, but by another Greek of the same name. Part of the joke, of course, is that it doesn't really matter who wrote the *Odyssey* – meaning who Homer was – because we understand the poem in principle to have been written by the man we know by that name. Thus, while we might discover that the name Homer refers to some other man than we had thought, the discovery would make no difference to our understanding that Homer wrote the poem in question. In this respect, Homer – like all four of Stein's *Four in America* – cannot be different from what he was. The difference between the Homer joke and *Four in America*, however, is that in the latter, being called "George Washington" will be sufficient to identify the bearer of the name as the father of his country even if he is a novelist instead of a general, whereas the joke implies that other things besides bearing the name "Homer" are required for someone to count as the author of the *Odyssey*, requirements that apparently include being Greek and having written the *Odyssey*. If this sounds tautological, that's part of the point, for the tautology is what provides the humor of the joke,

such as it is. The humor clearly revolves around identifying the reference for the name "Homer," and one of the criteria for identifying the reference is that in order to have written the *Odyssey* you need to have written the *Odyssey*. But the intrinsic claim of the joke – that to qualify as the bearer of the name Homer you need to satisfy a set of descriptive criteria – is not tautological, and it entails an important way of thinking about what names do, albeit the wrong one from Stein's perspective.

That Grant, Wright, James, and Washington, and, for that matter, Homer, "could not have been different from what they were" by virtue of their names already suggests one of the customary functions of proper names: the name is a convenient way of referring to the same person or thing at different times and in different situations. Indeed, both Stein's explicit claim that "names have a way of being attached to those that bear them" and her implicit claim that bearing a particular name *means* being a particular kind of person and thus being the same at different moments, can be understood to assign the proper name precisely this referential function. Moreover, once we define the name by its identity of reference, and hence, by the identity of its referent, then Stein's other claim about names, that they "denote character and career," would seem to follow directly, insofar as we can imagine that "character and career" constitute something like the descriptive criteria by which we ascertain that we are in fact referring to the same object each time we use a given name. To illustrate this in terms of the Homer joke, aspects of Homer's character and career – being Greek and having written the *Odyssey* – function as the identity criteria by which we determine whether or not a particular person qualifies as the bearer or referent of the name Homer.

Stein herself seems to endow character and career with a similar capacity vis-à-vis Grant when she explains why Hiram Ulysses could not have done certain things that make up the biography of Ulysses Simpson:

> Hiram Ulysses Grant would never have visited the Duke of Wellington he would never have had his daughter married to a European. Not he. And why not he. Because he was a tall thin man and he was drunk a little always often and standing and he was leading in religion in American religion, and he was not one any Duke of Wellington would have been writing to visit him because the Duke of Wellington would not have heard of him. (75)

Obviously the point of this passage is that marrying one's daughter off to a European and visiting the Duke of Wellington are constituents of a character and career that Hiram Ulysses Grant couldn't have had. And

from this point it would seem easy to surmise that these constituents of character and career serve the same function in relation to the name Ulysses Simpson as being Greek and having written the *Odyssey* serve in relation to the name Homer. They are what will identify someone as the bearer of the name Ulysses Simpson, while another set of descriptive criteria will identify someone as Hiram Ulysses.

Thus, in the case of the Homer joke, we could say that the name Homer *means* the man who wrote the *Odyssey*, and that would be one version of how we might understand the claim that names denote character and career. But I want to argue that when Stein uses names in *Four in America*, she doesn't think that the name Ulysses S. Grant means the man who married his daughter off to a European and visited the Duke of Wellington, or that George Washington means the man who was the father of his country in the same way that what we could mean by Homer is the man who wrote the *Odyssey*. There are two important reasons why, despite many superficial similarities, what Stein says names do can never correspond to what they do in the Homer joke, that is, to what I would call the "identity-criteria" account of names.

First of all, the Homer joke implies that different names can be used to refer to the same thing. True, we may identify a man as Homer only if he fits a particular description – the Greek who wrote the *Odyssey* – but since what identifies the man is that description and not, ultimately, the name itself, the very logic by which identity criteria may be applied dictates that the same set of identity criteria may attach to a different name. This possibility arises in the setup to the Homer joke, where the proposition that the *Odyssey* wasn't written by Homer immediately raises the expectation that the follow-up claim will involve a different name. Even if the name were to change, however, the given identity criteria would necessarily designate the same referent. The whole point of Grant's name change, by contrast, is precisely that the same referent cannot bear two different names; as I have already explained, with each new name comes a new and different bearer. Thus, the fact that the names Hiram Ulysses and Ulysses Simpson correspond to what look like two different sets of identifying descriptions is *necessary* in Stein's account, whereas such a discrepancy would be purely contingent in the identity-criteria account. The second reason Stein's account cannot accommodate the idea of identity criteria comes back to the issue of determinacy. If we play by Stein's rules we won't want to call whoever married his daughter off to a European and visited the Duke of Wellington at some particular moment in history

"Ulysses S. Grant"; rather, only someone we call Ulysses S. Grant will have been able do those things.

What this means for Stein's claim that names denote character and career is that character and career, instead of existing in some more or less direct *relation* to the name, are instead entailed by the name itself. More accurately, the character and career that a name denotes are a necessary (i.e., non-contingent) effect produced by this formal function of reference. To say that Stein thinks of a name as embodying reference as a formal function, rather than simply as pointing to particular qualities or objects, might on the surface look like a distinction without a difference, but the difference becomes clear when we view Stein's account of names within the standard terms of contemporary philosophical debates over what names do.

SENSE OR REFERENCE?

The central question in those debates is whether or not names carry a connotative sense above and beyond their specific referent, and what logical consequences the answer to that question holds for the truth-values of propositions. The mathematical philosopher Gottlob Frege makes one of the strongest arguments in favor of names having sense in his "Sense and Reference" (1892).[5] According to Frege, the only way that identity statements involving two names for the same thing can be informative rather than merely trivial is if each of the names has a different sense. The famous example of this is the identity statement "Phosphorus is Hesperus," where both names refer to the same object – the planet Venus – but each has a slightly different sense, "Phosphorus" meaning "the morning star" and "Hesperus," "the evening star." Of course the point of remarking on the difference in sense between these two names is to emphasize not the difference itself, but rather the fact of there being any sense at all. Moreover, for Frege, "sense" is not just a discovery about how names work, it is to be understood as *integral* to how they work; if it weren't, a statement like "Phosphorus is Hesperus" would be equivalent to the statement "that planet is that planet." In other words, if sense were not integral to the name, we could simply substitute the referent for the name and suffer no loss of meaning, but in the statement "that planet is that planet" the information contained in the original identity claim, "Phosphorus is Hesperus," has evaporated, leaving a mere truism.

The force of Frege's discussion is to establish sense as essential to the way names work. But once he has shifted our emphasis from reference to sense in this way, what then is the function of reference with respect to names? In the following passage, Frege describes a situation, which, while presented as atypical, nevertheless suggests the degree to which reference is understood by him to be a non-essential feature of names:

> Combinations of symbols can occur that stand for something but have (at least so far) no reference, e.g., divergent infinite series. This can be avoided. . .by means of the special stipulation that divergent infinite series shall stand for the number 0. A logically perfect language (*Begriffsschrift*) should satisfy the conditions, that every expression grammatically well constructed shall in fact designate an object, and that no new sign shall be introduced as a proper name without being secured a reference. (*Philosophical Writings*, 70)

The problem here, according to Frege, is that certain symbols, that is, things that "stand for" other things (a species of names if ever there was one), do so without having any referent, which suggests that a name can have a sense which does not determine a referent, a condition in which all sorts of ambiguities may arise. This happens all the time in ordinary language, but one doesn't want it to happen in a "logically perfect" language, and so, according to Frege, to avoid "logical mistakes arising from the ambiguity of [such] expressions" (70), it is apparently necessary to secure them a reference by "stipulating" it. Now, the fact that a reference can be stipulated would seem to argue the more persuasively for its being a purely contingent property of names in Frege's account. But as I will show, whereas the kind of stipulation that Frege proposes for securing the reference of names in a logically perfect language is merely a practical requirement to avoid ambiguity, a similar principle of stipulated reference, once formalized, becomes for Stein the essential function of names. What this formalized referentiality does for Stein is not only to make any ambiguity or indeterminacy of sense impossible, but also – in contrast to what it does for Frege – to make reference integral to the name, that is, to make it a defining feature of what the name *is* as opposed to a description of what it *does*. It is as if Stein were imagining Frege's idea of a symbol "standing for" something as a purely referential function, but one that did not involve any necessary relation to a referent – as if one could have reference without referents.

Thus "names have a way of being attached to those that bear them," I am arguing, is simply a way of articulating a state of denotation in which the concept of the bearer (the referent) becomes a *formal* property of the

name itself (as the function of reference). And insofar as I am claiming that this is just another way of saying that reference (the designation of a bearer) is intrinsic to the name, then Stein's account of what names do would seem to occupy the counter-position to Frege's: that names have only reference. Among Stein's contemporaries, Bertrand Russell is the exemplary proponent of this view in the context of the philosophical debate over what names do. Pointing to the identifying properties of "sense" as the essential explanation for why names can only refer, Russell argues that what Frege calls the "sense" of a name is basically a description that comes into play only when we fail to use a name "properly." According to Russell, if I were to say, for example, that Hiram Ulysses Grant changed his name and became Ulysses Simpson Grant, and you didn't know who Grant was, I would have to supplement my use of the name with descriptive criteria to help identify the reference (of course, from Stein's point of view, to say that Hiram Ulysses became Ulysses Simpson would be nonsensical, since the one is a completely different person from the other and thus could not be said to "become" him). "He was a general who won decisive battles in the Civil War," I might say, or "he became the eighteenth president of the United States." What such recourse to description means to Russell is that we are really using *proper* names only when we refer to things either that are present before us or with which we have had direct experience beforehand; only in the absence of such "acquaintance," to use Russell's term, do we employ descriptions.[6]

In this respect, a statement about Grant is in fact a bad example, since Russell argues that with someone like Grant we couldn't have the kind of acquaintance required to make our use of that word count as an instance of naming. For Russell, "Grant" would belong instead to a certain category of names that are not names at all, strictly speaking, but rather descriptions in disguise:

> You remember when Adam named the beasts, they came before him one by one, and he became acquainted with them and named them. We are not acquainted with Socrates, and therefore cannot name him. When we use the word "Socrates", we are really using a description. Our thought may be rendered by some such phrase as, "The Master of Plato", or "The Philosopher who drank the hemlock", or "The person whom logicians assert to be mortal", but we certainly do not use the name as a name in the proper sense of the word.[7]

From this perspective, the descriptive function of a name like "Socrates" or "Grant" looks exactly like Frege's evidence for names having sense, and indeed, Russell himself seems to support Frege's view when he claims that

the vast majority of what we ordinarily think of as proper names are "really descriptions" (*Mysticism*, 156). Indeed, so many names turn out to be "really descriptions," that finally Russell is left with but two that count as truly proper names: the demonstrative pronoun "this," and the personal pronoun "I," the only terms capable, he suggests, of "stand[ing] for a particular with which one is acquainted at the moment" (162). The key difference between Russell and Frege lies in the relation between experience and the referential function of the name. For Frege, experience is eliminated from the reference of the name because, as in the case of the referentless names of mathematics, there need be no actual referent. For Russell, meanwhile, there can be no referential function *without* an actual referent, i.e., an object of experience.

Thus, even though Russell's account of names comes to look strikingly like Frege's insofar as most names turn out to be "truncated descriptions" (*Logical Atomism*, 110), his decision to radically limit proper names to those referring to particulars – things a speaker has actually experienced – makes a profound difference with respect to the functions available for names in logical as opposed to ordinary language. Whereas for Frege a name can occur in a "perfectly logical language" as long as it is secured by a reference, for Russell, a perfectly logical language will never contain any names precisely because the proper name, strictly defined, can only ever refer. Of course, to the extent that Russell's proper names must of necessity refer to objects of acquaintance, the Fregean idea of a referentless name that could be provided with a stipulated reference becomes for Russell a logical impossibility.[8] Yet, that is the very kind of name that could work in a logical language, because it is the kind of name whose reference could be general rather than particular: "You can see why it is that in the logical language set forth in *Principia Mathematica* there are not any names, because there we are not interested in particular particulars, but only in general particulars" (*Logical Atomism*, 63). As Frege's example of the name for a divergent infinite series suggests, stipulating a reference for something that cannot be an object of acquaintance makes it possible for the reference to designate a principle – what Russell would call a "general particular" – as opposed to a "particular particular."

For Russell and Frege alike, what makes a logically perfect language both logical and perfect is its absolute adherence to principle, the fact that its representations admit nothing subject to the vicissitudes of experience. This commitment to pure abstraction is what leads Frege, on the one hand, to imagine a name that can "stand for" something without having an actual referent, and Russell, on the other, to insist that because names

can only have actual referents, they can never be part of a logically perfect language. The whole force of logic is gathered, in other words, around the task of eliminating ambiguity and indeterminacy by way of eliminating experience from the objects of representation. Frege locates the origin of ambiguity in the sense of names rather than in their reference, insofar as the point of stipulating reference is to alleviate the problem of "logical mistakes arising from the ambiguity of expressions" (reference, remember, is designated, while sense is expressed). Russell also invokes sense – for which he uses the term "description" – as the source of ambiguity: "the description required to express [a] thought will vary for different people, or for the same person at different times." Meanwhile reference becomes, for Russell, just as it does for Frege, an anchor amidst the transitory currents of sense: "The only thing constant (so long as the name is rightly used) is the object to which the name applies" (*Mysticism*, 156). Of course, according to Russell the name is most often *not* "rightly used," so that its reference becomes indeterminate (who is Socrates? who is Grant?) and requires for its determination the descriptive identity-criteria that Frege calls "sense." Despite his insistence, then, that reference – as opposed to sense – is the defining property of a name, Russell's account of names is finally as committed to the necessity of identity criteria as Frege's.[9]

As different as these accounts are, then, both Russell and Frege cling to the idea that the referent, if not fixed by stipulation or ostension, becomes indeterminate and requires the set of descriptive identity criteria to resolve the indeterminacy. The commitment to identity criteria obviously renders reference an epistemological function of identity in representation. But as long as reference is a function of identity, no proper name can ever be truly secure in its reference; we might always misdirect the reference. Moreover, if the proper name traditionally represents the most determinate relation there can be between a sign and its referent, and the name is nevertheless essentially indeterminate, then all language will come to look as though it conforms to something like a basic law of indeterminacy.

That law of indeterminacy is the starting point for the critical approaches to Stein that view her difficult texts as experiments in a kind of prescient postmodernism. Deriving their methodological authority from Jacques Derrida's deconstructive forays into the fundamental workings of language, such approaches customarily argue for indeterminacy as a means of displacing various idealized forms of representation, including that of a rigid correspondence between sign and referent. For Derrida himself, the fantasy that indeterminacy serves to displace is precisely the

fantasy of the proper name. The "Roundtable on Translation" in *The Ear of the Other* begins with the view that what makes the proper name a special case in language is its untranslatability: "Any signified whose signifier cannot vary nor let itself be translated into another signifier without a loss of meaning points to a proper-name effect."[10] Of course, the correspondence between signifier and signified is not the same as the correspondence between sign and referent, for the former is productive of sense, while the latter is, obviously, a matter of reference. But for Derrida, the one slips easily into the other, and this slippage is necessary to produce the linguistic indeterminacy to which he is committed. In any case, Derrida imagines the proper name to be characterized by an "absolute command" of signifier over signified, and in order to construct what that command would look like in its purest form, he hypothesizes an idealized "absolutely secret first name which functions all the time without our knowing it" and which "has nothing to do with my public proper name or with what anyone may know about me" (*The Ear of the Other*, 106).

Initially in Derrida's account, the function of this hypothetical secret name is strictly to address: without any conscious identification on the part of the speaker, the name, once uttered, simply "calls" to the bearer. Derrida gives as an example of how such a name would work a "moment" in the "conclusion of [psycho]analysis" when the analyst would find him- or herself "addressing the patient using his or her most proper name, possibly the most secret," that is, "when the analyst would say to the patient 'you' in such a way that there would be no possible misunderstanding on the subject of this 'you'." The point of making the purest proper name secret, of withholding it in principle from any form of knowledge, is to remove the name from the realm of experience, and hence, from any of the vicissitudes of experience that might detach the name from its proper bearer. The problem is that as soon as the name is uttered, which according to Derrida it must be if it is to fulfill its function of "calling" to its bearer, it enters a "system of relations" where "pure address is impossible": "I can never be sure when someone says to me – or to you – says to me 'you, you,' that it might not just be any old 'you'." The fact that even the secret name is subject to such uncertainty means for Derrida that uncertainty is essential to all linguistic signs: "I can never be sure that the secret address might not be diverted, like any message or letter, so that it does not arrive at its destination. This is inscribed in the most general structure of the mark. The proper name is a mark: something like confusion can occur at any time because the proper name bears confusion within itself" (107).

In making the extreme instance of the proper name a secret name, Derrida appears to be going for something akin to what Frege produces when he proposes the stipulation of reference, in that Frege's effort to imagine a purely logical reference is, like Derrida's effort to imagine a secret name, committed to protecting the name from the ambiguities and indeterminacies of experience. The force of Derrida's deconstruction of the name, however, is to show that reference can never be an ontological property of the name (as it is for Stein); rather, reference becomes an epistemological effect that can only be produced by way of an act of linguistic exchange. The name, in other words, does not have its reference and then enter circulation; it has its reference only by way of entering circulation, which entails its being subject to all the vicissitudes of experience that make any mark signify differently in different contexts. What this means, in short, is that any proper name can become a common noun. And the extent to which the proper name can, as Derrida says, "drift off course toward a system of relations where it functions as a common name or mark," is proof for him that all signs, including proper names, are always already adrift (108).

The consequence of seeing all proper names as common nouns *in potentia* is that the proper name is never really proper at all, and in this respect, Derrida's argument is essentially Frege's in a much stronger form. If for Frege the fact that all names have sense as well as reference means that there is in the final analysis no substantial difference between a word like Phosphorus and a phrase like "the morning star," for Derrida the fact that a name and a common noun can be the same means that there can be no such thing as reference in the absence of sense. And for Derrida it is the inseparability of reference from sense that makes all signs indeterminate. Obviously the problem of differentiating sense from reference lies at the heart of all three of the philosophical accounts of names I have been discussing. It is what drives Russell's effort to distinguish the pronouns "this" and "I" from all other names; Frege's insistence that a logical language must stipulate reference; and Derrida's hypothesis of the secret name. In all three accounts, the attempt to separate reference from sense deconstructs because the name and its bearer are imagined to be striving (and inevitably failing) to remain the same as they migrate from context to context.

THE GRAMMAR OF THE ROSE

Stein's view of the name in her 1934 lecture "Poetry and Grammar" looks much like Derrida's, in that she seems to be making the argument that the

common name, or noun, is merely a diminished proper name, an attenuation of the immediacy of reference:

> Now actual given names of people are more lively than nouns which are the name of anything and I suppose this is because after all the name is only given to that person when they are born, there is at least the element of choice even the element of change and anybody can be pretty well able to do what they like. . . A noun has been the name of something for such a very long time. (*Writings*, 316)

Here Stein seems divided on the question of how proper names relate to their common counterparts. On the one hand, the name appears utterly distinct from the common noun: it can be changed in ways that the noun cannot. But on the other hand, it looks as though all nouns begin as proper names, and only become less "lively" (and thereby more common) after they have been used "for such a very long time" that they are no longer possessed of the "element[s] of choice [and] change" they presumably had when they were used for the first time. The notion of a baptismal advent of the name – whether it be a proper name or a common noun – is precisely the fantasy that Derrida aims to deconstruct by showing that no such privileged origin exists for the name, much less for the common noun. But while Derrida rejects the idea of there being an initial inception of the name, he is nevertheless committed to the idea that the name subsists through a history of use, that even though its meanings change from one context to the next, the name itself remains the same, gaining ever more distance from a retroactively idealized (and impossible) reference.

But for Stein the liveliness proper names have upon being given at birth or being chosen to replace other names functions not as a way of fetishizing an originary reference that is subsequently lost, but rather as a way of negating the very possibility of such a loss. And the gain for Stein in redefining reference is an inversion of precisely what the originary-reference fetishist is forced to lament: if the originary-reference fetishist is sad because all proper names wind up as common nouns, Stein is happy because all common nouns can be made, through her own poetic invention, to work like proper names. The gain, in other words, is a means of alleviating the deadness that accrues to common nouns through use. But even if one wanted to imagine that Stein had solved this particular problem of names, a larger question remains: why does Stein care about names in the first place?

She gives her answer implicitly throughout her "Poetry and Grammar" lecture, where she emphasizes repeatedly that names are the stuff poems are made of: "now and always poetry is created by naming names the

names of something the names of somebody the names of anything" (*Writings*, 328–29). If we accept Stein's notion that poetry has traditionally been a means of expressing one's love of an object, and if what one most often does in expressing love for a thing is to call out its name, poetry can be understood, Stein contends, as "a state of knowing and feeling a name" (328). "You can love a name," she explains, "and if you love a name then saying that name any number of times only makes you love it more, more violently more persistently more tormentedly. Anybody knows how anybody calls out the name of anybody one loves. And so that is poetry really loving the name of anything. . . Yes any of you can know that" (327). But names apparently become a great deal less lovable as they get used for other than purely baptismal or incantatory purposes; when they come to have sense as well as reference; in short, when they become nouns:

> Nouns are the name of anything and anything is named, that is what Adam and Eve did and if you like it is what anybody does, but do they go on just using the name until perhaps they do not know what the name is or if they do know what the name is they do not care about what the name is. (325–26)

For Stein this loss of interest in what the name is threatens poetry itself with a similar loss of interest, which leads her to question the viability of the noun as the basis of poetry: "Things once named the name does not go on doing anything to them, and so why write in nouns" (313). But given that what Stein laments is a loss of interest in the name, she clearly retains a commitment to poetry being all about loving the name. What remains for her, then, is to imagine a way of keeping names in poetry without their falling prey to use: "Now that was a thing that I too felt in me the need of making [anything] be a thing that could be named without using its name. After all one had known its name anything's name for so long, and so that name was not new but the thing being alive was always new" (330). We're already familiar with the idea of the thing named being new from Stein's account of Grant. Grant becomes new each time he gets a new name, to be sure, but Stein suggests an even deeper and more perpetual newness that is purely a function of Grant's being alive. That the name, by contrast, is *not* new implies that through each successive use the name remains the same, and in this respect the problem of revitalizing poetry becomes a matter of revitalizing the name, of finding a way for the name to be new each time it occurs.

Stein looks to other parts of speech for the model of such a renewable commodity, to pronouns in particular, which "are of course not really the name of anything. They represent someone but they are not its or his

name. In not being his or its or her name they already have a greater possibility of being something than if they were as a noun the name of anything" (316). Here it looks as though Stein is eschewing the name completely, contradicting what I have been arguing thus far. But a closer look at what pronouns do will show that while they certainly are not names in the sense that Stein intends when she speaks of names being used, they nevertheless have everything to do with the kind of naming that she valorizes in both her account of Grant's name change and her account of poetry as the love of names.

If we think about Russell's choice of the pronoun "this" as one of two truly proper names, we can easily imagine that what Stein values in the pronoun is the same as what Russell values: its capacity for pointing to an object that is present. Certainly the function of any pronoun is referential in this sense, even when its referent is simply another word. But if we thus construct the referential function as a relation between the pronoun and its referent, so that the pronoun is what we use when a thing is present and we want to point at it, it's hard to see how the pronoun could ever be understood as something in and of itself, as Stein wishes. It is, at best, a medium for viewing the object. Moreover, if we plug this deictic function back into Stein's account of what names do in poetry, we are right back where we started: with an originary production of a name which then grows deader and deader each time we use it, much as a pronoun loses meaning if we repeat it too many times without restoring its referent.

But if we think of the pronoun, like the mathematical variable *x*, as essentially defined by its referential function, the pronoun no longer seems to suffer such a diminished fate. After all, if we square an *x* in one mathematical expression, and then times it by two in another, and then gave it a minus sign in another, we would hardly be inclined to regret that the *x* had somehow grown less lively or meaningful over the course of our different uses of it, and we certainly wouldn't say that its meaning had thereby become indeterminate. The reason that the *x* can never suffer a loss of meaning or be indeterminate is because in any given context, the value of *x* will always *in principle* be a matter of reference. We can see now why Frege would propose stipulation as a solution to the problem of ambiguity in expressions, for as soon as reference becomes a matter of stipulation, any possibility of ambiguity falls away. But Stein goes even further than Frege: by her logic, the particular reference of a variable at any given moment would not so much be a matter of stipulation, as a matter of the variable itself being essentially identical to its referential function.[11] Reference, in other words, is an intrinsic feature of the variable

insofar as it constitutes the possibility condition of all particular referents. In this sense what the variable (and likewise the name) denotes is something like its own rule of operation, much as we might say that the game-pieces in chess denote their own rules of movement. But while we conventionally think of the value of *x* as stipulated at the outset of a mathematical operation and then as remaining the same throughout that operation, for Stein no matter how often *x* might appear, each successive use would have to be understood as presenting both a new *x* and a new value, even as *x*'s capacity for reference remained unchanged.

If we think about the pronoun operating according to the logic of the variable, and then apply this model of reference to the function of names, it is easy to see how Stein would insist that Hiram Grant and Ulysses Grant are two completely different men. It is less easy, however, to see that George Washington the novelist would not be different from George Washington the general. In effect, they *are* different by the logic of reference, inasmuch as each occurrence of the name George Washington is a new instantiation of the reference the name entails. Yet this logic of reference also entails that Washington can never be different from what he was. There is no contradiction here: in each separate, successive moment of being named, Washington can only be Washington. By imagining names to possess the variability of pronouns, where any name becomes a wholly different term with each new use, Stein produces an unassailable distinction between sense and reference, so that even a common noun can retain the purity of the reference it embodies in any given moment of its use.[12] Thus, to return to Derrida for a moment: what constitutes from his perspective the phenomenological inseparability of sense and reference, and the consequent impurity of all reference, becomes from Stein's perspective a mere conflation arising from the failure to recognize that reference is what names are, not merely what they do. Moreover, only if the name is understood to be the same over the course of different uses, that is, only if it is understood as an object of continuous experience, can it be subject to the indeterminacies that Derrida proposes, and only then can the name be understood to revert to a common noun.

For Stein there is no question of the name reverting over time to the status of a common noun; the common noun instead acquires the logical function of the proper name each time it appears. Nowhere is Stein's commitment to this understanding of the proper name more evident than in the famous line "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," which I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The line appears to depict something very like the Derridean transformation of the referential proper name into the

descriptive common noun. It begins, after all, with a name – the capitalized, article-free "Rose" – and predicates a description on it: *what* is Rose? Rose is *a* rose. But when Stein claims that "in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years,"[13] she is emphasizing not the attenuation of the proper name into its common noun sense, but rather a perpetual renewal of reference, rendering each instance of the noun, in effect, a proper name. Like the stipulative variable, this "rose" has no memory. The reference is concentrated within each instance of the word, rendering it an autonomous, self-same entity. And once made an entity in this way, the word can finally become the proper object of the poet's love: "When I said A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," Stein writes in "Poetry and Grammar," "[a]nd then later made that into a ring I made poetry and what did I do I caressed completely caressed and addressed a noun" (*Writings*, 327).

LINGUISTIC INDETERMINACY: A DOG'S VIEW

The repudiation of nouns in "Poetry and Grammar" occurs initially as a way of rejecting a poetic tradition that Stein imagines has deadened literature by wearing nouns out. But even as her own project of modernizing poetry depends on identifying nouns as depleted names, her realization of that project depends not on rejecting names for their tendency to wither into nouns, but rather on revitalizing nouns by making them work like names – by making them "mean names without naming them." I have been arguing that the way names have of "being attached to those that bear them" involves a certain immediacy of reference that goes along with imagining the rose to be "red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years." But if that immediacy of reference is also what makes it possible to imagine caressing the rose as a matter of caressing the *noun*, that is, the *name* of the rose, then one might easily argue that what it means for the name of the rose to be so palpably physicalized is for the word itself to be valued as a strictly *material* object.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the single most prevalent gesture in the growing body of recent criticism emphasizing Stein's linguistic concerns is just such an insistence on the material features of words in her texts – particularly their sound, substance, and shape. Thus, in an early issue of the journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* that documents a series of poets' responses to Stein's *Tender Buttons*, Jackson Mac Low pays particular attention to his own physical experience of her words: "I go from word to word, seeing the shapes of the printed words, hearing the sounds

inwardly, noting rhymes, assonances, alliterations."[14] Mac Low's response is typical not only of the specific readings of Stein in that volume, but of the materialism that the language poetry movement has come to represent more generally.[15]

Ron Silliman's version of that materialism in *The New Sentence*, for example, laments "the disappearance of the word that lies at the heart of the invention of the illusion of realism and the breakdown of gestural poetic form,"[16] a loss he sees remedied by the disjunctive compositional practices – what he terms "the new sentence" – of the language poets, and of Stein, whom he singles out as a privileged predecessor. For Silliman, what "transparent realism" causes to disappear with the word is its purest materiality – its sound and shape – for by "gestural poetic form" he apparently has in mind something akin to rhyme, rhythm, and measure: "It is precisely the expressive integrity of the gestural use of language which constitutes the meaning of the 'nonsense' syllables in tribal poetries; its persistence in such characteristics of Skelton's poetry as its rhyme is that of a trace" (*The New Sentence*, 11). But Silliman's commitment to "gestural poetic form" is not, as his comments might suggest, an effort to celebrate meaninglessness (hence his scare quotes around the word "nonsense"); rather, he imagines that the pure sound and shape of syllables can "constitute meaning." Moreover, for Silliman, meaning so constituted seems to have as its overriding characteristic the familiar tinge of indeterminacy. In arguing for an analogy among three different forms of linguistic combination – the ways that syllables and phonemes "integrate" into words and phrases, the ways that words and phrases "integrate" into sentences, and the ways that sentences integrate into paragraphs and even larger units of composition – Silliman insists on both a finite degree of commensurability among the materials of language and an infinite (and hence, indeterminate) range of possibilities for understanding them. Silliman cites Tzvetan Todorov to make this point:

> While in speech the integration of units does not go beyond the sentence, in literature sentences are integrated again as part of larger articulations [e.g., the paragraph], and the latter in their turn into units of greater dimension, and so on until we have the entire work. . . On the other hand the interpretations of each unit are innumerable, for their comprehension depends on the system in which it will be included. (74)

But why should an insistence on the irreducible materiality of language go along with an insistence on its indeterminacy (or, in Todorov's formulation, the innumerability of its interpretations)?

It is easy to see how this works, once recognizing the materiality of language becomes a way of recognizing language as an *object*. Indeed, for Charles Bernstein, linguistic materiality translates quite precisely into linguistic objecthood, a pure physicality that, like Silliman's "gesture," constantly threatens to disappear:

> . . .The visibility of words
> as a precondition of reading
> necessitates that words obtrude impermeably into
> the world – this
> impermeability makes a reader's absorption
> in words possible. The *thickness*
> of words ensures that whatever
> of their physicality is erased, or engulfed, in
> the process of semantic projection,
> a residue
> tenaciously in-
> heres that will not be sublimated
> away.[17]

The "thickness" of words refers quite literally to their dimensions on the page as physical piles of ink – in other words, to their status as marks: "The 'mark' is the visible sign of writing. / But reading, insofar as it consumes & / absorbs the mark, erases it – the words disappear / (the transparency effect) & are replaced by / that which they depict, their 'meaning'" (*A Poetics*, 64). The pathos of loss that Bernstein attaches to the mark is to be remedied, he argues, by "anti-absorptive" poetic practices that foreground the material features of words.

For Bernstein, as for Silliman, the privileged example of such anti-absorptive poetics is the chant or incantation, whose syllabic units are defined as such by their lack of semantic meaning. Moreover, Bernstein (again sharing Silliman's view) insists that the resistance to semantic meaning does not "cede meaning" altogether (10); rather, he imagines a meaning whose function is experiential as opposed to semantic:

> . . .If the artifice [of a poem] is
> foregrounded, there's a tendency to say that there
> is no content or meaning, as if the poem were a
> formal or decorative exercise concerned only with
> representing its own mechanisms. But even when a
> poem is read as a formal exercise, the dynamics &
> contours of its formal proceedings may suggest, for
> example, a metonymic model for imagining

> experience. For this reason, consideration of the formal dynamics of a poem does not necessarily disregard its content; indeed it is an obvious starting point insofar as it can initiate a multilevel reading. But to complete the process such formal apprehensions need to move to a synthesis beyond technical cataloging, toward the experiential phenomenon that is made by virtue of the work's techniques. (10–11)

Here, Bernstein imagines that the "form" of a poem (by which Bernstein clearly means the *material* of the poem) can yield an "experiential" rather than a semantic meaning. Indeed, only by imagining that there can be such a thing as "experiential" meaning in the first place – by conflating experience with meaning – does indeterminacy become the necessary consequence of his "anti-absorptive" poetics. For experience as such not only isn't indeterminate; it cannot be indeterminate. An experience is what it is for the person who has it – there is no undecidability about it. Only when we imagine that a text's meaning becomes anyone's experience of it does it become the irreducibly multiple phenomenon that language poetry (and postmodernism more generally) associates with indeterminacy. For our purposes, however, the force of this passage lies not in the degree to which the "form" of a poem (again, the *material* of the poem) can yield an "experiential" rather than a semantic meaning; the real force lies in the absolute necessity and completeness of that displacement, Bernstein's conflation notwithstanding. When words become marks (or incantatory syllables), we have no choice but to experience them because – if we want to continue to apprehend them as material objects – we can no longer think of ourselves as reading them. That is, we can no longer think of ourselves as reading them because we can no longer think of them as language.

As both Bernstein and Silliman suggest, once words become marks, they will, as a function of their objecthood, yield innumerable experiences – as many as the subjects who view them and the times and circumstances in which they are viewed. But if the language movement's commitment to the mark is the basis for their commitment to indeterminacy, that commitment, I have tried to suggest, cannot exactly count as linguistic. Nevertheless, both Bernstein and Silliman (and a host of other *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* affiliates) insist on reading Gertrude Stein's poetry and poetics as predicated upon an acknowledgment of linguistic indeterminacy. I have already argued that her theory of reference with

respect to proper names not only does not involve any claim to indeterminacy but is intrinsically antithetical to it. But that argument is mistaken if Stein's claim to have "caressed and addressed a noun" is a claim to have caressed and addressed a literal object.

In the context of what we have seen in this chapter, it might be tempting to see Stein's characterization of masterpieces as having "entity" rather than "identity" as a version of the postmodernist idea that the nouns (and, for that matter, all the other parts of speech) in her writing have the status of objects rather than words. But in fact it is Stein's concept of identity that is closest to the relationship between experience and materiality that I have shown to be associated with objecthood. Insofar as an object acquires its identity through being experienced by a subject, identity above all requires a subject. As we saw in the introduction, in the case of painting it requires a beholder; in the case of literature it requires a reader. But, as we also saw in "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them," while every literary masterpiece has identity, what makes it a masterpiece has nothing to do with its identity because, Stein imagines, it can have nothing to do with the reader. What makes the masterpiece an entity is the irrelevance of its identity. This is why, for Stein, personal letters can never be masterpieces:

> The letter writes what the other person is to hear and so entity does not exist there are two present instead of one and so once again creation breaks down. I once wrote in writing *The Making of Americans* I write for myself and strangers but that was merely a literary formalism for if I did write for myself and strangers then identity would take the place of entity. (*Writings*, 356–57)

The standard of value that determines whether a work is a masterpiece – i.e., whether it is an entity – is therefore in no way determined by the response or experience of an audience. Indeed the difference between Stein's account of *The Making of Americans* here and the one that we saw in the novel itself serves precisely to obliterate everything that she had previously understood to be that novel's project. If, as we saw in the last chapter, "strangers" were previously imagined by Stein as necessary to completing the "whole history of every one" toward which the novel was building, here, the novel is what it is independent of any "strangers" and thus requires nothing of them for its wholeness or completion. Or, to reframe this idea in the terms of our discussion of Bernstein and Silliman, if we care about the text as a masterpiece, we precisely don't care about it as a "gesture" or a "mark."

Thus, when Stein writes that she has made a ring with her line "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," what finally makes her rose "red for the first time in a hundred years" – what submits that noun to her imaginative *caress* – is not any particular material feature of the noun capable of being felt (or seen or heard) by whichever "stranger" might wish to caress it. The name of the rose is not red because of anyone's experience of its redness. Moreover, the name of the rose is not red by virtue of pointing to something red. Rather than denoting a relation between the name and the redness of its bearer, each "rose" in Stein's ring denotes instead a reference to redness that inheres in the name. If Stein can "really caress" the noun by rendering it a name, it is not, then, the material form – the petals and thorns – of the floral object it denotes, and it is not the material form – the sound and shape – of the word that denotes it. What Stein caresses in caressing the "rose" is the immaterial form – the very function of reference – belonging to the name itself.

CHAPTER 3

Laura (Riding) Jackson and T=H=E N=E=W C=R=I=T=I=C=I=S=M

Peter Henry Emerson is significant to the early history of photography not only for the stunning photographs he produced during the 1880s but also for his impassioned campaign to grant photography the status of a fine art and to articulate the standards by which photographs could be evaluated as art. The standards depended above all on the photographer's ability to control what Emerson called the "values" (light and dark tones) of any photograph – his ability, that is, to alter them "at will."[1] But in 1890, when the chemists Ferdinand Hurter and Vero C. Driffield published an important finding from their experiments with photographic plates, the news effectively ended Emerson's artistic career. They discovered what would become known as the "characteristic curve" of all photographic images, which refers to the fact that while any given tone can be altered by process, the differential relation between tones in an image remains the same no matter the intensity or time of exposure, or density of the emulsion used (Newhall, *P. H. Emerson*, 89). Upon learning of this discovery Emerson immediately began to recant his previous arguments for the artistic merits of photography, initially by mailing a letter of renunciation to all of the magazine editors he knew, and next by issuing a pamphlet proclaiming the "Death of Naturalistic Photography" (92–93). According to Emerson, Hurter and Driffield's discovery disproved the very foundation of his prior conviction that "true values could be obtained [in photographs] and that values could be *altered at will* by *development*" (93). In other words, what Emerson required for photography to count as an art was the artist's ability to control the structure of the thing he was making. And when Hurter and Driffield proved that the relative values of any given image were determined by chemical laws rather than by the creative manipulations of the artist, Emerson saw his art vanish before his eyes.

Laura (Riding) Jackson, the modernist poet who is the focus of this chapter, has virtually nothing to do with photography, modern,

postmodern, or otherwise. I begin with Emerson to introduce a point not about photography, but about modernism, and particularly about how in modernism the status of the work of art *as* a work of art (or for our purposes, the status of the poem as a work of art) seems always to be in jeopardy. For Emerson, it's the laws of nature that count as the threat, and what they threaten – indeed, in Emerson's view, what they succeed in eliminating altogether – is the artist's agency in the construction of the work. Emerson found that the photograph was a result of the workings of chemistry rather than of the artist, and consequently, he felt compelled to give up photography as an art. Like Emerson, (Riding) Jackson also felt compelled to renounce her art completely. That is, around 1941, at the age of about forty, she stopped writing poems and began denouncing poetry as an irredeemable enterprise, a position she would maintain until her death in 1991. But if Emerson despaired of photography because he thought that the artist did not control the composition of the photograph and therefore was not ultimately responsible for it, (Riding) Jackson, by contrast, thought the poet had complete control over the composition of the poem. For (Riding) Jackson, the failure of poetry came not from a discovery that the poet couldn't control the poem, but that the poet couldn't control what her readers would make of it. The problem, she thought, was the well-established tendency among poetry readers and poets to emphasize the sound and visual shape of the poem as much as its meaning. And treating poems as objects of sensory experience meant that they became the sorts of things to which individual readers could not help but respond differently and which, in turn, became different things to different readers. If for Emerson it's chemical nature that undoes the art of the photograph, for (Riding) Jackson it's something like human nature, with physical response playing the role of chemical reaction, and the undoing clearly hinges for both on a threat to the agency of the artist. But while we might say that Emerson's renunciation of photography belongs to the prehistory of postmodernism, (Riding) Jackson's renunciation of poetry is the mark of its arrival. For postmodernism arrives with the prospect of the reader's involvement in the making of the work. This prospect may have led (Riding) Jackson to abandon poetry, but it has also led her most recent readers to place her at the center of the postmodernist canon.[2]

Since (Riding) Jackson's first poems appeared in the early 1920s, critical attention to her work has gone from being sporadic and often dismissive (from the early 1920s to the late 1930s when (Riding) Jackson struggled to establish herself as one of the legislators of modernism); to virtually

non-existent (from her initial abandonment of poetry until 1970 when her *Selected Poems* was published); to substantial and abundant (during the last two decades, when (Riding) Jackson's poetry and prose have found new readers and new publishers to reprint it). This uneven plot is familiar, of course, for the story of the brilliant but neglected modernist who only belatedly finds her rightful place in the canon is also, as we have already seen, the story of (Riding) Jackson's contemporary and friend, Gertrude Stein. As with Stein, the readership largely responsible for moving (Riding) Jackson from canonical margin to center has been the poets and critics of the language poetry movement. And as we also saw in the case of Stein, what language poetry proposes is precisely what (Riding) Jackson most deplores – in this case, writing that is what its readers make of it. As Steve McCaffery puts it in *North of Intention*, "The writing proposed is less the exclusive code of the author theologically transmitted *down* to a reader recipient than a productive field which a reader can enter to mobilize significations. Proposed. . .is a shift from sign consumption to sign production and a siting of meaning in a productive engagement with writing's indeterminacies."[3] But far from imagining that poems would be the products of a reader's "engagement with writing's indeterminacies," (Riding) Jackson spent the greater part of her career, before and after renouncing poetry, defending the idea that any linguistic production, literary or otherwise, could only mean one thing, and that it was, therefore, autonomous and – like Stein's "entity" – impervious to the effects of any individual reader's engagement with it.

How then do we reconcile the language movement's affection for (Riding) Jackson with her own complete hostility to everything they hold dear – namely, the view of the poem as a "productive field" of "significations"? In one sense, the answer is simple: the language poets don't like what (Riding) Jackson wanted her poems to be; they like what she herself discovered her poems couldn't help but be; it's as if the very thing that made her stop writing is the thing that got the language poets started. In another sense, however, the answer is more complicated. For the language poets – and, we might say, for the practice of a distinctively postmodern poetry in general – the commitment to the poem as "field" of "production" is articulated in opposition to the New Criticism, and especially to what they take to be the New Critical ideal of the autonomy of the work of art. As Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten argue in their manifesto, "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry," "it's the scenario of disinterested

critical evaluation reinforcing the alleged moral autonomy of the poem (after the work of Eliot and the New Critics) that has suffered most in the fact of these new concerns" – by which they mean the concerns raised by their poetry and that of fellow poets like McCaffery, Charles Bernstein, Michael Palmer, and Susan Howe.[4] Of course it is not just the so-called "moral autonomy" of the poem that the language movement seeks to attack, but its ontological autonomy. Indeed, the moral autonomy of the New Critical poem *depends* on its ontological autonomy, for it is only when the poem is (in their view, mistakenly) thought of as having such autonomy that it can also be thought of as imposing its meaning on the reader. Depriving the poem of that autonomy thus becomes a way of opening it to the agency of the reader. But as we shall see, (Riding) Jackson herself, so long as she remained committed to poetry, was deeply committed to what can only be understood as a moral autonomy of the poem, a moral autonomy that in turn can only be understood as derived from its ontological autonomy.

Yet (Riding) Jackson's own commitment to the autonomy of the poem is also deeply opposed to the New Critical one. For from her perspective, the New Criticism's conception of autonomy was never autonomous enough; it was always already too much like the loss of autonomy through readerly agency that Silliman and the others value. Hence (Riding) Jackson, despite the fact that she was in a certain sense one of the founders of the New Criticism, ended up as hostile to it as she was to poetry. So although postmodernity in the form of the language poets understands itself as derived from (Riding) Jackson and as opposed to the New Criticism, (Riding) Jackson would have understood herself as opposed to both. And this is not merely her variation on the old adage "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" (her version, both in life and in theory being, in effect, "The enemy of my enemy is also my enemy"). From (Riding) Jackson's theoretical perspective, the so-called "productive reading" that has emerged as the hallmark of the postmodern was already at the heart of the New Criticism. What I am arguing, in short, is that the language movement's place in the history of twentieth-century poetic theory is not as a repudiation of the New Criticism but as its reassertion. (Riding) Jackson (like Stein), meanwhile, counts among those who remained unimpressed by the logic of indeterminacy that underwrites both the New Criticism and its postmodern successors.

(Riding) Jackson's argument for linguistic determinacy eventually took the shape of a book called *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words,* a massive, 400-plus-page manifesto for a

"one-word-one-meaning view of language," which she worked on with her husband Schuyler Jackson from the late 1930s until just before her death, when she finally agreed to have it published. By the Jacksons' account, the conventional "one-word, *many*-meanings" view of language – the one sanctioned by dictionaries like Webster or the *OED* – mistakenly confuses vocabulary with language by mistaking sounds for words: "Where words are presented as alphabetized vocabulary," they explain,

> meanings of same-sounding words are classed, automatically, under one vocable, as if it constituted a single word: the sound-feature plays the part of the word itself. A tendency has developed in people, strengthened by recent linguistic education, to think of themselves as employing a vocabulary rather than as speaking a language. Only where the fact of language is apprehended as an internal actuality of the mind, the meanings of words recognized as the forms into which the mind casts its intelligent experience, and the sound-aspect of words recognized as an external and incidental feature of their identity, are people's words in their use of them the stuff of language.[5]

Apparently, according to the Jacksons, dictionaries contain no *meanings* of words and, as a consequence, no useful knowledge about language; rather they are simply catalogs of multiple word-associations that have accrued to certain "sound-aspects," or "vocables," over time. Distinguishing between vocabulary and language thus becomes a way for the Jacksons to define meaning itself as "rational," or, to invoke another of their preferred terms, "truth-based," rather than what they would call "associative," or experience-based. To get the force of their distinction, it is important to remember that for them, a vocabulary is precisely *not* a list of words representing meanings, but rather a list of *symbols* representing sounds. And any sound-sequence, or "vocable," in that list can only become a word – and further, can only become *language* – when it acquires a specific meaning intended for a specific use. A vocabulary, in other words, is a list of meaningless sounds, not of meaningful words. The confusion between vocables and words (and between vocabulary and language) occurs, they think, when we mistake the cumulative history of a sound's use for the meaning that attaches to it in any given utterance. In this respect, the distinction between vocabulary and language is a version of the distinction that emerges in Stein's turn from a phenomenological to a logical account of representation. If the problem in "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans" is that the ongoing and cumulative behaviors of a person do not equal the personality you seek to represent, the problem in *Rational Meaning* is that the ongoing and cumulative occurrence of a sound does not equal the meaning you seek to express.

The Jacksons proceed to address a long-standing question in the philosophy of language, the question of whether proper names can be said to mean (as opposed to referring), or, to frame it in their terms, the question of whether names are, strictly speaking, words. Here the distinction between conventional associative accounts of meaning and the Jacksons' rational one emerges most forcefully. "Like a 'vocable' the name," they explain, "is a sequence of sounds of the articulative kind." And because "the use of a name is an act of memory-association," they argue, it is therefore "not, as in the use of a word, an intellectual act" (*Rational Meaning*, 213). With respect to "rational meaning," the issue surrounding both vocables and names is that they have no meaning in the Jacksons' sense of the term. Vocables only acquire meaning by being deployed as words in an effort to express something. And names never acquire meaning because they never become words. That is, they don't, strictly speaking, express anything at all; what names do instead is refer, but they succeed in referring, according to the Jacksons, not through our deliberate effort to express a meaning but through a memory-association we do not control.

The associative function that distinguishes names from words, sounds from meaning, vocabulary from language, and, ultimately, for Laura (Riding) Jackson, mere sensory experience from truth and rational thought, also turns out to be the very ground on which she renounces poetry. At first glance, the Jacksons suggest, it might look as if poetry were the supreme demonstration of rational meaning, insofar as they want to claim that "*every* word [in a poem] is the subject of most studious choice for rightness." But the criteria for choosing turn out to involve the wrong kind of "rightness." Thus when they go on to say that "word-choice in poetry is in large part governed by considerations that have nothing to do with linguistic rightness," they mean that it has nothing to do with *linguistic* rightness because it has nothing to do with the kind of "intellectual act" that language requires. And it has nothing to do with the intellect, they explain, because it has everything instead to do with the senses: "So much of the great care taken in poetic word-choice is taken in the interest of inducing gratifying emotional states (by attention to the impressions producible by word-sounds, and the peculiarly sensuous associations words can carry and be made to carry, and to the physical effects achievable through rhythmic manipulation)" (171). The problem with poetry's gratifying emotional states is that they are like the memory-associations that link a name to a referent or a "sound-entity" to a certain word: they can never be necessitated by the poet's "intellectual act" intending to mean something.

Of course, it is at this particular moment in *Rational Meaning* that the Jacksons are following most closely the New Critical dispensation that, as I. A. Richards writes in *Science and Poetry*, "it is never what a poem *says* which matters, but what it *is*."[6] The difference between saying and being is, in the Jacksons' terms, precisely the difference between communicating a meaning and constituting or transmitting an experience. Moreover, the words that in Richards's formulation "are themselves the main part" of what he calls the "uttered experience" look, from the perspective of the Jacksons' argument, like vocables, or sounds, rather than words. For according to Richards, we can begin to seize upon the proper experience of a poem without concerning ourselves with its words at all, but only with the sensory effects of its syllables: "Let us begin by reading [the poem] very slowly, preferably aloud, giving every syllable time to make its full effect upon us" (*Poetries and Sciences,* 22). In the Jacksons' terms, then, because the "gratifying emotional states" sought after in poetry depend on the rightness of certain sounds (a function, according to *Rational Meaning*, of vocabulary) rather than the rightness of meaning (a function of words), the Jacksons are forced to conclude that "word-choice cannot be performed on poetry" (*Rational Meaning,* 171), for what is chosen instead of words is vocabulary, and instead of meaning, experience. Because poetry, in the Jacksons' view, depends on the kinds of sound-aspects that can accumulate associations with many words, associations that are entirely a function of the reader's individual and idiosyncratic experience, it cannot, they believe, remain consistent with the determinate structure of meaning that governs language more generally. In this respect, we might read the Jacksons' argument as an elaboration of Stein's criticism in "Poetry and Grammar" that "poetry is essentially a vocabulary."[7] Stein's effort to redeem poetry from vocabulary (and thereby from the associative phenomenology she links elsewhere to the categories of "human nature" and "identity") involves extending to poetry something very close to (Riding) Jackson's own theory of rational meaning.[8] And as we saw in the previous chapter, Stein does so by recovering what she imagines to be poetry's most consistent and valuable function – that of naming. The way she finds to accomplish this recovery is to make ordinary words work like proper names and to make names work like logical symbols in an artificial language in such a way that they can only ever be understood as having a determinate reference. In other words, for Stein names become entirely exempt from the kinds of "memory-associations" that (Riding) Jackson thinks define them. But if for Stein, poetry is redeemable only to the extent that what she calls "human nature" can be

made irrelevant to it, for (Riding) Jackson poetry is irredeemable because its emphasis on sound and visual appearance means that what she calls the "impressions," "sensuous associations," and "physical effects" are never irrelevant. Stein obviously never felt compelled to repudiate poetry the way that (Riding) Jackson did, but in *The Geographical History of America* she produces a description of poetry whose terms align precisely with (Riding) Jackson's rationale for abandoning poetry:

> Poetry may be time but if it is then it is remembered time and that makes it be what is seen.
>
> And so poetry a great deal of poetry is what is seen.
>
> And if it is then in so far as it is it is not a master-piece. What is seen may be the subject but it cannot be the object of a master-piece.[9]

Insofar as (Riding) Jackson imagines poetry to be inextricable from the kinds of "sensuous" experiences that yield what is for her the illusion that one word might have many meanings, she is entirely committed to both a New Critical and a postmodern account of poetry. And her subsequent decision that such commitments were an inevitable part of the general practice of poetry would lead inevitably to her renunciation of the art altogether.

(Riding) Jackson's connection to the New Criticism dates to her early involvement with Allen Tate and the Fugitives in the early to mid-1920s, but the story of her New Critical origins often gets told instead around a specific quarrel she entered into over William Empson's acknowledgments in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.[10] In the dedication to the 1930 first edition, Empson cites "Mr. Robert Graves's analysis of a Shakespeare sonnet, 'The expense of spirit in a waste of shame,' in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*" as the primary model for his own critical methodology.[11] (Riding) Jackson, when she was still Laura Riding, had co-authored the book in 1927 with her then-lover Graves, so on seeing Empson's omission, not surprisingly she complained. Her complaint launched an argument with Empson and his publishers that would persist through the subsequent editions of his book, during which time Empson continued to grant Graves sole credit for being the source of his method. Never willing to relinquish the matter, (Riding) Jackson took many opportunities, both public and private, to reinforce the 1927 *Survey's* own prefatory "Note," which begins "This book represents a word-by-word collaboration."[12] Eventually, however, (Riding) Jackson would make an even stronger claim, no longer insisting on her equal part in collaboration, but choosing instead to identify herself as the *Survey's* "first

author" and the "originator" of its method.[13] Of course one way to view the end of this story is to see (Riding) Jackson's *New York Times* obituary credit for being a "founder of [the] New Criticism" as simply one final stamp from a foot notoriously driven to frequent, if not obsessive, stamping.[14] Certainly the reams upon reams of (Riding) Jackson's correspondence – a vast, lifelong record of the intricate, sometimes bitter quarrels she picked with various academics, writers, editors, and publishers, many of which involved long-winded disputes over interpretive details, many of which spanned years – would seem to testify to such a view.[15] But if (Riding) Jackson is now better known for renouncing poetry than for inventing the New Critical way of reading it, the terms of her renunciation are entirely a logical extension of those interpretive methods she and Graves apply in their seminal analysis of Shakespeare's sonnet 129.

The main point of (Riding) Jackson and Graves's reading of the sonnet, indicated by their chapter's subtitle – "A Study of Original Punctuation and Spelling" – is to demonstrate how versions of the sonnet that contain modernized spelling and punctuation yield entirely different meanings from those produced by the sonnet in its "original" printed form. Most of their objections with respect to spelling changes revolve around the ways that modernizations alter the sonnet's syllabic count (as when the word "murdrous" becomes "murderous"), thereby altering the rhythm, and with it, the overall sound-effect of the poem. Punctuation changes, however, while they have less obvious rhythmic consequences, turn out from (Riding) Jackson and Graves's perspective, to do, as they put it, "the most damage: not only to the personal atmosphere of the poem but to the meaning itself" (*A Survey*, 66–67). The "damage" to which they refer occurs when a punctuation change restricts the implications of a line or several lines in ways that, as we shall see below, limit the multiple and simultaneously "interwoven meanings" they identify as the hallmark of Shakespeare's linguistic richness (70).

It is easy to see what (Riding) Jackson and Graves's analysis might have contributed to Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, and to the centrality of ambiguity to the New Criticism more generally. The fact that a Shakespeare sonnet is irreducibly multiple in its meanings, and that those ambiguities are understood to be fully intended by its author, draws from Empson one of the foundational assumptions of the New Criticism, namely that "all good poetry [is] supposed to be ambiguous" (*Seven Types*, xv). Decades later, in *Rational Meaning*, (Riding) Jackson devotes a short supplemental essay to her objections to the New Criticism, with the school's emphasis on "ambiguity" chief among them. But she is not

objecting to "ambiguity" as she understands it, for it only becomes a fault in the New Criticism, she argues, when any given instance of "ambiguity" remains a matter of the "uncertainty of meaning," rather than, as she would see it, simply a suspension of "two [entirely certain] meanings of two already existent words" (*Rational Meaning*, 512). The mistaken ambiguity that (Riding) Jackson describes here is a direct consequence of the mistake that we have already seen the Jacksons attribute to our most familiar dictionaries: that of confusing sounds for words. For them, imagining that a word might have multiple meanings is simply an illusion produced by treating two completely different signs as if they were the same word, more specifically, by treating one signifier/signified (or as the Jacksons would describe it, sound-entity/meaning) combination as identical to the same signifier with an entirely different signified. The later Jacksons' distinction between these two types of ambiguity and what follows from them is already built into the earlier (Riding) Jackson and Graves's criticism of modernized spelling in Shakespeare, and as we shall see, it is also the distinction that drives much of Empson's own argument about ambiguity.

Take one of the pivotal differences that (Riding) Jackson and Graves point out between the modernized and the "original" versions of two lines from sonnet 129:

> On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
> Mad in pursuit and in possession so;
>
> On purpose layd to make the taker mad.
> Made In pursut and in possession so,

The "change from *Made* to *Mad*" that (Riding) Jackson and Graves call "unpardonable" is necessitated, they say, by the modern editors' substitution of a colon for the original period. The result, they say, is to "mak[e] the next line run right on" instead of generating the end-stop that they see as key to the lines' most crucial ambiguity – the simultaneous presence of two very different meanings, one belonging to the verb-form "made" and the other, to the adjective "mad." In the new version of the sonnet, they argue, the reader is confined to the second meaning, but in the original, "*Made* logically follows from *make* of the preceding line: 'to make the taker mad, Made (mad)'; but it also returns to the general idea of lust" (*A Survey*, 68). It's hard to tell here whether (Riding) Jackson and Graves are committing themselves to what the later Jacksons would see as the wrong ambiguity or the right, since the modernization that they criticize (changing "made" to "mad") seems designed precisely to favor a one-word-one-meaning view of language rather than a one-word-many-meanings view. Moreover, when

(Riding) Jackson and Graves treat the original "made" as a representation of both the verb form and the adjective, we might take that as a confusion of the very kind the Jacksons accuse dictionaries of making: treating a sound, "mad," as if it were a word. But in fact the logic here is also perfectly consistent with the logic of *Rational Meaning,* if we take the ambiguity of the antiquated spelling of "Made" as consisting precisely in the simultaneous presence of two different words and two different meanings.

Empson, however, seems to offer a much clearer instantiation of the later (Riding) Jackson's charge that the New Criticism mistakes uncertainty for ambiguity when he embarks on his own effort to distinguish between "double meaning," on the one hand, which, in "manag[ing] to say two things at once" becomes a matter of "conciseness rather than ambiguity," and what he sees as genuine ambiguity, on the other hand, which consists, he says, in "a puzzle as to what the author meant" (*Seven Types*, x). But if Empson's genuine ambiguity (the experience of being *uncertain* about a poem's meaning) is not the same as (Riding) Jackson's genuine ambiguity (the presence in any poem of multiple but *certain* meanings), the first nevertheless depends upon the second. That is, the presence of multiple meanings in poems is what prompts in Empson the feeling of being puzzled about them:

> Now I was frequently puzzled in considering my examples. . . I felt sure that the example was beautiful and that I had, broadly speaking, reacted to it correctly. But I did not at all know what had happened in this 'reaction' . . .And it seemed to me that I was able in some cases partly to explain my feelings to myself by teasing out the meanings of the text. Yet these meanings when teased out. . .were too complicated to be remembered as if in one glance of the eye; they had to be followed each in turn, as possible alternative reactions to the passage; and indeed there is no doubt that some readers sometimes do only get part of the full intention. (*Seven Types*, x)

The point of saying that some readers don't "get" the "full intention," of course, is to suggest that other readers – Empson himself, for example – do. And that one might fail to "react correctly" to a poem by getting only part of the full intention suggests that although the experience of uncertainty about that intention is for Empson both an essential aspect of reading poetry and an essential criterion for identifying something as poetry to begin with, the full intention itself – that is, what the poem means in all its highly determined ambiguity (the kind that matters to [Riding] Jackson) – is not only never uncertain, but also entirely independent of any reader's feeling of uncertainty about it. A pivotal source of difficulty here is Empson's term "react" – itself a legacy from his

Cambridge teacher I. A.Richards – and what hinges upon it is a theoretical inconsistency between thinking of interpretation as a reaction to the text and thinking of it as understanding the text's meaning. As I will go on to show below, both (Riding) Jackson and Empson (personal quarrels notwithstanding) remain committed to the latter, and, by virtue of that commitment, insist upon the necessity of refusing the former. For they both insist that the moment when interpretation becomes "reactive" in the sense of being entirely a function of a reader's response to the text, there can be no such thing as "reacting to it correctly."

The most influential instance of what both Empson and (Riding) Jackson refuse is Richards's 1926 essay "Science and Poetry," an argument predicated entirely on the idea of reading as reaction. For while Richards's theory of interpretation appears to work in the same direction as Empson's – toward the goal of "correctness" – Richards imagines that correctness as a function of having a particular "experience": "A poem. . .is the experience the right kind of reader has when he peruses the verses" (*Poetries and Sciences*, 22). And, as we noted earlier, this experience derives above all from the sights and sounds of the poem: "Let us begin by reading it very slowly, preferably aloud, giving every syllable time to make its full effect upon us" (22). "Effect" is the operative term here, since, like the syllables that matter more to Richards than the words, it marks the difference between understanding a meaning and having an experience. The "right kind of reader" in other words, is not the one who has the correct interpretation of the poem's meaning, but the one who has the appropriate response to the sounds of its phonemes and the shape of its lines on the page: "We may best make our analysis of the experience that arises through reading these lines, from the surface inwards, to speak metaphorically. The surface is the impression of the printed words on the retina" (23). Of course, the metaphor here is only metaphorical to the extent that the retina exists inside rather than on the surface of the eye. Indeed, far from speaking metaphorically about the act of reading, Richards has rendered it as physically literal as possible.

This reduction of reading to a physical response takes its purest form in a famous analogy where Richards compares the interpretation of a poem to the movement of a highly sensitive magnetic instrument through an electrically charged environment:

> Suppose that instead of a single compass we carry an arrangement of many magnetic needles, large and small, swung so that they influence one another. As we move, the perturbations in this system will be very complicated. But for

every position in which we place it there will be a final position of rest for all the needles in which they will in the end settle down, a general poise for the whole system. (26)

Here the compass needles represent what Richards calls our "attitudes" or "interests," so that if, as he believes, "[o]ur interpretation of the poem is the movement of these interests," then the poem itself is obviously the charged environment that sets our "needles" spinning (28). And thinking of the poem as a stimulating environment and reading as a stimulated response obviously goes along with an emphasis on how a poem sounds and looks – on "what it is" rather than "what it says" (33). But thinking of interpretation as a stimulus-response doesn't so obviously go along with the idea that an interpretation can be correct (or incorrect), if only because (and this is the force of the Jacksons' distinction between vocables and words) there is nothing about a given sound in a poem that necessitates one meaning rather than another.

Empson understands what this vision of the poem entails when he paraphrases Richards's claim that "it is never what a poem says that matters but what it is" with the statement that "the meaning of poetry does not matter because it is apprehended as Pure Sound" (*Seven Types*, 8). But while Empson does not disagree with the statement, he does disagree with the critical imperative that Richards attaches to it. That is, Empson agrees that you stop caring about meaning when you only care about sound; what he disagrees with is the idea that you could stop caring about meaning and still think of yourself as engaged in what he identifies as the essential project of literary interpretation: "get[ting] the full intention" of the work. Indeed, for Richards there is no "get[ting] the full intention"; for part of what it means for the poem to be an "effect" of experience is that it cannot possibly be an effect of the poet's intention. In other words, "it is never what a poem says that matters" because, according to Richards the poet never intends to "say" anything by it:

Why, he asks, does the poet use these words and no others? Not because they stand for a series of thoughts which in themselves are what he is concerned to communicate . . . He uses these words because the interests whose movement is the growth of the poem combine to bring them, just in this form, into his consciousness *as a means of ordering, controlling and consolidating* the uttered experience of which they are themselves a part. (*Poetries and Sciences*, 33)

Even when Richards himself asks the kind of question that might seem designed to "get the full intention" of the work – "Why does the poet use these words and no others?" – what controls the poem is not the poet's

intention, but the unconscious "movement" of his "interests." And insofar as his choice of words is simply triggered by reactions to stimuli, it can hardly be understood as a choice at all. Rather the poem consisting of "these words" and "in this form" exists, Richards implies, before it ever becomes available to the poet's consciousness (much less his intention), the effect instead of something like habits, which he does not (and cannot) deliberately control. He makes this point more explicitly when he argues that poetry is something the poet "knows how to do. . .but does not himself necessarily know how it is done" (32). Richards's account of the poem thus begins to look like Emerson's account of the photograph after Hurter and Driffield's discovery of the "characteristic curve," insofar as it is governed by physical determinants rather than by conscious intent.

At this point we should also notice the parallel in Richards's account between the poet's relation to the poem and the reader's, both of which are governed by the same unconscious and uncontrollable "interests." To put this another way, the poem in the first case is an effect of experience (the poet's) and in the second case a potential cause of one (the reader's). This distinction quickly resolves into an identity, however, when Richards begins to describe the poem as a vehicle for the transmission of experience:

> The [poet's] experience itself, the tide of impulses sweeping through the mind, is the source and sanction of the words . . .To a suitable reader the words – if they actually spring from experience – . . .will reproduce in his mind a similar play of interests putting him for the while into a similar situation and leading to the same response. (33)

But of course, the experience the poem supposedly transmits to the reader cannot ever be identical to the one had by the poet; Richards himself recognizes that they can at best be "similar." It is in this context that the function of the "science" in "Science and Poetry" becomes clear. For it now comes to have an indispensable relation to poetry – that of accurately describing the approximate "response" that "suitable readers" are supposed to share: "Until recently," Richards writes, "this preliminary task could only be very incompletely carried out; the psychology of instinct and emotion was too little advanced" (21). If we return now to Richards's earlier description of the "experience the right reader has when he peruses the verses," the "right response" can never be what Empson would call the "correct" one, but only something like the "normal" one (hence Richards's methodological commitment, which he would publish several years later in *Practical Criticism* [1929], to surveying students' responses to poems and compiling statistics based on their recurring features).[16]

In a short chapter called "What Is a Poem?" in *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (1928), (Riding) Jackson describes the inevitable trajectory of the commitment to the poet's experience toward that of the reader. She frames her remarks as a critique of "romanticism," but the course of development she assigns to romantic attitudes about the poem is identical to the course that we have just seen charted in Richards:

> In the old romanticism the poem was an uncommon effect of common experience on the poet. All interest in the poem centred in this mysterious capacity of the poet for overfeeling, for being overaffected. In Poe the old romanticism ended and the new romanticism began. That is, the interest broadened to include the reader . . .[t]he uncommon effect of the experience on the poet became merely incidental to the uncommon effect which he might have on the reader. Mystery was replaced by science; inspiration by psychology.[17]

(Riding) Jackson's definition of the "old romanticism" alludes to Wordsworth's famous claim in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that the poem is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" on the part of a poet who earns his right to the name by being endowed with special sensitivity to experience. And in defining the "new romanticism," (Riding) Jackson is disputing Poe's famous claim in "Philosophy of Composition" that he had refused romanticism by choosing calculated effects over spontaneous inspiration.[18] But that (Riding) Jackson has Richards in mind as much as Wordsworth or Poe is apparent by the time we get to the last sentence, which is a supremely compact synopsis of Richards's argument for how science ("the psychology of instinct and emotion") can now describe what poets and readers experience as "inspiration." By formulating the distinction between the "old" and the "new" romanticism in this way, (Riding) Jackson is turning what she sees as two separate mistakes – thinking of the meaning of the poem as an effect of the poet's experience and thinking of it as an effect of the reader's experience – into the same mistake: thinking the meaning of the poem has anything to do with anyone's experience at all.

What, then, is a poem if it is neither an effect of experience nor the experience of an effect? (Riding) Jackson's own answer to the question "what is a poem" is designed to undo the very question itself:

> A poem is nothing. By persistence the poem can be made something; but then it is something, not a poem. Why is it nothing? Because it cannot be looked at, heard, touched, or read (what can be read is prose). It is not an effect (common or uncommon) of experience; it is the result of an ability to create a vacuum in experience – it is a vacuum and therefore nothing. (*Anarchism Is Not Enough*, 16–17)

By thinking of the poem as "nothing," more specifically, as a "vacuum," and above all, as not subjectible to any of the readerly activities – seeing, hearing, touching, and even reading itself (to the extent that reading involves looking at the words on the page, saying them aloud and hearing their sounds) – that Richards insists are essential if the poem is to "have its full effect upon us," (Riding) Jackson is not, however, simply resisting by contradiction. She is also making a positive claim, taking the strongest possible version of a position that we have already seen articulated by Empson. But where Empson thinks that if you care about the experience of a poem you no longer care about its meaning, (Riding) Jackson thinks that in order to care about the meaning of a poem you have to accept the *irrelevance* of experience, and that the only way to imagine something that does not involve any experience whatsoever is to imagine it not as something but as nothing. If, in other words, according to Richards it is never what a poem says that matters but what it is, and if according to the New Criticism more generally the poem must not mean but be; then according to (Riding) Jackson, it is not what the poem is that matters but what it says – for the poem to mean it must not be.

(Riding) Jackson puts this another way when she describes the "experience" that romanticism (which for her includes the New Criticism) assigns to the poem as an effort to disguise the fact that it is really "nothing": "But as both cause and effect," she says, "the poem counts itself out of experience: proves itself to be nothing masquerading as something. As something it is all that the detractors of poetry say it is; it is false experience" (*Anarchism Is Not Enough*, 17–18). Her point in saying that the poem mistaken for "something" is a "false experience," is not, it should be clear, to suggest that she would prefer a poetry of "true" experience. Indeed, the whole notion of the vacuum is geared toward denying that the poem has any relation to experience whatsoever. Moreover, since an experience cannot itself be either true or false, what counts here as "false" about experience is thinking of the poem as an experience to begin with. But (Riding) Jackson is also criticizing what would become an important New Critical corollary to the poem as experience: the poem as "pseudo-statement." The term used in the context of poetry comes originally from Richards (as does much of what (Riding) Jackson attacks in her criticism of the late 1920s) and refers to his notion that "poetry has constantly the air of making statements" but that it nevertheless consists not in statements but in, as he puts it, "sensory stimuli and (in the widest sense) symbols," which, unlike statements, possess no truth-value (*Poetries and Sciences*, 57–58). The poem as "pseudo-statement" is not strictly

speaking a "false statement," or rather, it is a "false statement" only in the way that it is a "false experience" for (Riding) Jackson. Which is just to say that for Richards, who is committed to the idea of the poem as an experience, the falsehood occurs the moment you imagine the poem *could* be making statements (truth-claims) in the first place. But if for Richards the poem can never be a statement (true or false) *because* it is an experience (neither true nor false), for (Riding) Jackson, the poem can never be an experience *because it is a statement*. And the moment when (Riding) Jackson insists on the presence of statements in poems, she is saying something that is logically disallowed by the New Critical commitment to the poem as experience: the idea that poems can – in fact, not only can but must – make truth-claims.

During the years that (Riding) Jackson was still committed to poetry, she went much further than merely negating New Critical arguments that poems make no truth-claims. For (Riding) Jackson the poet, poems are not statements in any neutral sense of the term – that is, in the sense that they might make false claims as well as true ones. Rather, to count as poems at all, they can only make statements of the highest truth: "A poem," she writes in her preface to *The Poems of Laura Riding* (1938), "is an uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth" (407).[19] To insist that a poem must be a truth of this kind (of the "fundamental and general" kind), however, would seem to work against (Riding) Jackson's insistence a decade earlier that "a poem is nothing." In fact, however – and this is true of (Riding) Jackson's entire career – there is never a moment when these two claims can be anything but thoroughly consistent with one another. (Riding) Jackson understands that the moment a poem is "something" it is (quite literally) a matter of our experience or perception, and the moment the poem becomes a matter of experience it cannot be a matter of truth, if for no other reason than that an experience, rather than being "fundamental and general," will be different for every individual reader, whereas to take something to be true is to take it as true for everyone. As Joyce Piell Wexler succinctly puts it in *Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth*: "The phrase 'true to me' would be obscene to Riding."[20]

(Riding) Jackson's poems themselves – that is, when they are not criticisms of what she saw as irresponsible (because imprecise) modes of thought and communication – comment relentlessly and self-consciously on their own status as expressions of truth.[21] In the poem, "The Talking World," for example, the speaker of the poem proclaims an end to "truth" by means of mere "talk":

> Let the uses of words prevail over words.
> Let there be many ways of not lying
> And no ways of truth-telling.
> Let there be no wrong because no right. (lines 67–70)

Moreover, wherever (Riding) Jackson represents the poem as potentially "something" (to be seen, heard, etc.), that phenomenological prospect occurs not as any function of understanding the poem's true meaning, but as a mutually exclusive alternative to it. In "The Courtesies of Authorship," for example, the reader is instructed to "choose freely between my book and your eye" where choosing to *see* the book (i.e., choosing "your eye") is choosing precisely not to understand the book (lines 5–6). Likewise in "Come, Words, Away," (Riding) Jackson shifts her imperative to the words themselves, calling them away from their physical manifestations as sounds and shapes:

> Come, words, away to where
> The meaning is not thickened
> With the voice's fretting substance,
> Nor the look of words is curious
> As letters in books staring out. . . (lines 5–9)

If meaning becomes "thickened" when words are voiced as sounds (or printed as letters), then "Come, Words, Away" beckons to where the meaning of words can remain transparent. The logic here is identical to the one we have already seen at work in Charles Bernstein's "Artifice of Absorption," only the objective is reversed: for Bernstein the "thickness" of words is a solution to the transparency of meaning, whereas for (Riding) Jackson, the transparency of words is a solution to the "thickening" of meaning.[22]

In "World's End," the ambiguity of the word "sense" serves as a vehicle for representing exactly these alternatives – the physical organs and faculties of sense on the one hand (embodied in ear and eye), and on the other, the rational ability to make sense (both to mean and to understand someone else's meaning):

> The tympanum is worn thin.
> The iris is become transparent.
> The sense has overlasted.
> Sense itself is transparent. (lines 1–4)

But if the transparency of meaning in "Come, Words, Away" was contingent upon relinquishing sight and sound, here those faculties are themselves "become transparent." Of course, these senses depend entirely on

the opacity of the respective organs: the tympanum loses its ability to respond to sound when it wears thin, and a transparent iris would leave us blind. One way to read the next line, then, is to see "sense" as physical, and its having "overlasted" as its having been overused. If we turn our attention to the sound-patterns of these lines, we see (Riding) Jackson creating the conditions for just such a sensory overload. For as we move through these first four lines of the poem, we notice the building effects of repetition, starting with the repetition of similar sounds ("tym-," "thin"), then of exact syllables/letters ("ir-is," "is"), and eventually of whole words ("transparent" and "sense" are both repeated twice, with transparent positioned at the end of lines two and four to form an exact rhyme). These repetitions alert us above all to the sounds and letters of the words, but our alertness to their sensory effects only serves to nullify their sense. This is, of course, a familiar result: pound away at the syllables of a word by saying it over and over, or focus too intently on the sequence of letters that form it, and you quickly lose your grasp on any meaning it might have.

In the next three lines, (Riding) Jackson pushes the pattern of repetition a step further by moving repeated words visually closer together within each line:

> Speed has caught up with speed.
> Earth rounds out earth.
> The mind puts the mind by. ("World's End," lines 5–7)

Here the loss of sense induced by repetition is reinforced by the illogic of the claims being made, an illogic that emerges in each case upon our arrival at the repeated word at the end of the line. Speed, for example, allows one thing to catch up with another or be caught by another, but our sense of "speed" is lost the moment it has "caught up with speed." But even as the stanza obsessively rehearses the ways in which our senses cause a loss of sense, (Riding) Jackson concludes it with a pronouncement of utter visual clarity, a clarity that occurs precisely when we no longer have an eye: "Clear spectacle: where is the eye?"(line 8). Following the logic of "Come, Words, Away," it would now appear that the "sense" we saw in the third line of the poem is our rational sense "overlasting" our attenuating physical senses. It's as if (Riding) Jackson is using sound to hammer out our senses to an infinite thinness in order to create an impossible transparency of meaning. If she hammers long enough, the poem suggests, she can hammer them into nothing. For "World's End" ends by claiming that "even nothing can live through love" (line 23), and the "nothing" that "can live through love" is the very nothing that is poetry in

(Riding) Jackson's answer to the question "What Is a Poem?" It is the same "nothing" – the nothing that marks the utter irrelevance of seeing and hearing – that is (Riding) Jackson's precondition for truth.

Throughout (Riding) Jackson's poems – particularly the many love poems – "love" itself consistently serves as an index for the highest imperative to communicate meaning. What lovers strive for in these poems is perfect understanding, a clarity of meaning that (Riding) Jackson insists can only be a cause, never an effect, of their intense physical desires. Thus, in "When Love Becomes Words" the lovers prove their love "true" not through their bodily embrace but through their language:

> Our love being now a span of mind
> Whose bridge not the droll body is
> . . .
> We can make love miraculous
> As joining thought with thought and a next,
> Which is done not by crossing over
> But by knowing the words for what we mean.
> (lines 192–99)

But (Riding) Jackson is not proposing, as Jerome McGann has argued in his essay on (Riding) Jackson in *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (1993) that meaning only exists in the "embodied, material, and (ultimately) social and interactive" exchange between speakers, or between writer and reader.[23] Far from requiring such an "embodied exchange" (or even a disembodied one), the value of meaning outstrips that of the lover's physical embrace precisely because it requires no "crossing over." What it means for this love to be "true" is just what it means for the statements a poem makes to be true: both are only true if they count as true independent of any one person's interpretation or understanding of them.

In short, (Riding) Jackson's poetic commitment to truth of the "fundamental and general" kind is a commitment to truth as such, that is to the conditions of universality that govern by analogy in any intentionalist account of meaning – and it is the same commitment that later drives her abandonment of poetry for the project of *Rational Meaning*. In the most widely available account of (Riding) Jackson's renunciation of poetry – her own remarks in the introduction to the 1980 reprint of *The Poems of Laura Riding* – (Riding) Jackson locates the reason for her renunciation in poetry's self-presentation as a special use of language:

> The price of poetic freedom of word was poetry's having the identity of a mode of verbal expression outside the norms of expression that language. . .seemed to ordain to be natural, "ordinary" practice. That there was, in the *difference* of poetic expression from "ordinary" expression, the key to the *natural* in language, the use of words according to a principle of truth inspiring the relationship of understanding existing between human minds and language as their common instrument of self-corroboration, no poet of honorable linguistic sensitivity cannot have felt. (Introduction, *Poems*, 4)

We know from *Rational Meaning* that (Riding) Jackson's understanding of what it means to "use words according to a principle of truth" extends entirely from her insistence on the "one-word-one-meaning theory of language." But if the "ideal of poetry" is based on what she calls "the studious choice for rightness" then the difference between the "ideal of poetry" and the imperative she imagines to underlie all human communication simply collapses.

(Riding) Jackson's renunciation of poetry, in other words, does not arise, as we might expect, from her discovery that there is no special literary language because poetic language simply is language. Rather, it arises out of what has to be, by her logic, a contradiction between the "ideal of poetry" on the one hand and its actual, technical composition on the other. For the only substantial difference between poetry and non-poetry, (Riding) Jackson observes, is the emphasis the former places on its sensory appeal – that is, on material features of the words (their letters, phonemes, stress-patterns), features that have nothing to do with their capacity for presenting the truth (i.e., their meaning). Everything about a poem that, in Richards's account, should captivate our attention is, in (Riding) Jackson's account, the source of ruinous distraction from the truth: "I came close to achieving, in my poems, trueness of intonation and direct presence of mind in word. But, what I achieved in this direction was ever sucked into the whorl of poetic artifice, with its overpowering necessities of patterned rhythm and harmonic sound-play, which work distortions upon the natural proprieties of tone and word."[24] Because the physical effects of "rhythm and harmonic sound-play" are inevitably personal and idiosyncratic, varying from reader to reader, they cannot fulfill the promise of a universal truth.

But it is, of course, the failure to fulfill this promise that has made (Riding) Jackson a central forerunner for the language poets. If (Riding) Jackson worries that meaning tends to disappear behind the "whorl of poetic artifice," the surface of "patterned rhythm" and "sound-play"

(which produce irreducibly multiple experiential effects), the language poets who have sought to claim (Riding) Jackson as their precursor have founded their poetics on doing just what she most vehemently refuses. When Ron Silliman laments "the disappearance of the word that lies at the heart of the invention of the illusion of realism and the breakdown of gestural poetic form," the thing lost is unmistakably a version of (Riding) Jackson's "whorl of poetic artifice" and Richards's "pure sound." Not surprisingly, the recovery of "gestural form" requires the disjunctive style Silliman identifies both with his fellow language poets and (as I have argued, mistakenly) with (Riding) Jackson and Stein, his privileged predecessors.[25] But if for Silliman the "disappearance of the word" behind its meaning occurs at the expense of its visual and aural materiality, for (Riding) Jackson, the word disappears behind its materiality at the expense of its meaning.

Despite what would appear to be mutually exclusive alternatives, both Silliman and Charles Bernstein nevertheless argue that the poetic effort to resist semantic meaning by foregrounding the materiality or "artifice" of language is an effort that does not, as Bernstein puts it, "cede meaning" altogether (*A Poetics, 10*). But as we have seen in the preceding chapter, the meaning that the materiality of language supposedly does not cede is entirely synonymous with the experience of its sensory effects; indeed, it is precisely this conflation of meaning and experience that produces the "poetics of indeterminacy" that language poetry serves to celebrate. It is also what produces the kind of ambiguity that (Riding) Jackson rejects in her critique of the New Criticism – the kind that involves thinking of the meaning of a word (or an entire poem) as undecidably multiple. What Silliman calls "gestural form" and what Bernstein calls "artifice" are the crucial problem for poetry in (Riding) Jackson's mind; they are what plays on our senses so that we lose sight of the poem's sense. And while the experiential effects of the poem are as many as there are readers of the poem (this plurality is what the language poets like about foregrounding materiality), for (Riding) Jackson the sense of the poem can only ever be one thing: what the poet means to express (this singularity is what the language poets dislike about foregrounding meaning).

Thus, if for (Riding) Jackson, the intention of an utterance is what rescues it from becoming an indeterminate field of sensory effects, for the language poets, casting the utterance as an indeterminate field of sensory effects is precisely what rescues it from the bullying authority of intention. Steve McCaffery's *North of Intention* articulates this logic in political terms, linking the very kind of investment in intention that we have seen

in (Riding) Jackson to a profiteering capitalism at the level of linguistic production. "The disappearance of the word" (Silliman) that occurs when understanding the text "absorbs the mark, erases it" (Bernstein, *A Poetics*, 64) also occurs, according to McCaffery, entirely at the expense of the reader's physical participation in textual production, resulting in a thoroughly alienated labor: "Profit," he says, "shows itself to be predicated upon a loss, for the physical act of reading or writing must withdraw so that what has been said can be considered meaningful" (*North of intention*, 204). But poetry that, by resisting meaning, "comes closer to being an experience in language than a representation by it" (24) yields a very different outcome, "establishing a politicized effervescence within the code in which signs can never settle into messages from 'authors' and intentional language can hold no power" (150). "Power" here ceases to be something possessed by either text or author; if it persists at all, it does so by being distributed among readers, so that they all become active participants in the production of the text they read: "What is important to grasp here is the characteristic *excess* of this [type of] text. In a way it cannot be spoken about but only participated within and a criticism would comprise the documentation of its reading as an extended writing" (150). Once reading becomes a function of our sensory experience, the text itself becomes an effect of our senses, and we become, quite literally, its bodily producer. When McCaffery envisions our reading of the text as an "extended writing," in other words, he is imagining the conditions under which the authorship of the text is no longer confined to the author, but extends to each and every one of its readers.

In *A Poetics,* Bernstein takes the idea of reading as an "extended writing" of the text to its inevitable conclusion, one arrived at decades earlier by I. A. Richards and Cleanth Brooks: "reading" that is, he argues, "almost impossible apart from the tautological repetition of the poem" (11). Thus, for Bernstein, as for Richards and Brooks before him, the risk that some of the poem's material features might otherwise pass unnoticed is precisely the risk of committing the heresy of paraphrase. And reading will no longer get us around it – that is, we avoid the heresy not by reading the poem, but by "repeating" it. In the context of language poetry, then, the heresy is no longer a matter of mistaking the meaning of the text, but rather of failing to reproduce the object that is the text itself.

Rational Meaning remained unpublished throughout (Riding) Jackson's lifetime, but when it finally did appear shortly after her death in 1991, it came with an introduction by Charles Bernstein. What is remarkable about Bernstein's reading of the book is the degree to which he is at

pains to point out (and he does so quite accurately) the vast gulf between the linguistic sympathies of postmodernism and those of (Riding) Jackson herself. For not only do the Jacksons argue vociferously against the poststructuralist linguistic theories that Bernstein and others claim as their own foundation; the connection between the experience of sound and the production of meaning that characterizes language poetry itself involves the very act of linguistic bad faith that (Riding) Jackson imagines herself to be renouncing when she renounces poetry. Not surprisingly, in the introduction to *Rational Meaning* Bernstein prefers (Riding) Jackson's poetry to her linguistics; and indeed it is a standard thing to say about poets, that they are stronger in their practice than in their theory. And yet the theory that Bernstein uses to rescue (Riding) Jackson is precisely the theory that she wished to be rescued from. Where Bernstein wants (Riding) Jackson to be an early incarnation of himself, Bernstein himself turns out to be a belated incarnation of I. A. Richards. But where Richards thought (mistakenly, from [Riding] Jackson's point of view) that the experience of readers could be governed by the poem, Bernstein sees that once the experiences of readers become relevant, they must be understood to produce different poems. So if, in the end, Laura (Riding) Jackson is anything but the postmodernist *avant la lettre* that postmodernism wants her to be, Bernstein, *tout après la lettre*, may be understood as the New Critic that Richards didn't quite succeed in being and that Bernstein can't possibly imagine himself to be.

CHAPTER 4

Modernism's old literalism: Pound, Williams, Zukofsky, and the objectivist critique of metaphor

Reviewing Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (reissued in 1934 in an abridged edition that reduced the novel's original 900-plus pages by almost half), Conrad Aiken complains about the still relentless effect of the novel's repetitious style, calling it "a complete esthetic miscalculation: it is dull; and although what it seeks to communicate is interesting, the cumbersomeness of the method defeats its own end. . .[I]t sounds as if someone attempted to paraphrase Jung's 'Psychological Types' in Basic English."[1] Aiken's passing reference to the lingua franca known as Basic English would be lost on many readers now, but in 1934, I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden's 850-word version of English, touted as an easy-to-learn alternative to Esperanto that would solve the communication difficulties of a "babelized" political economy, was an object of popular, and indeed, of distinctly poetic fascination.[2] Aiken's point in invoking it here is to reiterate the frequent charge of excessive simplicity in Stein's writing by attributing that simplicity to an impoverished vocabulary (by implicit contrast to, say, the nearly 30,000-word vocabulary attributed to Shakespeare).[3] The idea, then, is that Stein's choosing to repeat sentences with only slight variation over dozens of pages entails using a disproportionately small selection of words in forming those sentences. Obviously for Aiken, Basic English is just an incidental vehicle for denouncing one of Stein's early literary experiments. To poets like Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky, however, Basic looked like a violation of the very medium of their art. But their objection wasn't, as one might expect, to the system's drastic reduction in vocabulary – it was to the specific grammatical means by which that reduction was carried out, namely, Basic's emphasis on nouns at the expense of verbs: "Basic English," explains Ogden, "as may be seen from the vocabulary, in which 600 out of 850 words are noun-forms, is a system in which the noun plays a dominant part."[4] According to both Pound and Zukofsky, however, nouns are weak because they function as more or less static names of things, tending, as Zukofsky puts it, "to confine thought,"

whereas verbs are strong and dynamic because they represent actions.[5] Both poets, in pursuing their linguistic interest in actions (Zukofsky following the lead of Pound, Pound following the lead of Ernest Fenollosa), single out Chinese ideographs (in explicit contrast to Basic's nouns) as ideally suited to poetry because they supposedly function as "names and acts at one and the same time" ("Basic," 43). Thus, Zukofsky explains, when Basic includes a word like "control" in its list of "things" and forbids us to use it as a verb (indeed, forbids us even to call it a verb), it destroys the feature of English most suited to the service of poetry – most suited because most like what they thought was the great virtue of Chinese: "The *simple* English verbs, a full number of which BASIC includes as nouns, are a shorthand for *act* and *thing* that the Chinese sees perhaps in his ideograph. . .[N]eglect of these verbs is a loss" (160).

In fact, the literary hostility to the noun was so widespread that the same year that Aiken was suggesting an affinity between Stein's writing and Basic, Stein herself was explicitly criticizing the noun and celebrating the verb in terms that correspond closely to the terms of Pound's and Zukofsky's attacks on Basic. In her 1934 lecture, "Poetry and Grammar," she worries over the fact that, on the one hand, poetic tradition locates the creative vocation of the poet in naming the things she loves, but on the other, once things are named then "the name does not go on doing anything to them and so why write in nouns."[6] Verbs meanwhile, are "lively" for Stein just as they are for Pound and Zukofsky: they "can change to look like themselves or to look like something else, they are, so to speak, on the move" (*Writings*, 315). Stein's desire for a poetry that would still have all the creative force of naming without any of its fossilizing consequences – one that would, as she puts it, "mean names without naming them" (*Writings*, 330) – certainly appears to line up with Pound's and Zukofsky's desire for a poetry that, aspiring after Chinese ideographs, would make names indistinguishable from acts. But while one could describe all three of these writers – perhaps even modernist poetry generally – as engaged in a critique of the noun, I will be arguing that there turn out to be two diametrically opposed accounts of what constitutes a poem at work within this apparently uniform project.[7]

If the desire to name is supposed to have led poets to an ill-considered emphasis on nouns by virtue of their being names of things, Stein's solution, which involves redeeming the noun, is to replace the idea of the name of a thing with what she calls "entity." But as Stein's

contemporary Laura (Riding) Jackson has already shown us, the poem that truly counts as an entity – as having the integrity and autonomy that will qualify it as a masterpiece – must not only not be the name of a thing (a particular, individual act of reference); it must itself be "nothing."[8] The Pound/Williams/Zukofsky version of this critique of the noun (which also involves championing the verb) will lead, by contrast, not to the noun being an entity and thereby being nothing, but to the noun being a *thing*. It will lead to what Zukofsky's mentor, William Carlos Williams, meant by "no ideas but in things" and to Zukofsky's imperative – articulated in his February 1931 "objectivists" issue of *Poetry* magazine – that the poem achieve a "rested totality."[9] And for much of the last half of the twentieth century through to the present, it will lead, quite literally, to the poem as "object." What this wide-reaching modernist (and, I would argue, post-modernist) poetics wants, in other words, is a noun that no longer counts as the name of a thing, but that counts as a thing instead of a name. Furthermore, this desire for the thing instead of a name takes the form of another pervasive critique in modernism, the critique of metaphor by way of a more generalized critique of analogy.

NOUNING THE VERB

In *Debabelization: with a Survey of Contemporary Opinion on the Problem of a Universal Language* (1931), C. K. Ogden cites a remark made over a decade earlier by the German journalist Helmuth von Gerlach: "'A simplified English would be the ideal world language. No language with literary ambitions. For Heaven's sake no seeking after an 'artistic' world language! No, exclusively a practical medium of understanding. Pure utility must decide, the "aesthetic" to be put aside. . .'"[10] Not surprisingly, Ogden suggests that this "remarkable passage. . .might have been designed specifically with a view to propaganda in favor of Basic." But the propaganda value of Gerlach's remark hinges on more than his specification of English as the international language of the future; the idea that any such language must be free of "literary ambitions" (the choice to rhyme "decide" with "aside" notwithstanding) also lines up perfectly with what Ogden saw as one of Basic's main strengths: that it manages, "by virtue of its reduced vocabulary [to eliminate] the majority of idiomatic overgrowths" (*Debabelization*, 29). And it is the elimination of "idiomatic overgrowths" that Ogden links directly to the most controversial claim of Basic, namely that it contains no verbs:

> In Basic, since there are no "verbs," "having cut the meat" becomes "when he had got the meat cut," just as "when she had cleaned the table" becomes "when she had got the table cleaned". So, too, where ordinary English kicks, bites, pushes, cries, etc., Basic is content to use only the noun form, and to give a kick (a bite, a push, a blow, a cry, etc.). (*Debabelization,* 28–29)

This passage makes clear the desire in Basic to get rid of verbs by replacing them with nouns. But even though we may easily grant that "kick" is no longer a verb when it becomes "a kick," we may be much less inclined to grant that "give" in "to give a kick" is not a verb. Indeed, in this context, Ogden's claim that "there are no 'verbs'" raises an obvious question, one that speaks directly to one of the major controversies over Basic: If "give" and, for that matter, "get" aren't verbs, what are they?

The answer given by the Basic vocabulary list in Ogden's *General Introduction* is that these two words, along with sixteen others also formerly known as verbs and eighty-four words formerly known as articles, prepositions, pronouns, and conjunctions, fall into a single category. All hundred of them are identified uniformly as "OPERATIONS" to be performed on another category, "THINGS." For their part, "THINGS" – that is, nouns – make up nearly three-quarters of the word list, with 150 "QUALITIES" (of "THINGS") making up the remainder. Ogden acknowledges, however, that the 850 words in the Basic list might not suffice for learners working in specialized contexts; hence, an addendum for technical vocabulary: "By the addition of 100 words required for general science, and 50 for any particular science, a total of 1,000 enables any scientific congress or periodical to achieve internationalism" (*General Introduction*, 10). But making room for specialized vocabularies turns out, once again, to be a matter of making room for nouns: "It should be noted that the scientific addenda are *all* noun forms, i.e., they can be learnt as names requiring no further grammatical instruction" (11). The slide from learning "nouns" to learning "names" is striking, for the name here is simply a noun stripped of its grammatical functionality and rendered purely deictic.[11] Indeed, the ideal dictionary for Basic turns out to be one that points to a picture to teach us a word: "One important advantage of any system which features the noun is the assistance to be derived from the pictorial method, and particularly from the pictorial dictionary to which the various Larousse compilations are already pointing the way. In addition, therefore, to a copiously illustrated dictionary, a volume entitled *Basic by Pictures* will eventually be available. . ." (*General Introduction*, 43–44). The Basic vocabulary list itself already pushes in the direction by dividing its THINGS into those that are "General" and those that are

"Picturable." Moreover, it isn't just nouns that undergo the transformation into names. The eighteen Basic words that count in "standard" English as verbs are described in the more elaborate outline of rules for the system as "names of the fundamental operations." Thirteen of them are also accompanied by a pictorial explanation. At its extreme, then, the larger project of Basic is apparently not just to simplify the grammatical functions of the language, but to eliminate grammar as such by turning nouns and verbs alike into names, and everything into vocabulary.

Basic's selling hook, however, was its physical presentation of that vocabulary: all 850 words, along with rules for their use and "examples of word order," neatly arranged on one side of a letter-sized insert folded to an even smaller size that would fit in a reader's pocket. Near the bottom of the sheet, at the end of the complete word list, comes the following explanation, in just this form:

IT
IS
POSSIBLE
TO
GET
ALL
THESE
WORDS
ON
THE
BACK
OF
A
BIT
OF
NOTEPAPER
BECAUSE
THERE
ARE
NO
'VERBS'
IN
BASIC
ENGLISH (*General Introduction*, insert)

That this sentence takes the form of a list – as do the two "examples of word order" – creates the effect of treating grammar as if it were indistinguishable from vocabulary.[12] Indeed, when Basic gives "examples of word order" rather than sample sentences, it is as if there could be no sentences in Basic – as if the point in reading the examples were to see lists of words rather than statements. From this perspective, the vocabulary of Basic no longer looks like a lexicon for a language, but a lexicon instead of a language.

In "Poetry and Grammar," Stein treats poetry as if it shared Basic's emphasis on vocabulary at the expense of grammar and as if the challenge of writing it were akin to overcoming that limitation. By this I don't mean to suggest that she worries over the quantity of words available to her; rather, when she describes poetry as "essentially a vocabulary" the difficulty she has with that vocabulary is that it, like Basic, is "entirely based on the noun" (*Writings*, 327). Moreover, if Stein's problem with the noun is that "it has been the name of something for such a very long time," the solutions she identifies are the very sort that the vocabulary reductions of Basic appear designed to avoid. That is, poetry's project of saving the noun requires, according to Stein, either creating new nouns or reinvesting the "old" ones with something like their grammar: "That is the reason that slang exists it is to change the nouns which have been names for so long. I say again. Verbs and adverbs and articles and conjunctions and prepositions are lively because they all do something and as long as anything does something it keeps alive" (316).

"LET US HAVE FRESH MEAT"

Of course, Stein's own example of keeping a noun alive is her famous line "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," which she says made the rose "red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years."[13] But even as Stein is distinguishing her rose from all the dead ones in English poetry, her line is clearly designed to reproduce the same analogizing structure that governs one of the most faded roses in English poetry: "My love is a red, red rose." The syntax these roses share – crudely put, a subject plus "be"-verb plus predicate nominative – is what allows two or more nouns or noun phrases to be grammatically interchangeable, and thereby, for one thing ("my love" or "Rose") to acquire the qualities of another ("a red, red rose" or just "a rose"). From the moment Stein chooses to insert the same noun into the variable positions of this syntactical equation, however, she foregrounds the analogical principle of metaphor as such over any specific metaphorical uses to which her rose might be put. But obviously the

capitalization of "Rose" generates an important ambiguity here – if it simply indicates the beginning of a sentence, we read "Rose" as the first of four instances of the same noun, "rose"; however, if it indicates a name, "Rose" cannot be the same noun as "rose" because it isn't, strictly speaking, a noun at all. Thus a further effect of Stein's line is something like the reverse of Basic: if Basic gives us nouns turned into names, Stein's rose gives us a name turned into a noun, as we saw in chapter 2. But where in the earlier reading of that line our concern was confined to Stein's theory of the name, our concern here is with how the name functions in Stein's theory of metaphor. And from this perspective, the alternatives generated by the capitalization of "Rose" are no longer at odds with each other, since the different name becomes the repeated noun precisely by means of the metaphorizing grammar that Stein's sentence serves to dramatize.

It is easy to see why Stein thinks of herself as reviving the rose: by calling attention to its grammatical status as a noun and inserting it into a repeatable formula representing the substitutive logic of poetic analogy, she has transformed the device of metaphor, which seems at once inevitable and no longer viable, into an infinitely renewable resource. Stein's remark that "poetry is concerned with. . .replacing the noun" (*Writings*, 327) does more, however, than paraphrase her own effort to sublimate the grammar of metaphorical substitution. It is also an apt description of another well-known modernist's effort to revive the rose – William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All* (1923), in which one poem begins by declaring the very condition that drives Stein's own poetic reforms: "The rose is obsolete."[14]

But if both Stein and Williams solve the obsolescence of metaphor by, as Stein says, "replacing the noun," Williams does so by replacing nouns not with themselves ("a rose" with "a rose"), but with empty space:

> The rose carried weight of love
> but love is at an end – of roses
>
> It is at the edge of the
> petal that love waits
>
> Crisp, worked to defeat
> laboredness – fragile
> plucked, moist, half-raised
> cold, precise, touching
>
> What
>
> The place between the petal's
> edge and the
>
> From the petal's edge a line starts. . . (lines 21–32)

In two places in "The rose is obsolete" Williams positions an article – the grammatical announcement of a noun to follow – at the "edge" of a line. In the first case, a noun – "petal" – does indeed follow in the enjambment of the line, but in the second case, no noun fulfills the article's promise; we are met only with the blank space after it and a return to the left margin to begin a new line (and a new sentence) altogether. The line to which the line itself refers ("from the petal's edge a line starts") occurs in place of the missing noun, even as the word "line" sits at the "edge" of the "petal" that came with the previous line-ending "the." In "replacing the noun," the line thus occupies the space of substitutability marked by the void after the hanging "the," but it also defines that space, performing a function similar to the predicative equation of Stein's "Rose is a rose." For what the "line" represents earlier in this passage is precisely a *structural* divide in the formal architecture of metaphor. After all, the "petal's edge" where "a line starts" is also "the edge of the petal" eight lines earlier where "love waits." It is structurally equivalent to the "is" that both separates and grammatically equates tenor (the "love" that "waits") and vehicle (the "rose" that can no longer carry the "weight" of its tenor). And here it is also quite literally the graphic line Williams draws between the "end" of "love" and "of roses": "but love is at an end – of roses." In short, both Stein and Williams produce roses that lay bare the underlying structure of a familiar metaphorical equation. But while Stein ends by sublimating the equation in all its mathematical abstraction, Williams ends by refusing abstraction altogether. He dismantles the equation like a machine, leaving an array of nonfunctioning parts and empty spaces, and erecting a single, perfect flower in their place: "The fragility of the flower / unbruised / penetrates spaces" (lines 40–42).

Far from obsolete, Williams's rose ends with the appearance of never having lost its freshness in the first place. But exactly what transformation has it undergone? If "love" occupies one of the two "spaces" in the structural equation formed by the familiar metaphor ("rose" the other), there is certainly a way in which the obsolete rose "penetrates" the space of love with its qualities; it is a vehicle driven by force of analogy. The point of the flower that subsequently "work[s] to defeat/laboredness" and emerges "unbruised" at the end is not, however, to create a new metaphor by resembling some other thing – even another rose. Moreover, the flower that "penetrates" the "spaces" at the end of Williams's poem acquires, over the course of the poem, a series of qualities – metallic ones – that also

bear little resemblance to those of actual roses: the "sense / makes copper roses / steel roses" rather than soft or thorny or scented – or red – ones (lines 18–20). The pun on sense is relevant here as well, for the senses of this new rose (what we see, touch, and smell) serve precisely to foreclose all the things the obsolete rose used to mean. Once the rose no longer "carrie[s the] weight of love," it has ceased to carry the sense of love. Indeed, as I will go on to show, the point of producing the flower that appears at the end of this poem is to make it be what it is precisely by keeping it from meaning what it used to mean, or for that matter, from meaning anything at all.

"The rose is obsolete" opens the seventh of *Spring and All*'s twenty-seven poems, all of which are untitled, headed instead by roman numerals and presented in sequence, interspersed with short prose "chapters" that make up an essay on poetry and the imagination. In it, Williams characterizes "great works of the imagination" as those that "escape illusion and stand between man and nature as saints once stood between man and the sky" (*Imaginations*, 112). Throughout *Spring and All,* the figure who repeatedly emerges as the exemplary producer of such works is Williams's contemporary, the artist Juan Gris, whose painting, *Roses* (1914) represents what Williams describes as a more general modernist effort: "But such a picture as that of Juan Gris, though I have not seen it in color, is important as marking more clearly than any I have seen what the modern trend is: the attempt is being made to separate things of the imagination from life" (*Imaginations*, 107). The problem prompting the modernist solution is, according to Williams, the tradition of mimetic realism that consists in "copying after nature." "There is no life in the stuff," he says, "because it tries to be 'like' life" (129). And paradoxically, the way the poet must restore "life" to poetry is to eradicate any tendency it has to be "'like' life." Thus Williams repeatedly describes the imagination as a "force" that "cleave[s] through everything," "separating things of the imagination from life" by shattering the mirror mimetic art holds up to life. The result, he says, is an art that "is not a matter of 'representation'. . .but of separate existence" (117).

It is one thing when art "tries to be 'like' life," quite another when love is "like" a rose; yet for Williams the likeness of verisimilitude and the likeness of simile both represent "traditions" of "plagiarism" that modern poetry must overcome to produce "great works of the imagination." The rose my love is like may not be "copying after nature" in the way that Williams thinks a realist still life or novel does; nevertheless, it becomes

obsolete precisely by having been copied, "plagiarized" for centuries in the service of the same associations:

> The man of imagination who turns to art for release [has to contend] with the sky through layers of demoded words and shapes. Demoded, not because the essential vitality which begot them is laid waste. . .but because meanings have been lost through laziness or changes in the form of existence which have let words empty.
>
> . . .Crude symbolism is to associate emotions with natural phenomena such as anger with lightning, flowers with love it goes further and associates certain textures with
>
> Such work is empty. (100)

At this point, the passage from "Poetry and Grammar" where Stein lists the parts of speech that are "lively" by contrast to nouns begins to sound like a paraphrase of *Spring and All*, for both make similar claims about the "essential vitality which begot" words, suggesting that it is, if not entirely "laid waste," at least obscured or made unavailable by their habitual use: "a noun" that "has been the name of something for such a very long time" (Stein, *Writings*, 316) is nothing if not "demoded." One solution to that demodedness is, of course, to try to make nouns work as if they had no history of use, and Williams himself praises Stein for doing just this. In a short essay called "A 1 Pound Stein," published the same year as Stein's American lecture tour (1935), he describes her as having "gone systematically to work smashing every connotation that words have ever had, in order to get them back clean."[15] For Stein, finding a way of "get[ting words] back clean," revealing, in effect, "the essential vitality that begot them," does indeed look like a matter of treating them as if they were being used for the first time – as if they were names instead of nouns, as Stein herself writes in "Poetry and Grammar": "Now actual given names of people are more lively than nouns which are the name of anything and I suppose that this is because after all the name is only given to that person when they are born" (*Writings*, 316).

But when Stein asks "was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them" (*Writings*, 330), she is offering a very different idea of the poet's vocation from the one Williams proposes when he declares that "there is work to be done in the creation of new forms, new names for experience" (*Imaginations*, 117). Obviously one difference is that Stein rejects the idea of "inventing" names outright: "Of course you might say why not invent new names new languages but that cannot be done" (*Writings*, 331). But even as Williams locates "the value of the imagination. . .in its ability to make

words," he doesn't *invent* new ones; any competent reader of English already knows most or all of the words in *Spring and All*, and whatever words she doesn't know have been seen many times by other English speakers (*Imaginations*, 120). For our purposes, then, the difference that matters between "meaning names without naming them," and "creat[ing] new names for experience" is not between inventing or not inventing new words; rather, I will argue, it is the difference between a poetry that values *meaning* and a poetry that values *experience*. The passage in which Williams deplores the "empty" "work" of "crude symbolism" comes several pages before "The rose is obsolete," but it too contains the signature blank space of that poem: "Crude symbolism is to associate emotions with natural phenomena such as anger with lightning, flowers with love it goes further and associates certain textures with . . ."

Moreover, this passage employs the blank to precisely the same end. Because the word that precedes the empty space is a preposition, we expect (just as we would on seeing an article) a noun or noun phrase to follow, but because "with" also occurs immediately after two parallel constructions that pivot around the same preposition ("anger with lightning, flowers with love"), it signals us further to expect a noun that will complete a metaphorical equation. To refuse the noun at this precise moment, then, is to refuse the metaphor; just as important, it is to refuse to *name* the missing association. But what kind of thing does Williams imagine himself to be creating if "creating new names for experience" involves refusing names, replacing them with nothing, with empty spaces? When Stein repeats the same noun in "Rose is a rose," thereby abstracting the metaphorical structure in which qualities can be transferred from one thing to another, or we might say in this context, where meanings can be transferred from one word to another, she draws our attention to the conditions of possibility for producing meaning as such. When Williams replaces the noun with a blank space, by contrast, he gives us not the conditions under which meaning occurs, but the conditions under which experience occurs. For the graphic space literally makes room on the page, transforming the words that might fill them into things instead of language. In other words, the word that no longer means but simply fills space is an object of our physical experience. And as such, it becomes unlike any other.[16]

The opening chapters of *Spring and All* call for a wholesale destruction of the world and everyone living in it (or at least, everyone in Europe): "Kill! Kill! The English, the Irish, the French, the Germans, the Italians, and the rest: friends or enemies, it makes no difference, kill them all" (*Imaginations*, 90). Written shortly after the appearance of T. S. Eliot's

The Waste Land, the devastation upon which Williams predicates his *Spring* clearly is meant to exceed (and parody) that of Eliot's "cruelest month": "If I could say what is in my mind in Sanskrit or even Latin," Williams writes, "I would do so" (90). But where the post-World War I killing fields of Eliot's *The Waste Land* may or may not have "begun to sprout," the human sacrifices that constitute Williams's wasteland are unambiguous sources of sustenance: "We make *leberwurst* of them. Bratwurst" (90). The transformation doesn't end there, however; Williams proceeds to turn his kill into even rawer material: "let there be fresh meat." (90). In progressing (or regressing) from "bratwurst" to "fresh meat," these corpses move from having form (however crude) to having no form – becoming, rather, the material basis for forms yet to exist. In this respect, the parallel between the obliteration of life that yields fresh meat and the obliteration of nouns that yields white space is more than obvious, but it's less obvious how killing off living beings has anything to do with killing off metaphors. The connection becomes clearer when Williams discovers one tiny form that survives the carnage: "Now, in the imagination, all flesh, all human flesh has been dead upon the earth for ten million, billion years. The bird has turned into a stone within whose heart an egg, unlaid, remained hidden" (93). And that preserved seed is enough to bring about yet another round of plagiarism, this one in the form of evolution:

> It is spring! but miracle of miracles a miraculous miracle has gradually taken place during these seemingly wasted eons. Through the orderly sequences of unmentionable time EVOLUTION HAS REPEATED ITSELF FROM THE BEGINNING.
>
> Good God!
>
> Every step once taken in the first advance of the human race, from the amoeba to the highest type of intelligence, has been duplicated, every step exactly paralleling the one that preceded in the dead ages gone by. A perfect plagiarism results. Everything is and is new. Only the imagination is undeceived. (93)

If a single form suffices to generate a whole "new" world that nevertheless consists entirely of copies (evolution understood here as traits reproducing themselves), suddenly the bar is raised considerably for what can qualify as truly fresh meat.

What cannot so qualify are any of the preliminary modernist efforts – those of the imagist movement a decade earlier – to escape the "demoded words and shapes" of traditional poetic conceits. Williams lumps his own early work and, by allusion, that of Ezra Pound, together with the same

"crude symbolism" that he identifies as completely "empty" and (a few pages later in the rose poem) "obsolete":

> Everything I have done in the past – except those parts which may be called excellent – by chance have that quality [of "crude symbolism"] about them.
>
> It is typified by use of the word "like" or that "evocation" of the "image" which served us for a time. Its abuse is apparent. (100–01)

Since the standard for truly fresh meat clearly requires that it be unreproducible – that it be un*like* anything else – Williams thus finds himself in the position of repudiating not only traditional similes of the "*x* is like *y*" variety, but analogy of any kind. Moreover, in seeking to disable likeness as such he necessarily repudiates the standard of abstraction underpinning both Stein's concept of the masterpiece as "entity" and Laura (Riding) Jackson's concept of the poem as "vacuum."

PETALS ON A STEEL BOUGH

In the course of transforming the "obsolete" rose at the beginning of his poem into the one that "penetrates spaces" at the end Williams nevertheless passes through an intermediate position that looks much more like that of Stein and (Riding) Jackson, and, at least provisionally, of Pound. That is, in the early lines of the poem, he refers to the "line" that we have already seen to be so crucial to the rose's transformation in mathematical (more specifically, in geometrical) terms, at the same time producing a literal version of the geometrical "line" in the form of an em-dash: "so that to engage roses / becomes a geometry —" (lines 11–12). The line only exists temporarily in this geometrical form, however; by the time the flower must "penetrate spaces" the line has acquired physical dimensions and a material presence, "being of steel / infinitely fine, infinitely / rigid" (lines 33–35). But, as I will go on to show, for Williams to dismiss the geometrical form of the line in favor of its materialization in steel is to dismiss not just the limits of imagism, but specifically Pound's own efforts to move beyond them.[17]

Pound's presence in "The rose is obsolete" is unmistakable; the fact that Williams's rose emerges in steel can only recall Pound's "rose in steel dust." Evoking the pattern that iron filings make in the presence of a magnet, Pound's steel rose is a recurring image throughout his work, and in his essay on Cavalcanti and medievalism, it serves as both an analogy for the forms expressed by an idealized creative "force" (a term Williams

shares unambivalently with Pound) and an occasion to lament the unavailability of such forms to the modern scientific imagination:

> For the modern scientist energy has no borders, it is a shapeless "mass" of force; even his capacity to differentiate it to a degree never dreamed of by the ancients has not led him to think of its shape or even its loci. The rose that his magnet makes in the iron filings, does not lead him to think of the force in botanic terms, or wish to visualize that force as floral and extant (*ex stare*).
>
> . . .The medieval philosopher [by contrast] would probably have been unable to think the electric world, and *not* think of it as a world of forms. Perhaps algebra has queered our geometry.[18]

Insofar as Pound's steel rose is the direct effect of the magnetic force that shapes it, it has a great deal in common with Williams's idea that the forms art takes must be direct effects of the "force" of imagination. In that respect, it also has a great deal in common with the steel rose that replaces the obsolete one in Williams's poem, but there is another feature of Pound's rose that Williams imagines keeps it from achieving the "independent existence" to which he aspires, and it has to do with the abstractable form that makes the "rose in steel dust" recognizable as a rose in the first place.

When Pound laments that the "modern scientist" cannot see the rose or even "think of its shape" it isn't because he can't see a pattern in the iron filings; it is because he can't see any likeness between the pattern he does see and the "botanic" form of the rose. In other words, the scientist cannot "visualize that force as floral" because he cannot see the analogy between a "floral force" and a magnetic one. Indeed, Pound suggests he cannot see analogically at all; there is no "as" in his vision. The modern scientist's lack of analogical vision arises, apparently, from the fact that his abstraction of the idea of force is at once too particular (he can only see *magnetic* force) and too abstract (as "unbounded" energy, that force is too "shapeless" and undifferentiated a "mass" to be likened to something else). Pound is not opposed to the scientist's abstraction as such, however. In "Vorticism," in which Pound relinquishes the image of his earlier "imagisme" in favor of the "radiant node or cluster" that he calls "the vortex," he invokes the standard equation of a circle – $(x-a)^2+(y-b)^2=r^2$ – as the ideal image precisely by virtue of its abstraction: "It is not a particular circle, it is any circle and all circles."[19] This turn to analytic geometry occurs, however, at the very moment when his account of how he came to write "In a Station of the Metro" begins to make that poem appear too closely tied to his personal experience – to seeing particular faces in a

particular metro station on a particular day, at a particular time, with particular feelings only he could have:[20] "The apparition of these faces in the crowd: / Petals on a wet, black bough" (*Gaudier-Brzeska*, 89). In the space of a few sentences, Pound goes from "try[ing] all day to find words for what this had meant to me" and "not find[ing] any words that seemed. . . worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion" to "find[ing], suddenly, the expression" and finding it precisely in the form of "an equation" (87). He moves, in other words, from the unrepeatability of an individual and idiosyncratic "sudden emotion" to the recognition of a "pattern," a "kind of emotion," so that in the end "the difference between art and analytic geometry is the difference of subject matter only" (91).

The difference in subject matter, Pound explains, is the difference between "*a, b,* and *c,* having something to do with form" and "*sea, cliffs, night,* having something to do with mood" (92). But if "In a Station of the Metro" is the sort of poem where "one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective," Pound's narrative about that effort moves in the opposite direction, charting the transformation of his "inward and subjective" experience ("these faces in the crowd") into a thing "outward and objective" ("petals on a wet, black bough"). And of course the technology that enables that transformation is, despite having been rendered invisible here, the same tool of analogy that once allowed the obsolete rose of Williams to "carr[y] weight of love" and that Williams is at such pains to eradicate through his prohibition on all forms of "plagiarism." The unspoken "like" between the noun phrase in the first line of Pound's "*hokku*" and the one in the second line is what gives the "apparition of faces" that began as one subject's perception all the objective quality of a physical fact – "petals on a wet, black bough." Moreover, by insisting that this image came to him as an "equation," Pound suggests that the simile operates in the same manner as the variables and equals sign in the standard formula for the circle. That is, the faces and the petals share the same formal identity as two instances of a circle, but that formal identity also serves to make the "sudden emotion" they represent as universal a type as the geometrical form of a circle. But of course, from the perspective of *Spring and All* the moment an experience is represented in *geometrical* terms, terms abstract enough to define it as a universal *kind*, sharing common traits with other instances of that kind – or to put the point even more strongly, the moment it is, as Williams says, "a matter of representation" rather than "separate existence" (*Imaginations*, 117) – it has ceased to qualify as an experience at all. We can see now why

Williams's rose cannot rest with geometry. To achieve its separate existence as an (object of) experience, it cannot exist as a type.

Pound summarizes his commitment to the image as equation when he describes the forms he seeks as "universal, existing in perfection, in freedom from space and time limits" (*Gaudier-Brzeska*, 91). At the same time, however, he believes that in poetry those forms serve above all to communicate human experience – transforming "emotions" that are themselves irreducibly "sudden" and particular into universally recognizable "moods." In this context, the modernism represented by Stein and Williams divides into two competing resolutions to a fundamental impossibility in Pound: art has no universality if it is an effect of experience; and if it has any universality it "retains," as Williams puts it, "no value" for "experience." For Stein, then, art can only possess its value of permanence to the extent that what it represents (and the fact that it represents) is independent of any individual's experience of it; as a representation, the work of art can be an entity, but it cannot be a thing. And for Williams, the work of art can only "retain value for experience" if it is itself both a direct effect of and an occasion for experience; it cannot be an entity – a "matter of representation" – because it can only be a thing.

HANDKERCHIEFS TOMORROW

In "American Poetry 1920–1930," Zukofsky devotes a comparatively long concluding section to the work of Williams, in which he praises – in the same terms he would later use to condemn Basic and idealize Chinese – Williams's ability to shift our focus beyond the meaning of his words and sentences to their physical arrangement on the page:

> [o]ne does not think of line-ends in him but of essential rhythm, each cadence emphasized, the rhythm breaking and beginning again, an action, each action deserving a line:
>
> the harried
> earth is swept.
> The trees
> the tulip's bright
> tips
> sidle and
> toss
>
> nouns: acts as much as verbs.[21]

We can easily see how the physical placement of words in these lines leads Zukofsky to the brief pronouncement he makes just after them. The visual isolation of "tips" and "toss" from the rest of the words in the sentence out of which the lines are formed forces them to read ambiguously (and thus simultaneously) as nouns and verbs.

It is much harder, however, to see the relationship between Zukofsky's desire that nouns be "acts as much as verbs" – that they be, as he puts it some years later in his essay on "Basic," the "shorthand for *act* and *thing* that the Chinese sees perhaps in his ideograph" – and the desire Zukofsky articulates in the next paragraph of his essay on American poetry of the 1920s: "[Williams] has apparently broken with his own stylistic standards when the power behind the words demanded it. Thus, the conceit of his 'Botticellian Trees': but one feels 'the alphabet of the trees' identified with roots and growths which make the alphabet of his actual writing. The conceit does not stick out of the verse, but builds it" ("Basic," 150).[22] Here Zukofsky recognizes what we can already infer from Williams's own arguments in *Spring and All*: that to produce a "conceit" at all necessarily involves "br[eaking] with his own stylistic standards" because it necessarily involves making one thing "like" another, "plagiarizing." But Zukofsky is interested not in the fact that, as a metaphor, "the alphabet of trees" makes letters *like* "roots" and "growths"; rather he is interested in the fact that the letters of the alphabet literally "build" the words of Williams's "conceit" and are therefore, also in some sense literally, their "roots" and "growths." The difference, in other words, between a conceit that "stick[s] out of the verse" and a conceit that "builds it" is the difference between "feeling" *as if* (Zukofsky conspicuously elides the phrase) "the alphabet" were "identified with roots and growths" and *feeling* the alphabet physically – seeing the curves and stems of the words that constitute any given poem. What Zukofsky sees in Williams, and what he pursues rigorously in his own poetry, is a radical organicism in which tenor (trees) and vehicle (alphabet) are no longer two things like each other but are ontologically one and the same thing. But what does "feeling the alphabet" have to do with the grammatical functions of nouns and verbs? Or to put this a different way, what does the commitment to abandoning analogy have to do with the commitment to abandoning the distinction between acts and things?

As we have already seen, Zukofsky's criticism of Basic centers on the fact that, on the one hand, the 850-word vocabulary includes many words in its list of "things" that, like "toss" and "tip," can also serve as what Basic

calls "operations," but on the other, that the rules of Basic nevertheless will not allow these words to serve both functions. This criticism repeats a few years later the main complaint that Pound makes in 1935 in his own writing on Basic, which takes the form of a brief (barely two pages long) foreword to a pamphlet reprint of his 1918 translation of Ernest Fenollosa's "The Chinese Written Character As a Medium for Poetry." Pound's main focus in the very few sentences of his foreword is Basic's sixteen "operations" about which he suggests, somewhat surprisingly, that the list could actually be streamlined even further once one recognizes, for example, that "*take* is more active *getting*" or that "to *keep* [is] more retentive *having*."[23] Pound then concludes with his only mention of Chinese in the entire foreword: "All this will seem very simple to anyone trained in ideogram. The running legs and the gripping hand of the Chinese pictures will give considerable vividness to the meanings and their relation. On this I rest my case until the gentle reader has read Fenollosa" (*The Unwobbling Pivot*, 51). In one respect, Zukofsky is actually more illuminating than Fenollosa in making clear what Pound means here, since, as we have already seen, Zukofsky understands the ideogram as a technology for combining "acts" with "things" – a means of "picturing" to use Pound's examples, a "gripping hand" or "running legs." From this perspective, however, it looks as though Chinese for Zukofsky is simply a *successful* Basic. It surpasses Basic's main claim, by giving us "words" that really do serve as "pictures," but it also succeeds where Basic fails: if Basic seeks to make its list of "operations" (verbs) as small as possible, Chinese, Zukofsky suggests, succeeds in eliminating that separate category altogether by making "operations" indistinguishable from "things."

But if both Pound and Zukofsky are deriving their understanding of the virtues of Chinese from Pound's translation of Fenollosa, it is worthwhile for us to take a look at what Pound thinks Fenollosa himself says about Chinese characters.[24] The moment in Fenollosa's essay when the Chinese character emerges most explicitly as a combination of acts and things is also the moment when he is most insistent on a direct connection between language and "nature," drawing on an organic metaphor that sounds much like Zukofsky's description of Williams's "alphabet of trees":

> One of the most interesting facts about the Chinese language is that in it we can see, not only the forms of sentences, but literally the parts of speech growing up, budding forth one from another. Like nature, the Chinese words are alive and plastic, because *thing* and *action* are not formally separated. The Chinese language naturally knows no grammar. (*The Unwobbling Pivot*, 67)

As we can gather from Fenollosa's title ("The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry"), his discussion of Chinese is geared toward establishing, above all, its poetic merits – indeed this focus is precisely what attracts Pound to it. And indeed, the point Fenollosa himself goes on to make about the characteristics Chinese ideographs share with "nature" has everything to do with the poetic functions of metaphor. Fenollosa argues that all languages "pass from the seen to the unseen by exactly the same process," that is, the "use of material images to suggest immaterial relations" which he identifies as the "process" of "metaphor" (72). Metaphor, in other words, is a process that serves to create "abstract terms," such that [t]he whole delicate substance of speech," he says, "is built on substrata of metaphor." For Fenollosa, digging through that substrata to the origins of language in "nature" takes us, however, not to things, but to "actions," so that even the most "abstract terms" in Western languages, which, he says, tend to be "concerned with logical faculties" and to "condemn. . .direct imagination" will "reveal their ancient roots still embedded in direct action." Thus, although, "[n]ot more than a few hundred roots out of our large vocabularies could have dealt with physical processes," we can nevertheless, Fenollosa explains, "identify [them] in primitive Sanskrit," and [t]hey are, almost without exception, vivid verbs" (72–73). The relative impoverishment of "our large vocabularies" with respect to "vivid verbs" stands in direct contrast, therefore, to Chinese, which gives us "vivid shorthand pictures of actions and processes in nature" (71).

Although Fenollosa clearly locates the virtue of Chinese in the degree to which it retains a direct link to "actions and processes in nature," nevertheless he is concerned to claim for it all the capacities of "the best poetry," which he says, "deals not only with natural image but with lofty thoughts, spiritual suggestions and obscure relations" (71). And he identifies the processes by which Chinese "pass[es] over from the seen to the unseen" as "exactly the same process which all ancient races employed," namely metaphor. The metaphorical process embedded in Chinese characters is one that Fenollosa clearly identifies as "primitive," by which he means that it "does not spring from arbitrary *subjective* processes" but rather "follow[s] objective lines of relations in nature herself" just as "the forces which produce the branch-angles of an oak lay potent in the acorn." At the moment when the Chinese character's relation to nature becomes a version of the oak tree's relation to the acorn, the difference between Chinese and Western metaphors starts to look exactly like the distinction in biology between "analogy" and "homology." And this is

precisely Fenollosa's point: "This is more than analogy, it is identity of structure. Had the world not been full of homologies, sympathies, and identities, thought would have been starved and language chained to the obvious. There would have been no bridge to cross from the minor truth of the seen to the major truth of the unseen" (72). What Fenollosa sees as the virtue of Chinese is thus precisely what Zukofsky sees as the virtue of Williams in his reading of Williams's "Botticellian Trees." When Williams allegedly makes us see the trees not as *like* the letters of the alphabet but literally "built" out of them, the conceit has become "more than analogy" precisely by way of its "identity of structure."

In "Basic," Zukofsky illustrates his own claims for the superiority of Chinese with a short tale whose opacity makes Pound's effort to connect Basic with Fenollosa seem completely transparent by contrast. But as we shall see, it becomes in the end a vivid exposition of the difference between meaning and being, and it does so by differentiating analogy from homology:

> This thought might be backed up by a story. It was a cold winter afternoon toward sunset. The Chinese laundryman had brought back the week's wash and left. When the package was opened, none of his patron's handkerchiefs were in it. The patron walked back in the cold to tell the laundryman. Without looking up the Chinese laundryman said merely: "Go home, you find." "Maybe you come, you find," the patron answered. "All light," the laundryman said gaily. He went out into the cold without bothering to put on a coat and this move troubled the patron. (Patron, by the way, is not a BASIC word.)
>
> In any case, in the house of the man who gives him a week's wash the first act of the Chinese was to go over to the mantelpiece, look at the lot of books and ask: "How much?" "It doesn't much matter," he was told. The laundryman was not interested in looking at the man's linen. "You read English?" the man queried. "No, no savvy."
>
> The man had another book on his desk shelf, one of the pages opened to a few Chinese ideographs – the characters resembling men standing with legs apart. The English under the Chinese writing read: "Knowledge is to know men; Humanity is to love them." The man thrust the book onto the laundryman, who responded gaily: "Heh, heh, yeh, handkerchiefs tomorrow!"
>
> Evidently the Chinese was not interested in handkerchiefs that day. And the other man was not a little surprised by the effect on the Chinese of a force that might be sensed as active in the Chinese characters. At any rate, something more active than the man could find that day in a list of 400 *general things* and 200 *picturable*. ("Basic," 156–57)

The racist stereotypes of Zukofsky's caricature of the Chinese laundryman notwithstanding, the point of this tale is nevertheless to celebrate the

laundryman's language as having a "force" that conveys something beyond the words the patron reads – words that are in standard, not Basic, English. What remains opaque in the story, however, is what exactly the Chinese characters themselves mean, given that the laundryman delivers what appears to be, in light of the meaning of the English translation, a complete non sequitur. Exactly what understanding of "Knowledge is to know men; Humanity is to love them" brings us to "Heh, heh, yeh, handkerchiefs tomorrow!"?

We cannot tell, in other words, what the Chinese characters "mean" to the laundryman from either the meaning of his exclamation in English upon seeing them or the meaning of the English translation that the patron reads but the laundryman cannot. But in the context of Fenollosa's claims about the nature of the Chinese ideograph, we know what we are supposed to think the syntax of the English translation does to the Chinese characters, and we know it without recourse to their meaning. The parallelism between the translation's two independent clauses emphasizes their structural identity, but our interpretation of those two sentences depends on our treating their meaning in terms of an analogy: "Knowledge" is to "knowing men" as "Humanity" is to "loving them." From Fenollosa's perspective (and presumably from Zukofsky's), the "homology" that would exist in the Chinese has been reduced to an analogy in the English. But the non sequitur the laundryman produces in response to the ideograph points to an even more important disjunction between the explicit analogical structure of the English translation and the implied (but inaccessible) homological structure of the original Chinese.

The laundryman's response to the ideograph is certainly not a paraphrase of the meaning in the English translation, and the meaning he does convey has more to do with the laundry transaction that brings the men together in the patron's house in the first place than with the idea expressed by the translation. Indeed, the meanings of both the English translation and the laundryman's non sequitur are irrelevant to the point of the tale except as a way of making the meaning of the Chinese ideograph appear utterly untranslatable and, what amounts to the same thing here, unparaphrasable. The only way to understand the laundryman's response to the ideograph, in fact, is to see it as just that: a response. If, as would be far more plausible, the actual meaning of the ideograph does have anything to do with the meaning of the translation, then when the laundryman looks at the characters and says "handkerchiefs tomorrow," he is not demonstrating his understanding of the text; he is

demonstrating what it reminds him of at the moment – in this case, his patron's missing handkerchiefs. The conclusion of the story – that "evidently the Chinese was not interested in handkerchiefs that day" does not contradict the claim. The remark suggests, rather, that the handkerchiefs went missing in the first place because they, like the characters in the Chinese ideograph, are subject to the vicissitudes of the laundryman's "interest." The poetic moral of Zukofsky's little story is, in short, the familiar moral of literalism: that the value of poetry (represented in this context by the Chinese ideograph) lies in what it causes us to notice – its effects – rather than its meaning. And the literalism that Zukofsky produces in his own poetry arises, as we are about to see, out of a transformation of metaphor that involves nothing short of turning an analogy into a homology.

OR, RES SUNT CONSEQUENTIA NOMINUM

The Latin sentence "nomina sunt consequentia rerum" appears, along with a translation ("names are consequent to the things named"), as the subtitle to "'Mantis,' an Interpretation," Zukofsky's well-known gloss in verse form of another of his own poems, the sestina entitled "Mantis."[25] Both poems carry the name of the thing they are about – in the first case the name refers to the insect, in the second to the poem called by the insect's name. And both poems imagine actions and events – in the first case the sight of a praying mantis in a subway stop, surrounded by signs of crushing poverty; in the second case the event of writing the poem called "Mantis" – that cause something else to happen. In the first poem the appearance of the mantis in a subway station prompts the speaker to meditate on the plight of the poor and to incite an effort to save them from that plight. In the second poem the same incident prompts the speaker to write the first poem.[26] But if the causal logic in the poems is intended to parallel the subtitle of "'Mantis,' an Interpretation" by making names consequences of things, then the poems themselves must be understood as something like "names" – a version, we might say, of Williams's poetic imperative to create "new names for experience." Each poem, in turn, represents a specific and real experience on the part of the speaker as if it were a direct cause of the poem, turning that experience into the kind of "thing" from which a "name" can follow. Seeing the mantis stranded in a subway amidst the most vivid material consequences of the Depression thus becomes one kind of "thing," and writing the

poem about it an instance of the same kind of "thing." Each, in turn, is the "thing" to which a poem is the "consequent" "name."

If the "Mantis" poems imagine actions and events as the sorts of "things" that can bring "names" into being, the opening of the seventh part of Zukofsky's massive long poem *"A"* brings names into being in order to return them to their literal origin in things, hence the title of this section, a reversal of the Latin subtitle of Zukofsky's second "Mantis." "*'A'*-7" is a remarkable tour de force, cleverly orchestrating the dismantling of a so-called dead metaphor – the word "sawhorse" – in order to transform the word itself into a vital, poetic "thing." The first line of the poem begins with the word "Horses," but by the middle of the opening stanza, we have learned from a series of descriptive cues, replete with compact metaphorical turns, that the speaker is talking about sawhorses:

> Horses: who will do it? out of manes? Words
> Will do it, out of manes, out of airs, but
> They have no manes, so there are no airs, birds
> Of words, from me to them no singing gut.
> For they have no eyes, for their legs are wood,
> For their stomachs are logs with print on them;
> Blood red, red lamps hang from necks or where could
> Be necks, two legs stand A, four together M.[27]

In the references to "legs" made out of "wood," to the "stomachs" with "print on them," and above all to the shape the objects make, the poem gives us the image of literal sawhorses. What makes "sawhorse" a "dead" metaphor (what makes it read as literal *rather* than metaphorical) is the fact that it allegedly calls to mind only the wooden structure and not the similarities it has to its original metaphorical vehicle (in the same way that when we use the word "leg" to refer to part of a chair, we supposedly no longer care about its similarities to human or animal legs). In that context, the lines above appear to make those similarities vividly relevant.

But as we shall quickly see, Zukofsky isn't interested simply in putting what we might think of as the word "sawhorse's" "original" metaphorical associations back into circulation. Indeed, I will argue, he is committed to blocking their circulation altogether. Here we have to notice two crucial absences in these lines (and also in the poem as a whole). First, while the initial word, "Horses," as well as names for various body parts that horses have ("manes," "legs," "stomach," "necks," etc.) occur frequently, the poem keeps returning to the fact that there are "no horses there" (line

48). The absence of literal horses appears, in fact, to be the condition under which the sawhorses get constructed in the first place:

> Trot, trot–? No horse is here, no horse is there?
> Says you! . . .we'll make
> Wood horse, and recognize it with our words – (lines 22–24)

But (and this is the second crucial absence) if the word that is vehicle of the original "live" version of the metaphor is missing, so is the word that *is* the dead metaphor. For nowhere in the poem does the word "sawhorse" ever appear. Thus, on the one hand, the referent for the metaphorical "sawhorse" – the four-legged wooden structure that resembles a horse – is imagined to be literally present, even as the referent for its literal counterpart – the four-legged animal that *is* a horse – is not. On the other hand, meanwhile, the *word* "horse," along with the names for its constituent parts, occurs frequently, even as the *word* "sawhorse" occurs not at all. "Saw" also does not occur, though throughout the poem there are numerous references to things that have necessarily undergone sawing ("logs," "stumps," and above all, the "wood" from which the sawhorses described have been constructed. It's worth mentioning that a variant on the other kind of "saw" – the verb "see" – also occurs with great frequency, and in every case as an imperative – the primary imperative, in fact, of the poem as a whole. As I will go on to show, the poetic artifact that "*A*-7" serves to produce exists entirely in and for our literal ability to see.

When the speaker of the poem says "we'll make / Wood horse, and recognize it with our words," he obviously means to (and does) exclude the word that actually refers to the structure: "Not it – nine less two! – as many as take / To make a dead man purple in the face" (lines 25–26). It is also clear here that the point of "mak[ing] / Wood horse, and recogniz[ing] it with our words" is to restore the life-blood to the missing word that is the "dead" figure of speech (lines 23–26).[28] But if the lifeblood of a metaphor is thought to consist in the analogy between two things that it serves to make apparent, how is the lifeblood of a dead "sawhorse" to be restored when one side of the equation – in this case, the horse – is nowhere in sight? Indeed, if the "original" metaphor hinges on the properties of the horse, giving us the word without the source of those properties would seem to be one way of making the metaphor's original "vehicle" disappear. It seems all the more fitting then, that the wooden structures to which the missing name "sawhorse" refers make their appearance on a street blocked to vehicle traffic: "'Street Closed' is what the print says on their stomachs" (line 9). And the traffic that has

been blocked, I will argue, is precisely the traffic in meaning on which metaphor as such depends.

Nevertheless, the poem does insist on its own success in "making a dead man purple in the face." Indeed, it succeeds not only in raising the dead, but in giving it eternal life – a success, moreover, that lies precisely in closing off the overused metaphorical street:

> For they had no manes we would give them manes,
> For their wood was dead and the wood would move – bare
> But for the print on it – for diggers gone, trains'
> Run light lights in air where the dead reposed –
> As many as take liveforever, "Street Closed."
>
> (lines 38–42)

Where then, we might ask, is the lifeblood that will "move" the "dead" wood of the sawhorses, if the circulation of meaning on which the "live" metaphor depends has been blocked? The answer given by the poem is to create a materially different route and allow, not the literal *meaning* of the word that was the original vehicle, but rather the literal *substance* – the wood itself – of the thing to which the metaphorical word refers, to pass through it: "'Closed'? then follow me airs, We'll open ruts / For the wood-grain skin laundered to pass thru" (line 43–44).

So how does this work with respect to the metaphor itself, that is, with respect to the term "sawhorse"? The answer goes back to the very beginning of the poem, to a line that is later repeated as one of its refrains: "two legs stand A, four together M." The line obviously refers to the way in which, if we look at actual sawhorses from a particular angle, we can see shapes that resemble those of letters in the alphabet. If one way of creating a "live" metaphor is to put words together in such a way that the interaction between their meanings makes us recognize the resemblance between two things, then carrying out that same project while trying to avoid the circulation of meaning might involve seeking to reinstate the structure of analogy in a different way. We might, in other words, take being made to see the sawhorses as the letters A or M as a way of being made to see resemblances that don't depend on the meaning of the words involved. But the project of the poem, I will argue, is not to revitalize the metaphor by defining its analogical structure in even more strongly literal terms – in this case, by foregrounding the resemblances between the shape of sawhorses and the shape of letters. Rather, the poem's project – and it is indeed a literalist one – is much closer to digging "ruts" for "wood-grain skin" to "pass thru." That is, calling our attention to the way in which a

sawhorse resembles the letter "A" turns out to be a means to another end, which is to make us see the A is a constitutive part of the word "sawhorse" itself. Or, to put this in slightly different terms, the project is to construct the conditions under which that figure of speech is structured like a Chinese ideogram rather than a metaphor – i.e., according to homology rather than analogy. And raising that figure from the dead becomes a matter not of seeing its original metaphorical associations but of seeing the literal material out of which it is built, i.e., the letters out of which words are built. The homology consists in imagining that those letters, like the acorn of an oak tree, contain the incipient forms of words.

The refrain "two legs stand A, four together M" obviously plays an important role in making visible the literal building materials of words. Aside from making us see letters as letters by capitalizing them and setting them apart from those already incorporated into words, the poem goes even further in making us focus on their literal form. That is, we have to have a strong grasp of the shape of the letter M in order to recognize it as an inversion of the W needed for the "sawhorse" we are being asked to reconstruct. We are also reminded of the fact that words are built out of letters by the poem's anagrammatic plays on "manes" and "names." The poem tells us repeatedly that the wooden structures "have no manes" (which they really don't) and at the same time tells us "their necks 've no name" (line 55). Thus, even as the wooden structures literally lack manes, they also – and just as literally – lack their name, given that it never occurs in the poem. But this is exactly wherein the literalist ambition of the poem lies. For although the name "sawhorse" never occurs in that form in the poem, if we think that the letters that make it up are the crucial thing about it, then it is, in a strictly anagrammatic way, present in the poem.[29] The way to see it is the same way we can see an "M" as a "W" or pick out the word "name" in "manes." Like Williams's "Botticellian Trees," Zukofksy's "*'A'*-7" is designed to make us "feel the alphabet." Near the end of the poem the speaker announces that he has

> . . .shaped a flower. "Street Closed" on their stomachs.
> But the street has moved; at each block a stump
> That blossoms red. . . (lines 77–80)

The project of "*'A'*-7," like the project of Williams's "The Rose is Obsolete," and like Stein's circular "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" is to make a dead metaphor live again. But unlike Stein's rose, the "flower" that "blossoms red" in Zukofsky's poem is achieved not by creating the structural conditions for circulating the meaning of words (that circula-

tion is blocked at both ends by "a stump"), but by creating the structural conditions for circulating the literal material of words. If we are at all uncertain up to this point about the status of this poem as a contribution to the modernist project of reviving the rose, the poem ends with a "rose":

> Bent knees as these rose around them – trot – trot –
> Spoke: words, words, we are words, horses, manes, words.
> (lines 97–98)

Zukofsky has, in good ideogrammic fashion, created a figure that is both "name[] and act[] at one and the same time" (*Prepositions+*, 156). But because the meaning of "rose" in this context has nothing to do with the "rose" that signifies a flower (and that is the commonplace of metaphor), the act can only be recognized as the thing by means of the same method we must use to construct the name of the wooden horse out of individual letters in the poem. Which is to say that the "flower" that "blossoms red" at the end of this poem is indeed a "rose" but it is a "rose" whose presence in the poem depends on its letters rather than on its meaning – or more specifically, on thinking of its letters *as* its meaning. In "*'A'*-7," names are consequent to things but only by virtue of *being* things.

"Z-Sited Path," Ron Silliman's essay on the objectivist roots of language poetry, ends by aligning Zukofsky and Gertrude Stein as the starting point of that tradition: "Zukofsky is of course but one of any number of possible examples of this problem. From Gertrude Stein to the present, poets have increasingly emphasized that meaning in poetry falls on the side of the signifier."[30] We have already seen in Silliman's advocacy of a return to the "gestural" and in Bernstein's preference for treating words as "marks," how the language movement's "poetics of indeterminacy" comes into being precisely through a conflation of meaning with its material signifiers. In this context, it's easy to see how Zukofsky has come to count as a language poet *avant la lettre,* for here, at least, his project is indistinguishable from Bernstein's and from Silliman's.[31] Dead metaphors get to "liveforever" by becoming signifiers that can, in principle, at least, generate an infinite number and variety of effects. But if Zukofsky contributes to the larger twentieth- (and twenty-first-) century project of literalism, he does so in exactly the ways that Stein does not. For Stein (as for [Riding] Jackson), the poem achieves its presentness independently of what anyone sees in it. For Zukofsky, as for Bernstein and Silliman (and for that matter, McCaffery, Howe, and Hejinian), the only presentness a poem has lies literally in what it makes us see.[32]

CHAPTER 5

Authorial inattention: Donald Davidson's literalism, Jorie Graham's Materialism, *and cognitive science's embodied minds*

LITERALISM (AGAIN)

If, as we saw in the last chapter, the problem metaphor created for poets like Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Louis Zukofsky was that it depended on "abstract terms" for analogies between "things" and thereby gave up the possibility of rendering the liveliness of "acts," then (for Pound and Zukofsky at least) the Chinese ideograph stood as a kind of correction to metaphor through the fantasy that its "vivid shorthand pictures" dynamically transformed "things" *into* "acts." And as we saw in earlier works of both Williams and Zukofsky, the effort to block the abstract exchange of meaning on which metaphor supposedly depended also took the form of literalizing "things." Thus both Williams's transformation of his "Botticellian Trees" into the physical letters on the page and Zukofsky's transformation of the sawhorse in "'A'-7" into a literal horse and at the same time into the letter 'A' that the sawhorse shape resembles are efforts to overcome metaphor that result in the very kind of literalism that would become the hallmark of language poetry in the late 1970s.

But at the same time that language poetry was just getting started, and indeed in the same year that Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein launched the journal *L=A=N=G=U= A=G=E* (1978), the philosopher Donald Davidson published an essay in *Critical Inquiry* called "What Metaphors Mean," which went on to become one of the most influential and controversial accounts of metaphor in the latter half of the century.[1] In it, he rejects the terms in which metaphor came under attack in modernism in the first place, arguing that it has nothing necessary to do with either analogy or the "abstract terms" that supposedly follow from it. Far from being excessively "abstract," metaphor turns out in Davidson's analysis not only to be solidly anchored in the literal in ways that Zukofsky could only imagine as metaphor's undoing, but also to be defined by the very kinds of kinetic, physical effects that Pound, Williams,

and Zukofsky all felt compelled to seek by other means. But insofar as metaphor (even when disparaged) occurs in all of these arguments as an emblem of poetry and of the category of the literary more generally, the various disagreements about metaphor begin to seem inconsequential in the face of what they collectively affirm about poetry. As we have already seen in the case of Pound, Williams, and Zukofsky, and as we will see in the case of Davidson, the value of poetry is understood to be determined not by its meaning but by the effects it has on the subjects who read it.

Davidson begins his essay with the broad question of what distinguishes the meaning of metaphorical statements from the meaning of "more routine linguistic transactions," and the answer he gives is, quite simply, that there is no distinction: "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (*Inquiries into Truth* 245). In making this claim, Davidson seeks to refute what he calls "the usual view of metaphor," which holds that "a metaphor has, in addition to its literal sense or meaning, another sense or meaning" (246). Consider Davidson's example of a critic's remark that "Tolstoy was a great moralizing infant" (248). Confined to its literal meaning, Davidson explains, the statement refers not to the mature writer Tolstoy but to the infant Tolstoy. But obviously the image of a baby delivering moral pronouncements is not just absurd; it also counts as a false statement – about the Tolstoy who wrote and published (since he was an adult, not an infant), and also about the infant Tolstoy (who, by any developmental definition of infancy, would have been incapable of "moralizing") – not to mention being entirely off the mark with respect to what the critic himself might plausibly have meant. From this perspective, the full "meaning" of the metaphor does indeed look as though it has to involve something added to or altogether other than its literal meaning. Davidson's argument, however, is not that there is another kind of *meaning* added to or different from the literal, but that there is no meaning whatsoever in the metaphor other than the literal one, however false. Once having denied that there is any other kind of meaning to discover, Davidson takes his argument in another direction, claiming that the "point" of the metaphor (as distinct from its "meaning") – the idea of Tolstoy's infant-like qualities, for example, or the immaturity of his moral pronouncements – is a matter of something entirely "different in kind" (247). And Davidson is as much if not more concerned to discover exactly what the difference in kind is between metaphorical and "routine linguistic transactions" as he is to disprove the "usual view" that takes it to be a difference in kinds of meaning.

Davidson initially identifies that difference as "the distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do" and contends that "metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use" (247). To help explain the "domain of use" that distinguishes metaphorical from ordinary statements, Davidson turns to the question of so-called "dead metaphors":

> Once upon a time, I suppose, rivers and bottles did not, as they do now, literally have mouths. Thinking of present usage, it doesn't matter whether we take the word "mouth" to be ambiguous because it applies to entrances to rivers and openings of bottles as well as to animal apertures, or we think there is a single wide field of application that embraces both. What does matter is that when "mouth" applied only metaphorically to bottles, the application made the hearer *notice* a likeness between animal and bottle openings. (Consider Homer's reference to wounds as mouths). Once one has the present use of the word, with literal application to bottles, there is nothing left to notice. (252)

What, then, does Davidson mean when he says that in the case of dead metaphors like "the mouth of a river," "there is nothing left to notice"? Certainly as long as we are experienced speakers of the language, we don't need to conjure images of "animal apertures" or any other sorts of literal mouths to understand what is meant by the phrase "mouth of a river," since it refers conventionally to the part of a river that joins another body of water. But Davidson imagines that in a time when the metaphor had not yet entered into conventionalized use, it might have made us notice a range of surprising and interesting connections between mouths and river entrances. In the case of a "living" metaphor – even an ancient one like Homer's description of "wounds" as "mouths" – it is just such connections, Davidson suggests, that give the words the vivid metaphorical force they have. It is, in fact, the very capacity to prompt such interested "noticing" that for Davidson properly defines metaphorical usage and distinguishes it from "routine" usage (including that of dead metaphors): "Mak[ing] the hearer notice" is what metaphors "are used to do."

Davidson's insistence that the only *meaning* a metaphor has is its literal one obviously makes him a certain kind of "literalist." But as we will see, his literalism with respect to the meaning of the metaphor also ends up making him a literalist of the by-now-familiar kind. Let us return for a moment to the literalist text with which this book began: John Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror." It is true that while Davidson imagines the "meaning" of metaphor "lies on the surface," Ashbery imagines the "meaning" of the painting to be "lost beyond telling"; nevertheless, both think that interpretation requires something other than a paraphrase

of the "meaning." Or more strongly, we might say that both think the image requires something *other* than our interpretation. And what displaces meaning for Davidson is precisely what displaces it for Ashbery when the portrait itself becomes the "moment of our attention." As Davidson puts it, "what we attempt in paraphrasing a metaphor cannot be to give its meaning, for that lies on the surface; rather we attempt to invoke what the metaphor brings to our attention" (262). Thus whether we take the meaning to be "impossible to restore" or plainly visible "on the surface" (even for Ashbery these claims end up being the same: the eyes in Parmigianino's portrait also "proclaim / that everything is surface") our primary task as interpreters is not, according to both Davidson and Ashbery, to decide what the meaning is. Rather, what matters about the metaphor or the painting is what it "brings to our attention." Indeed, the simultaneous impossibility and irrelevance of paraphrase combined with the absolute relevance of our "attention" is precisely what Davidson thinks metaphors and pictures have in common:

> To suppose [a metaphor] can be effective only by conveying a coded message is like thinking a joke or a dream makes some statement which a clever interpreter can restate in plain prose. Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact – but not by standing for, or expressing the fact. (262)[2]

In other words, it isn't just that the "point" of pictures, like the "point" of metaphors is not reducible to their meaning; it's the way in which they "make us" (the *causal* aspect of the phrase is crucial) "appreciate some fact."

While laughing at a joke may be what shows our "appreciation" of "some fact" (in this case, a funny one), our being made to laugh is not equivalent to understanding the words and sentences used in telling it (however much our understanding may contribute to the impulse to laugh), because we can always understand the joke without finding it funny enough to laugh. So if for Davidson it's not the meaning of the joke but our laughter in response to it that defines the "point" of the joke; and if, in the case of metaphor or a picture, it's not the meaning of the image but what it "brings to our attention"; then in both cases, Davidson seems to suggest, the *effect* on the hearer is the essence of their "point." But once being "made" to "appreciate some fact" is also what metaphors have in common with a bump on the head, the "effect" of a metaphor can no longer have anything to do with understanding (indeed, I will go on to argue that the fact that our "appreciation" is an *effect* makes it something other than our understanding).

But even as the "point" of the metaphor is not, according to Davidson, reducible to its meaning (to a particular idea or content that it might "stand for" or "express"), neither is it reducible to a specific effect. For if a metaphor had to "bring" certain things "to our attention" to qualify as a metaphor, or if a joke required our laughter in order to qualify as a joke, Davidson would be unable to declare, as he does at the outset of his argument, that "there are no unsuccessful metaphors, just as there are no unfunny jokes" (245). In other words, what Davidson thinks is essential isn't the particular effect the metaphor is supposed to have or even simply that it has an effect (in a trivial way, every "linguistic transaction" can be imagined to have some effect); what is essential for Davidson is that the effect matters to the "point" at all.

Or to put this another way: if all that mattered about a metaphor were its "meaning," we should never be concerned with its effects to begin with, for the separation between them is, in Davidson's account, absolute. As he says at one point, criticizing a different argument about the "fuzziness" of metaphor,

> Verbrugge and McCarrell don't believe there is any sharp line between the literal and metaphorical uses of words; they think many words have a "fuzzy" meaning that gets fixed, if fixed at all, by a context. But surely this fuzziness, however it is illustrated and explained, cannot erase the line between what a sentence literally means (given its context) and what it "draws our attention to. . ." (260)

From one standpoint, of course, this doesn't look like literalism at all, since as we have already seen, the literalism not just of Ashbery, but of Hejinian, Silliman, McCaffery, and Bernstein alike depends on a conflation of meaning and effect that for Davidson is logically impossible. If anything, Davidson shares more here with Laura (Riding) Jackson than with Ashbery or the language poets. For not only are both Davidson and (Riding) Jackson committed to the categorical separation between the meaning of a text and its effects ("what it 'draws our attention to'"), they also both believe that the difference between "routine linguistic transactions" and poetic ones has to derive from the degree to which we think the effects of the transaction are relevant to its "point." For (Riding) Jackson, of course, thinking that the effects of an utterance matter amounts to a betrayal of its meaning; hence her renunciation of poetry in the interest of "truth." But where Davidson's literalism emerges is in the fact that for him, unlike for (Riding) Jackson, paying attention to the effects of a metaphor – or better, enjoying the effects of paying attention – is exactly

how one goes about grasping what he calls the "beauty or aptness, the hidden power, of the metaphor itself" (264).

Here we begin to see why the "beauty or aptness, the hidden power, of the metaphor," *because* it is entirely a function of "what it brings to our attention," invariably differs from the metaphor's "meaning" or, as Davidson puts it, what "its author wishes to convey":

> The central error about metaphor is most easily attacked when it takes the form of a theory of metaphorical meaning, but behind that theory, and statable independently, is the thesis that associated with a metaphor is a definite cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message. This theory is false as a full account of metaphor, whether or not we choose to call the purported cognitive content a meaning.
>
> It should make us suspect the theory that it is so hard to decide, even in the case of the simplest metaphors, exactly what the content is supposed to be. The reason it is so often hard to decide is, I think, that we imagine there is a content to be captured when all the while we are in fact focusing on what the metaphor makes us notice. If what the metaphor makes us notice were finite in scope and propositional in nature, this would not in itself make trouble; we would simply project the content the metaphor brought to mind on to the metaphor. But in fact there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention, and much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in nature. When we try to say what a metaphor "means," we soon realize there is no end to what we want to mention. (262–63)

The metaphor in some sense clearly causes the effects we experience when we feel ourselves "made to notice" certain associations. But in just this way the "point" of the metaphor also becomes the infinitely variable effect of our noticing. Thus the interpreter of the metaphor in Davidson's account, like the reader of the poem in Lyn Hejinian's "Rejection of Closure," Charles Bernstein's "Writing and Method," or Steve McCaffery's *North of Intention*, becomes a literal "producer" of the text. As Davidson himself concludes, "[t]he critic is, so to speak, in benign competition with the metaphor-maker" (264). We already saw a version of this "benign competition" in the relationship Ashbery constructs in "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" between the painting and the poem to which the title simultaneously refers, in that the painting becomes an artifact of the poet's making, and in so doing, diverges from the one imagined to be "intended" by the painter. And just as the poet's associations, spun out of the "moment of attention" in beholding the painting, are what "makes works of art so unlike what the artist intended"[3] so too in Davidson the associations that "a metaphor calls to our attention" not only differ from but inevitably exceed "what the author wishes to convey."

Davidson's emphasis on the degree to which the metaphor's effects exceed "what the author wishes to convey" puts his argument at the center of Steven Knapp's *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism*, which takes as its starting point the "widely shared perception that to compose a literary work is to perform a peculiarly self-transcending action – that the meaning of the work goes beyond what its author intended."[4] In the longer passage cited above, Davidson clearly maintains the rigorous identity between meaning and intention that Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels defended in "Against Theory" and its ensuing debates.[5] But by emphasizing the importance of unintended effects, Davidson appears to be suggesting that literary interpretation must necessarily have to concern itself with things other than the meaning of the work, a position antithetical to the one taken in "Against Theory." Davidson himself has difficulty maintaining the separation between meaning/intention and effects (evident in his effort to distinguish between a metaphor's meaning and its "point"), and Knapp's project becomes one of figuring out how to explain the commonsense intuition that meaning goes "beyond" intention without having to abandon the arguments for why they are one and the same. The solution lies in the difference between the "effects" *caused* by the metaphor and what Knapp calls the "indirect communication of a writer's thoughts" through the "implicatures" (a term he draws from the work of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson) of its "cognitive content":

> I see no reason why the activity triggered by a poetic metaphor – or indeed by any literary representation — should take the form of an attempt to *interpret* the representation. Even if, as his critics argue, Davidson is wrong in excluding the indirect communication of a writer's thoughts from the category of what he is willing to call meaning, he is right in seeing that there is an interest in metaphor that goes beyond figuring out what thoughts the writer intends to communicate. But the possibility of this interest does not depend on the metaphor's lack of "cognitive content." As soon as one gives up the notion that intending to communicate necessarily means intending to communicate a determinate set of representations, there is no reason to deny that *interpreting* a metaphor involves discovering the cognitive content the writer wishes to convey. (*Literary Interest*, 47–48)

In light of the problems created by the application of cognitive theory to literary interpretation, which I take up in the discussion below – namely, the problems that ensue when we think that literary interpretation is a matter of understanding the *causes* of a literary work – Knapp's argument might be reframed in slightly different terms. Which is to say that what

makes intention (and thus meaning) the object of specifically "literary interest" to begin with is precisely that it coincides with neither the causes of a literary work nor its effects.[6]

To return, then, to Davidson: paraphrasing a metaphor (or a poem or a picture) becomes impossible in part because there is no settling on a single account: "there is no end to what we want to mention." But it isn't as though being able to enumerate, *Making of Americans*-style, all of what everyone might notice – all that stands in excess of "what the author wishes to convey" – would solve the problem of paraphrase: "How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph? None, an infinity, or one great unstatable fact? Bad question. A picture is not worth a thousand words or any other number. Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture" (*Inquiries into Truth*, 263). There is no explaining what the metaphor means, not because there are an infinite number of meanings, but because nothing belonging to the category of meaning could supply the content of the explanation: "No such explanation or statement can be forthcoming because no such message exists" (264). Were it not for Davidson's insistence on the complete disjunction between the *meaning* of the metaphor and the effects it generates, what Davidson calls its "point" would be thoroughly consistent with the semantic plenitude and indeterminacy of postmodernism's "open text." But here I would argue that the only difference between the postmodernist account of the open text and Davidson's account of metaphor is that the one undoes the other's incoherent conflation of meaning and effect; meanwhile the resulting theory of both the nature of the text and of the agency that produces it is the same. If for Davidson there can be no such thing as a metaphor's "indeterminacy" or "semantic plenitude" because nothing about its (strictly "literal") meaning is indeterminate and nothing about its plenitude is semantic, nevertheless the *effects* of a metaphor, like the "meanings" of the "open text," are in principle both innumerable and, if not indeterminate exactly (every effect has a cause), at least impossible to determine in advance. But whether we think what matters about a metaphor is its "effects" rather than its meaning or we think its meaning *is* its effects, "what the author wishes to convey" inevitably ceases to have any relevance to our concerns, for those intentions do not cause the effects we experience. And by the same token, when we concern ourselves with the effects of the text, we are inevitably led to a causal rather than an intentional account of the agency that produced it.

It's this interest in causes that has produced one of the most striking recent developments in literary theory – the effort to apply cognitive research to literary interpretation. "Cognitive" literary theory's effort to explain literary effects by locating their most literal causes – by locating them, that is, in the neurological (mechanical, chemical, electrical) functioning of the human brain – should be read, I argue, as a logical extension of the more general postmodern preference for effects over meaning. In fact, the movement to apply cognitive theory to literary interpretation takes up precisely where postmodernism leaves off.[7] That is, "cognitive" literary theory seeks to address the condition under which the effects of a text necessarily exceed any explanation we might produce – the condition under which, as Davidson put it, "words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture." But in the case of cognitive literary theory, what explains the impossibility of explanation is not, as we saw in Davidson, the "picture," but rather the brain of the subject who beholds it. Ellen Spolsky, for example, argues in *Gaps in Nature: Literary Interpretation and the Modular Mind* that certain "gaps" that structure the brain are entirely responsible for the undecidability and indeterminacy that define postmodern literary interpretation. "Recent literary theory," she says,

> has emphasized not only the inadequacy of the verbal description vis-à-vis the visual or sensual experience, but also the power of words to suggest. . .images, sensations, and thoughts beyond those of their original context. Brain theory confirms that the inadequacies of language are not merely matters of local inadequacy. . . The phenomenon of incommensurable readings is not accidental; it is genetically built into the brain.[8]

Spolsky derives the main framework and terminology for her argument from two popular scientific accounts of cognition: Jerry Fodor's theory of the "modular mind," where the human brain "takes in information about its environment through several channels simultaneously," and Gerald Edelman's "theory of neuronal group selection" which explains cognition in terms of "mapping," where neural "intake points" in and on the body react to the body's surroundings and "map" to coordinated points in the brain to produce the mental images we associate with thinking and self-awareness. [9] The subtitle of Edelman's book *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* points to the key import of literary theory's trade in cognitive science: namely, the discovery of the material origins of the mind, the discovery, as Edelman puts it, that the "mind arises from the

interactions of nonintentional matter" (*Bright Air*, 161). As a result of that discovery – that is, because what we call "mind" is a "material" effect of "material" causes in the body and its surroundings – the traditional mind/body "dualism" has ceased to hold and belongs instead, Edelman argues, in the philosophical "graveyard of isms" (159–60).

Expanding the graveyard, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim in *Philosophy of the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* not only that cognitive science dissolves the mind/body problem, but that it renders obsolete virtually all philosophical accounts of reason by showing that "the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment."[10] But Lakoff and Johnson also emphasize that reason is not just a consequence of our embodiment; it is at the same time completely coextensive with structures and processes we ordinarily think of as categorically distinct from our consciousness. Indeed, far from being "completely conscious," reason, they say, is "mostly unconscious" (*Philosophy in the Flesh*, 4). Which is to say that our most basic acts of reasoning require bodily processes that largely go unnoticed by us (or more precisely, *cannot* be noticed by us): "Cognitive scientists have shown experimentally that to understand even the simplest utterance, we must perform these and other incredibly complex forms of thought automatically and without noticeable effort below the level of consciousness. It is not merely that we occasionally do not notice these processes; rather, they are inaccessible to conscious awareness and control" (11). Moreover, the fact that "understanding even the simplest utterance" involves bodily processes that are "inaccessible to conscious awareness and control" renders the category of meaning itself, according to Lakoff and Johnson, inextricable from those same unconscious processes: "Because our conceptual systems grow out of our bodies, meaning is grounded in and through our bodies" (6).

Translated into a theory of literary interpretation, the idea that "meaning is grounded in and through our bodies," leads to projects like Mary Thomas Crane's *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory*. The point of Crane's book is to contribute to a mode of Renaissance historicism devoted to investigating the "material sites for the production" of literary texts – to redeem, in other words, certain kinds of evidence for literary interpretation that the New Criticism had rejected as invalid because "external" to the poem. While historicists working in that mode have been interested, for example, in Elizabeth's court or developments in print technology, for Crane the material sites of production are axons, dendrites, and neurotransmitters. In treating the neurological structures

and processes of "Shakespeare's brain" as "one material site for the production of the dramatic works attributed to him,"[11] Crane would hardly imagine herself as the kind of critic whom Cleanth Brooks believed "prefer[red] on principle investigations of Browning's ironic question, 'What porridge had John Keats?'"; nevertheless, the material processes in which she and other cognitive science-based critics locate meaning would seem to be nothing if not "the gross body of life" the New Criticism discounted as irrelevant to "the intellectual composition that is the poem."[12]

For Crane those material processes are, however, not just part of the body of life; they are also "external" in another important sense, for she draws heavily on the Darwinian angle of Edelman's work, emphasizing the degree to which the functions of the brain are themselves evolutionarily shaped by social forces, which in turn count among the "material sites of production" responsible for the literary works in question. We have seen earlier that the New Critics' rejection of intentionalism was in fact a rejection of what Brooks called "the reduction of a work of literature to its causes."[13] And here we see a historicist who is completely and in principle committed to the importance of those causes. But here is also precisely where cognitive science-based criticism actually succeeds – better than any New Critic ever could – in the New Critical project of separating the meaning of a work from its author's intention. For contrary to the New Critical denunciation of causes there is no surer way of accomplishing that separation than by treating the meaning of a literary work as a complex aggregate of effects, and by treating interpretation as the discovery of what caused them.

Obviously cognitive science itself is concerned entirely with the discovery of causes – that's what makes it a science. And part of what has attracted literary theorists and critics to its research is that those causes appear to lend scientific proof to some of the major "discoveries" about meaning and interpretation in their own field. In particular, the work of Edelman and the work of neurologist Antonio Damasio are cited consistently to show how things we tend to perceive as singular or unitary are, as Mark Turner puts it in *The Literary Mind*, "fragmented across the brain."[14] The example Turner gives is of how the act of watching a horse running delivers the effect of a unitary image even though there is nothing remotely unitary about our neurological activity in the process of watching. He then cites Damasio for an explanation of how "the horse that seems one thing corresponds to a widely distributed fragmentation in the brain":

Antonio Damasio, for example, has proposed a model of "convergence" according to which the brain contains records of the combinatorial relations of fragmentary records; the recall of entities or events arises from a reactivation, very tightly bound in time, of fragmentary records contained in multiple sensory and motor regions. Mental evocations that seem to us so unitary and solid are instead always fleeting reblendings of reactivated fragments in a very tight and intricate interval of time. (*The Literary Mind*, 111)

The discrepancy evident here between the unity of the perceived image and the fragmented nature of the processes that cause it runs parallel to another discrepancy that dominates most of the other literary adoptions of cognitive science: namely the discrepancy between the subject's own self-perceptions – including the very concept of a self as such – and the processes that cause it (many of which are the same ones that give us singular images of objects). The "model of 'convergence'" is the answer Damasio gives to what he describes more recently in *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* as "two intimately related problems" in the study of consciousness. The first is the one that interests Turner: "the problem of understanding how the brain inside the human organism engenders the mental patterns we call, for lack of a better term, the images of an object."[15] But what interests Spolsky and Crane is Damasio's second "problem of consciousness," the one that has to do, as he puts it, with "how, in parallel with engendering mental patterns for an object, the brain also engenders a sense of self in the act of knowing" (*The Feeling of What Happens*, 9).

The fascination for both cognitive scientists and the literary theorists who read them is clearly with the striking discrepancy between the effect – the "unitary" quality of both our selves and the objects in our surroundings – and the far from "unitary" cause of that effect – the "fragmentary records contained in multiple sensory and motor regions." All of the cognitive science-based texts I have been discussing manage at one moment or another in this context to invoke the so-called "homunculus" theory of human consciousness and perception in order to dramatize exactly how mistaken we can be about the causes of our conscious states. The homunculus theory, as Damasio explains, proposed that

a part of the brain, "the knower part," possessed the knowledge needed to interpret the images that formed in that brain. The images were presented to the knower, and the knower knew what to do with them. The term ["homunculus"] suggested the picture that many people actually formed of its physical structure: a little man scaled down to the confines of brain size. (189–90)

The problem with the homunculus theory is that once we feel compelled to propose an agent responsible for our knowing, we will be required to explain that agent's knowing in the same way, which requires yet another agent, and so on. Of course, one of the immediate consequences of tracing our conscious states to the kinds of processes that cognitive research has discovered is to obviate the need for any such agent. In other words, despite the fact that, as Damasio explains, "the images of an object and of the. . .plans related to it are sensed as the unmistakable property of. . .an observer, a perceiver, a knower, a thinker, and a potential actor," nevertheless, "[t]here is no homunculus" (11).

But when the images in question become literary texts and the agency in question becomes that of authors and readers, the fascination with cognitive research no longer rests on the fact that the effect is unified and the cause is fragmented. Rather – and this goes back to Edelman's formulation in which "mind arises from the interactions of *nonintentional* matter" – the fascination has to do with the contrast between the intentionality inherent in acts of human thought and expression and the utter nonintentionality of the material structures and processes that (in a very literal sense) cause them. Of course, it is one thing to observe the discrepancy between a given set of conditions and the effects they cause; it is quite another, however, to treat the effects as an illusion on the basis of that discrepancy.[16] But the "cognitive" literary theory we have been investigating arrives at exactly that conclusion. Crane's route begins with a reasonable summary of claims we have already seen from Edelman and Damasio: "Cognitive neuroscientists now sketch out complex neural networks that regulate themselves according to identifiable principles but are not controlled by any central entity or mechanism within the brain" (*Shakespeare's Brain* 21). The denial of this controlling entity then becomes, for Crane, a denial of intentionality: "conscious agency (defined as actual control over such mental processes as decision making, language production, etc.) is, finally, a meaningless concept" (22). Crane seems to think, in other words, that because there are no such things as intentions in the material processes of the brain there are no such things as intentions in its effects – i.e., there are no such things as intentions in human consciousness or its literary productions.

To make her point that there are no such things as intentions, Crane turns not to a literary example, but to a medical and psychological one. An example of aphasia in which a speaker demonstrates his loss of control over his speech thus becomes, for Crane, the exception that proves the rule.

> Transcripts of conversations with aphasics suggest that people feel immense frustration if their ability to choose appropriate words is impaired. For example, in an answer to an interviewer's question, "What happened to make you lose your speech?" one patient responded, "Head, fall, Jesus Christ, me no good, str, str. . .oh Jesus. . .stroke." This patient evinced anger and frustration at his inability to control his speech, to use language to express his intended meaning. Even if such control is illusory, it is still a powerful expectation. (22)

There is an immediate difficulty with this example, of course: if "conscious agency" is a "meaningless concept," how does the speaker come to have any intentions to begin with? How is it possible to refer to anything like the speaker's "intended meaning"? Crane's argument is that the control that intention entails has to be understood as a completely illusory effect. Where, then, does the illusion occur? Where does the speaker really have no control but continue to imagine he has?

Given the original cause of his condition (ostensibly a stroke), this aphasic speaker's "inability to control his speech" may be the result of any number of more immediate factors. He may, for example, no longer remember certain words that would be "appropriate" choices for explaining "what happened" (though he clearly manages to find the most relevant one). And he may be unable to control the parts of his face and mouth that he must use to say the words he does remember. But in what way, then, does it make sense to think that "such control is illusory"? The kind of control the aphasic speaker has lost obviously isn't illusory for anyone who can remember the "appropriate" words and speak them clearly. And there's nothing to suggest that the aphasic speaker himself harbors any illusions about the control he has lost; if anything the "anger and frustration" he "evinces" suggest a full comprehension of how little control he has. The "powerful expectation" that has been disappointed in the aphasic victim of stroke cannot, in other words, be the same "control" that Crane takes to be "illusory" *in principle*.

Crane surely means to locate the speaker's loss of control in his attempt to "use language to express his intended meaning," but if the more universal illusion of control cannot reside in the act of "using language" (remembering words and speaking them) then Crane must think it lies in the effort "to express [an] intended meaning." But once again, she must conflate cause and effect, since the part of the frustration we might see as universal in the stroke victim's effort at expression would arise not from being unable to control his intention but from being unable to control how his speech would be understood.

We might, for example, imagine a situation similar to the one described above, with identical lines of dialogue, only where the patient is a victim not of a stroke but of an accidental blow to the head by a falling rock. And suppose that in the process of explaining his condition, the word "stroke" comes to mind in place of the word "struck," which he no longer remembers. In this situation, we might easily misunderstand his "intended meaning" and conclude that he had a stroke instead of a head trauma. One way to imagine that the brain-injured speaker loses control in the effort to "express his intended meaning" is to point to the fact that he says "stroke" when he means "struck," but as we have already seen, that loss of control does not explain Crane's claim to a *principle* of uncontrollability; the speaker's inability to "choose appropriate words" is a function of his particular impairment, not of a universal one. Those without the impairment *can* remember and say "struck" instead of "stroke." But suppose now that the trauma victim has fully recovered from his injury and manages to produce a perfectly grammatical sentence: "I was struck by a rock." We might still fail to understand his meaning (did someone strike him with a rock on purpose? did one fall on his head from on high, striking him by accident?). Now our misunderstanding of the speaker really does mark a principle of uncontrollability. But here, of course, and in the previous case, the uncontrollability only applies to the *effects* of his expression, not to the expression itself. The healthy speaker here *means* to say "struck," just as the injured one did; even though he has succeeded, we still don't get what he means *by* it. Moreover, in this context – that is, as long as we take the "meaning" to be the *effect* of the utterance – what is true of the speaker's control over it is true of all actions, including those having nothing to do with language: the effect always has the possibility of being something other than what we intend. The claim that "such control is illusory" is true, in other words, but only in the most trivial sense.

It is worth noticing, however, that in none of these scenarios – no matter how much difficulty we imagine the speaker to have in choosing and saying his words; no matter how much difficulty we imagine the listener to have in making sense of them – does the speaker at any moment cease to "express his intended meaning." Indeed, the one thing over which he cannot help but have complete control is his own intention. The only way, then, for Crane's claim that "control is illusory" to make sense is for us to imagine the "meaning" of an utterance to consist of its effects rather than the speaker's intention. By the same token, the only way to imagine meaning as an effect to begin with is to treat its expression as causal rather than intentional. So Crane's interest in Shakespeare's

writing is not exactly in what the plays meant, but instead in the access it gives to Shakespeare's brain. Or to put the point another way: what we learn when we read Shakespeare is not what he meant, but who he was.

LYRIC EMBODIMENT

It thus makes sense that final promotional blurb in the paperback edition of Damasio's *The Feeling of What Happens,* following three pages of others by book reviewers and fellow scientists, should make this particular overture to its readers: "There is no simpler way to say this: read this book to learn who you are." The blurb is by "poet and Pulitzer Prize winner" Jorie Graham, whose name appears again following the title page and copyright apparatus, as the author of one of the book's two epigraphs. Taken from the fourth of five poems called "Notes on the Reality of the Self" that are dispersed through the volume *Materialism*, the excerpt begins with the line, "The question of who I was consumed me." Graham's blurb is clearly an allusion to her own work even as it ostensibly refers to Damasio's,[17] but while Graham's book appeared in 1993 and Damasio's in 1999, the answer *Materialism* gives to "the question of who I was" is essentially Damasio's account of the brain in *The Feeling of What Happens.*[18] Graham, however – unlike Damasio and Edelman (but like Spolsky and Crane) – portrays the self as something that is at once an *effect* of nonintentional material causes and indistinguishable from them. And in the course of that portrayal, poetic agency as such becomes in *Materialism* one more nonintentional material cause.[19]

The first poem of *Materialism* is the first of five "Notes on the Reality of the Self" dispersed throughout the volume, and it opens with a sentence fragment, marked above all by the grammatical absence of its subject: "Watching the river, each handful of it closing over the next, / brown and swollen" (*Materialism*, 3). The initial phrase is technically a dangling participle; there is no clause to offer a subject for it to modify. And the one noun available for modification by the participle – "handful" – is not plausibly capable of "watching." "Each handful of it closing over the next / brown and swollen" creates an image of a substance being kneaded or folded, but in the context of the river's appearance, the only literal agent capable of handling the river in that way and producing that turning, rolling effect is the river itself. "It" in other words, is simultaneously the effect of the action and the agent causing it.

But this image is, after all, a poetic representation of the object and not the literal object. We might say instead that the image of "each handful of

it closing over the next" is entirely in the eyes of the implied subject doing the "watching" – an effect, that is, of the imaginative agency of the lyric subject or speaker implicitly (if not yet grammatically) present in the poem. Or we might say that the point is to reveal the image as a direct effect of the agency of the poet herself whose absence from the representational world of that image is the structural condition of its production. We might also see the ambiguity out of which we arrive at these conclusions as exactly the sort of thing that, in good New Critical fashion, anchors the poem securely within the long tradition of the lyric. And indeed, the division in critical reception between Graham's admirers and her detractors has taken shape around just these claims. On the one hand, for example, Helen Vendler, one of the long-standing legislators of the so-called "mainstream" canon in American poetry, and who is often still identified with the New Critical tradition in which she was trained, has championed Graham for both mastering the lyric and expanding its limits. On the other hand, Graham has repeatedly drawn fire from language school quarters for being entirely at the mercy of the lyric tradition and failing to expand her work beyond it. But if language poetry has been seen – from both within its own circles and without – as an attack on the "personal, 'expressive' lyric," the subjectivity that emerges in *Materialism*, I will argue, goes at least as far in theorizing the elimination of that "expressivity" as the claims language poetry makes for the "open text."[20] And it does so along the very lines we have already seen articulated in the materialisms of both language poetry (most succinctly in Steve McCaffery's denial of "personal control over the production of meaning") and cognitive literary theory (in Crane's insistence that "control is illusory" with respect to "the use of language to express. . . intended meaning").[21]

In Graham's version of materialism in "Notes on the Reality of the Self," "expression" comes "pouring forth," but it is "all content no meaning":

> . . .All things are
> possible. Last year's leaves, coming unstuck from shore,
> rippling suddenly again with the illusion,
> and carried, twirling, shiny again and fat,
> towards the quick throes of another tentative
> conclusion, bobbing, circling in little suctions their stiff
> presence
> on the surface compels. Nothing is virtual.
> The long brown throat of it sucking up from some faraway melt.
> Expression pouring forth, all content no meaning.
>
> (*Materialism*, 3, lines 5–13)

As we already saw in the first two lines of the poem, the natural phenomena being described in this river scene raise as much as answer questions about the agency performing (or, we might say, causing) the movements described by the various participles. With what agent, for example, do we identify the "rippling," when, given the image we saw of the river in the first two lines of the poem, it presents as vivid a description of the water's movement as it does of the movement of the "leaves" it grammatically modifies. Unlike the opening lines of the poem, however, the lines in which the "rippling," "twirling," "bobbing," and "circling" occur constitute a grammatically complete sentence, but one that still reads ambiguously with respect to the object of its transitive main verb, "compels" (itself a compact index of agency). That is, we might understand the sentence this way: the "stiff presence" of the leaves on the water's "surface compels" the "suctions" in which the leaves are "circling." But we might also treat the sentence as a kind of solecism, one that drops the grammatically necessary object of "compels," forcing us to supply it ourselves: "their stiff presence on the surface compels [something]." But who or what is the object of this compulsion? The reader? The poem's speaker? The author herself? Something else altogether?

As we read on, another sentence fragment, "The long brown throat of it sucking up from some faraway melt," broadens the conceit of the opening fragment, shifting from one anatomical symbol of poetic making (hands) to another (the throat). I will return to the poetic significance of these tropes in a moment, but first, it's worthwhile pursuing the continuing grammatical difficulties: while the "it" to which the "long brown throat" belongs is fairly easy to identify – if "it" is not the "river," then "it" is surely the "surface" of the river – the relation between "it" and the participle "sucking up" is not so easy to make out. Like "compels," "sucking" (up or down or in any direction) implies a transitive object. There should be some thing that the "long brown throat" is "sucking up." With no such object in sight, we have the opportunity to read the sentence as yet another solecism in need of correction. We can either supply a transitive object that isn't mentioned, or choose one that is present to perform that grammatical function. But given that the source from which whatever is being sucked comes is "some faraway melt" (a plausible reference to a glacial source) the only object of "sucking" that makes sense is the water of the river itself. Yet, if the river is also the body to which the throat doing the sucking belongs, we are once again forced to imagine that the agent performing the focal action is also the agent being acted upon: the throat doing the sucking is itself being sucked.

"Nothing," therefore, "is virtual" in these opening lines of the poem because everything is *actual*. That is, every object in it is simultaneously acting and being acted upon. And within this morass of actions and reactions, causes and effects, there appears no controlling agency or, as Damasio would put it, no single central "knower." Moreover, the one thing at this point in the poem that might indicate such a "knower" (aside from the initial dangling participle, "watching") – the "expression pouring forth, all content no meaning" in the subsequent line – is not a statement of the kind that "knowers" produce. Rather it is such a literal outpouring of the watery "throat" from which it issues that it cannot help but be "all content" and "no meaning." And what the "content" of the "expression" offers instead of "meaning" is thoroughly appropriate to its nonintentional source – it offers "force": "The force of it and the thingness of it identical" (3, line 13). Ordinarily, in the context of "expression," "force" would easily serve as a synonym for "meaning"; here, however, the force that the "expression" conveys is strictly literal – the physical might of the river in all its "thingness." Indeed, precisely because the river's "expression" necessarily has "no meaning," its "force" cannot be anything other than its "thingness."

The figures of the "river" and the "leaves" in the opening poem, along with a "wind" that is introduced in the poem immediately succeeding it, repeat themselves in varying combinations throughout *Materialism*. As Vendler and other readers of Graham have noted, these tropes have a long history within the lyric tradition of being used as symbols of poetic creation and imagination. Hence Vendler's following interpretation of lines from the final poem of the book, a reading that could as easily describe the lines from "Notes on the Reality of the Self" that we have just been examining: "[The book] bravely closes with the old classical pun on vegetal leaves and the leaves of a book; Graham's leaves are carried on the surface by the current of the river, carried away in time even from their mortal author."[22] And we have already seen at least one other way in which "Notes on the Reality of the Self" might lend itself to being read as a traditional lyric allegory of poetic agency. I want to pursue that reading for a moment, but my argument will be that while the traditional lyric associations of the "river," "leaves," and "wind" are indeed crucial to the meaning of these poems, to let them stand as an allegory of what Vendler calls "lyric subjectivity" is in fact to miss the point.

The third element of Graham's trio of recurrent figures, the "wind," does not occur explicitly in "Notes on the Reality of the Self," but insofar as that figure, in the context of lyric, is what traditionally possesses and

moves the poet, the poem delivers another element whose "inspiriting" function is identical – namely, a certain kind of breath:

> A long sigh through the land, an exhalation.
> I let the dog loose in this stretch. Crocus
> appear in the gassy dark leaves. Many
> earth gasses, rot gasses.
> I take them in, breath at a time. I put my
> breath back out
> onto the scented immaterial. (3, lines 16–22)

After the long grammatical and thematic absence of subjectivity as such from the beginning of the poem, in these lines a subject capable of performing the detached "watching" that initially marked its absence finally materializes in human form. And it materializes in first person, in the "I" that is the conventional subject of the lyric poem. Furthermore the analog to the traditional "wind" in these lines, the "sigh," comes from outside her and serves as her literal inspiration. In fine lyric fashion, she takes in the sigh and breathes it back out, delivering, with her exhalation, "the scented immaterial" of her own conscious presence. Unlike the inspiriting breath (or wind) of traditional lyric, however, this breath issues not from a divine source of knowledge, or even from its secular counterpart, the poet's imagination (except in a strictly material sense, to which I will return in a moment), but from nonintentional matter ("gassy dank leaves"), which exhibited such chaotic, roiling activity in the first lines of the poem.

But if it no longer makes sense to read the poem as an allegory for the production of lyric subjectivity through divine or imaginative inspiration, neither does it make sense to read it, as Helen Vendler tries to do, as an allegory of the disappearance of that subjectivity. As we have just seen in "Notes on the Reality of the Self," part of the point of starting out in a material world without a subject is to give us a material genealogy for how that subject comes to exist. The "reality of the self," in other words, is its material origin. In describing Graham's project as one of "embodying in art a non-teleological universe – a universe without philosophical coherence though bound by physical law, a universe unconscious of us but which constitutes, by its materiality, our consciousness" (*The Given and the Made*, 92), Vendler so far grasps the point. And she also grasps the consequences Graham's project holds for the effort to make poems into allegories of lyric subjectivity. Speaking of a different "Notes on the Reality of the Self," but again in ways that apply to the poem we have been reading, Vendler explains:

> The speaker, it is true, can easily encompass within herself light, wind, bushes, and drums [think instead of "river," "breath," "leaves"]: it is even true that as they change she can change kinesthetically with them. But if one removes lyric subjectivity, and thinks purely about these four material foci of the poem, impenetrability at once becomes the central problem. (127)

Vendler understands, in other words, that once the "material foci" in the poem are understood both as literal and as the causes of the (equally material) consciousness that is the "speaker" of the poem, the option of seeing the speaker as the traditional lyric subject of an allegory of poetic inspiration is no longer possible.

Vendler also understands the consequences Graham's project of materializing the self holds for poetic expression as such:

> Graham has explored not only the limitations of any conceivable material self, but also the poetic expression possible to a self conceiving itself as material . . . The instabilities of matter must now be assumed by the self; and so any poem spoken in the voice of the material self must be an unstable poem, constantly engaged in linguistic processes of approximation. (128–29)

For Vendler, then, part of what must follow from Graham's *Materialism* is the instability that inevitably arises in a world composed entirely of causes and effects. Moreover, the "unstable poem" is a direct consequence of the same principle of uncontrollability that we have already seen ascribed to linguistic expression more generally. Recalling Crane's example of the aphasic speaker, we remember that what everyone shares with him is the frustration over being unable to control the effects of our expression. That is, there's always the possibility that someone will not understand what we mean. But as we also saw, only if we think meaning consists of the *effects* of our speech (rather than of our intentions), do we get the pathos of approximation that disturbs both Crane and Vendler. That is, the lack of control the aphasic has as he attempts to "choose the right words" only becomes universal when we think the meaning of his expression consists of its effects rather than of his intention. But the frustration only ensues when we think there was an intention to begin with.

Which is why, in the context of Graham's project, Vendler's description of the "unstable poem . . . engaged in linguistic processes of approximation" is thoroughly misplaced. That is, only by treating intention – which is, ultimately, what Vendler must mean by "lyric subjectivity" – as something *lost* in Graham's poems, do they become the kinds of efforts of approximation that can yield the pathos of struggle she wants to attribute to Graham's project: "Graham's attempt to describe the material world

with only minimal resort to the usual conceptual and philosophical resources of lyric (once so dear to her), and to make that description a vehicle for her personal struggle into comprehension and expression, is harder even than it would seem" (129). But there is in fact no loss of lyric subjectivity in Graham's poems. They depict it coming into being. There is also no pathos of struggle over expression in *Materialism*. The "lyric subjectivity" that materializes in the "I" in the second half of "Notes on the Reality of the Self" is itself one more material cause just like the ones that produced it. And it is one more "effect," itself the material "expression" of those causes. Indeed, in that poem everything, including the "lyric subject," is being expressed all the time, with lots of activity and plenty of "force," but precisely not with the struggle of approximation that Vendler imagines. What does disappear from expression, however, is meaning, and it disappears because it requires intention, something a material cause never has (cannot have). Hence, in "Notes on the Reality of the Self," expressions that are "all content," their "force" and "thingness" "identical."

The point, in other words, is to imagine the producer of the poem as a material cause, and the poem as its material effect. This is, as we have seen, the fundamental project of language poetry, the main anti-New-Critical, avant-gardist element in contemporary poetry. But the denial of intention that that project entails is also the fundamental project of the New Critical tradition and of the "mainstream" Vendler and Graham, who are committed not to repudiating that tradition but to extending it.[23] As we have seen in all of these projects, and as we saw in Davidson's effort to explain the distinctiveness of metaphor, when our interpretation of an utterance no longer concerns its intention, we are led inevitably to a consideration of its effects. By the same token, the fact that the effects of an utterance are of concern to us is the telltale sign that the meaning isn't.

There is no more vivid way to ascertain those effects than by tracking, as both Davidson and Ashbery would put it, what we "notice." So when, in a poem called "The Surface" (which is also the final poem of *Materialism*), Graham returns to her "river," "leaves" and "wind," we should not be surprised at all to find that they converge around the category of "attention":

> It has a hole in it. Not only where I
> concentrate.
> The river still ribboning, twisting up,
> Into its re-
> arrangements, chill enlightenments, tight-knotted
> quickenings

and loosenings – whispered messages dissolving
the messengers –
the river still glinting-up into its handfuls, heapings
glassy
forgettings under the river of
my attention –
and the river of my attention laying itself down –
bending,
reassembling – over the quick leaving-offs and windy
obstacles –
and the surface rippling under the wind's attention–
. . .
I say iridescent and I look down.
The leaves very still as they are carried.

(*Materialism*, 143, lines 1–12)

The "hole" in the "surface," whose analog is the vortical "suction" we saw in "Notes on the Reality of the Self" draws the speaker's attention ("where I concentrate") from the outset.[24] But if we recall the degree to which those "suctions" were indistinguishable from the body of the river containing them, we can see why the hole must also extend beyond the scope of her concentration ("not only where I concentrate").

In this respect, the hole may as well be a river, and as endless as time itself (which is why rivers are figures of choice for representing time). And like any object of attention (and unlike any expression of *intention*), it works exactly according to the logic of literalism, which entails just that sort of endlessness. What Fried has to say in "Art and Objecthood" about the work of Judd, Morris, and Smith thus applies here as well: the effect of any object's objecthood is that it can always be

> of further interest; one never feels that one has come to the end of it; it is inexhaustible. It is inexhaustible, however, not because of any fullness – that is the inexhaustibility of art – but because there is nothing there to exhaust . . . Morris's claim that in the best new work the beholder is made aware that "he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context" amounts to the claim that the beholder is made aware of the endlessness and inexhaustibility if not of the object itself at any rate of his experience of it. This awareness is further exacerbated by what might be called the inclusiveness of his situation, that is, by the fact. . .that everything he observes counts as part of his situation and hence is felt to bear in some way that remains undefined on his experience of the object. (166)

Like the beholder in the presence of a literalist object, the concentrating subject of Graham's poem finds that everything "[s]he observes counts as

part of [her] situation." And the effect of that "inclusiveness" is that the speaker's own attentive agency becomes entirely indistinguishable from the objects that draw her interest in the first place. "The river of my attention" simultaneously describes the object of her attention and the act of attending to it.

In the muddled chaos of cause and effect (identical here to what we saw in "Notes on the Reality of the Self") "the river of my attention" undergoes a further transformation when it begins "laying itself down–/ bending/reassembling – over the quick leaving offs. . ./. . .and the surface rippling under the wind's attention." At this point, the situation has become so "inclusive" – the material causes and effects in it are so thoroughly interrelated and so thoroughly coextensive with the "experience" of the speaker – that the surface over which the "river of [her] attention" is "reassembling" has become indistinguishable from "the surface rippling under the wind's attention." But if the traditional lyric role of the wind is to serve as the force that moves the poet to speak, and if in that regard, the speaker's agency is in some sense indistinguishable from that of the wind, the mingling of agency that occurs here arrives at quite different results.

The wind does move the poet to speak – to say "I say *iridescent*" – and unlike the "expression pouring forth" in the earlier poem, consisting of "all content no meaning," this "expression" does indeed have a meaning. The rainbow effect it describes is that of seeing an object – more particularly its surface – as if from many perspectives simultaneously. Or, we might say, it refers to what Morris describes above as the literalist object's greatest effect: the sense of "apprehend[ing it] from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context." But precisely *because* the meaning of the word so accurately describes the inevitable "inclusiveness" of the situation out of which it emerges, and because the word, appearing at the end of the poem as it does, occurs as a literal consequence of that situation, the meaning that the word conveys becomes indistinguishable from the effect that it literally is.

DIVINE INTENTION

DOC COCHRAN: It also wouldn't surprise me if you had a lesion in your goddamn head, and that's what's givin' you the seizures and generating your chats with the goddamn divinity. No goddamn offense intended. . .

REVEREND SMITH: Could not the lesion be the instrument of God's instructive intention, Doctor, if I am so afflicted?

DOC COCHRAN: Of course it could, his ways not bein' ours and so forth.[25]

Materialism's materials consist of Graham's own poems interspersed with fourteen excerpts from the works of monumental figures in the history of Western thought and art, ranging from Plato, Dante Alighieri, and Leonardo da Vinci to Walter Benjamin, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Bertolt Brecht. Among these, a passage from Jonathan Edwards's *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* represents effects in nature operating in the same terms that we find in Graham's poems. Just as the leaves in "Surface" are "very still as they are carried" by "the river of [the poet's] attention," so, according to Edwards, "the *images* of things. . . as we keep our eye upon them seem to remain precisely the same."[26] But this sameness of things – what Edwards calls their "continuing, perfect identity" – is entirely a function of the fact that, as he says, "these images are constantly *renewed*, by the impression and reflection of *new* rays of light; so that the image impressed by the former rays is constantly vanishing, and a *new* image impressed by *new* rays every moment" (224, note 384). As in Robert Morris's account of beholding the minimalist object, in Mark Turner's account of watching a horse running, or in Lyn Hejinian's account of the collaboratively produced "open text," the "continuing, perfect identity" of a thing is for Edwards neither singular nor continuous; it is as many images as "every moment" in which it is "renewed" and consists in successive but completely distinct effects.

Edwards's insistence, furthermore, that every apparently singular identity consists of separate, successive effects places us, not surprisingly, in a world inhabited by the same natural agents ("wind," "river") that figure so prominently in *Materialism*:

> Therefore the brightness or lucid whiteness of this body is no more numerically the same thing with that which existed in the preceding moment, than the *sound* of the wind that blows now, is individually the same with the sound of the wind that blew just before, which, though it be like it, is not the same, any more than the agitated *air*, that makes the sound is the same; or than the *water*, flowing in a river, that now passes by, is individually the same with that which passed a little before. And if it be thus with the brightness or color of the moon, so must it be with its *solidity*, and everything else belonging to its substance, if all be, each moment, as much the immediate effect of a *new* exertion or application of power. (*Great Christian Doctrine*, 224, note 384)

In the same Heraclitean fashion that we saw in Graham, Edwards seems to be insisting that we can't step twice into the same river or see a leaf blown twice by the same wind (or, for that matter, see the same leaf twice). Of course, the very question of the sameness of things – the drama of their identity – only unfolds to begin with if one is concerned with the

relation between perception of an object in one moment and perception of it in the next. Or, put slightly differently, the identity that arises out of the relation between what a thing is at one moment and what it is at another is inevitably a function of what it is to or for someone. And as we also already saw in Graham, it is just this interdependence between subjects and objects that makes nature look continuous with consciousness and vice versa. In poems like "Surface" and the various "Notes on the Reality of the Self," then, Graham seems to make "wind" and "river" her dominant tropes precisely in order to represent a phenomenological world (or to represent a world phenomenologically) in which "images are constantly *renewed*" by each successive perception we have of them.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the entire passage that Graham extracts from Edwards's *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* contains no explicit reference to the subject of its defense (aside from its abbreviated title: "The Doctrine of Original Sin"). Yet the poet who earlier wrote "Self-Portrait as the Gesture between Them [Adam and Eve]" and the more oblique "Expulsion" – that is, the poet who has repeatedly taken the philosophical and theological implications of original sin as her own subject – could hardly fail to have Edwards's subject in mind.[27] As I will show, however, reading Edwards's paragraphs specifically as a defense of "The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin," requires another, radically different understanding of the "constant renewal" of "images" than the one Graham's *Materialism* suggests. More specifically, and despite the apparent implications of his concern with the effects of things "on the eye," Edwards's defense hinges on defining divine creation logically rather than phenomenologically and on distinguishing intended effects from actual ones – or, to return to the terms with which this chapter began, on distinguishing God's intention from our attention.

The larger argument of Edwards's treatise, as we shall see, is an effort to justify holding human beings accountable for their sin while at the same time insisting on God's absolute sovereignty and omniscience as their creator. The passage that Graham includes in *Materialism*, however, is addressed to a narrower theological objection to original sin. The problem, as Edwards imagines it, is that Adam's posterity is held responsible for something Adam himself actually did. Or as Edwards puts it, some might think that "imput[ing] Adam's sin to his posterity. . .is unjust and unreasonable, inasmuch as Adam and his posterity are not one and the same" (*Great Christian Doctrine*, 220). Because we are not Adam, and because Adam is the one who sinned, the argument goes, conferring Adam's

guilt on us is "unjust and unreasonable," and thus inconsistent with the intentions of a just God. Edwards refutes the claim by contradicting the very idea that "Adam and his posterity are not one and the same," arguing that they are only as different as the "root of the tree" is from its "branches." In short, the mistake is to focus on the parts without taking account of the whole. "God," by contrast, according to Edwards, "looked on [Adam's] posterity as being *one with him*. And though he dealt more immediately with Adam, it yet was as the *head* of the whole body, and the *root* of the whole tree; and in his proceedings with him, he dealt with all the branches, as if they had been then existing in their root" (220). These claims do not appear in the paragraphs Graham selects for *Materialism* (they come several pages earlier in Edwards's treatise), but they raise an immediate question: by what logic does Edwards's denial that "the *water*, flowing in a river, that now passes by, is individually the same with that which passed a little before" support the idea that Adam's posterity is "one" with Adam? Why wouldn't Adam's posterity be "no more numerically the same thing" as Adam, than "the *sound* of the wind that blows now, is individually the same with the sound of the wind that blew just before"?

Materialism's solution to this question seems to be to make what is not "numerically the same" from one moment to the next part of an infinite tissue of causal connection. Indeed, in the second of Graham's "Notes on the Reality of the Self," where the swaying of bushes in the speaker's yard is inextricably bound up with the sounds and movements of a marching band practicing in an adjacent field, the syntax of the poem so insists on that connectedness that it's impossible to quote only a few lines at a time. Here is the last sentence of the poem, which takes up a full third of its forty-nine lines:

> . . .For there is not a sound the bushes will take
> from the multitude beyond them, in the field, uniformed –
> (all left now on one heel) (right) (all fifty trumpets up
> to the sun) – not a molecule of sound
> from the tactics of this glistening beast,
> forelimbs of silver (trombones, french horns)
> (annointed [*sic*] by the day itself) expanding, retracting,
> bits of red from the surrounding foliage deep
> in all the fulgid
> instruments – orient – ablaze where the sound is released –
> trumpeting, unfolding –
> screeching, rolling, patterning, measuring –
> scintillant beast the bushes do not know exists
> as the wind beats them, beats in them, beats round them,

them in a wind that does not really even now
exist,
in which these knobby reddish limbs that do not sway
by so much as an inch
its arctic course
themselves now sway.

(*Materialism*, II, lines 35–49)

As the individual band members become one "glistening," "scintillant beast," the wind becomes part of them and of the "bushes" it "beats" (the band, too, "beats" its drums), so that in the end we cannot tell whether "these knobby reddish limbs" must refer to parts of the bushes or parts of the band or parts of individual band members. Moreover, the agency that moves them – whichever they are – saturates the whole that they synecdochally represent, so that although "limbs" "do not sway" the wind from "its arctic course," nevertheless they do "themselves now sway."

Here we see the point of Graham's choice to include Edwards's paragraphs in *Materialism*: this wind is not swayed "by so much as in an inch" from "its arctic course" because, by Edwards's logic, it can't really have a "course" at all; it can't have a "course," because it can't actually be the same wind in one moment that it is in the next. Or as Graham puts it, the "wind" that "beats them" does so "in a wind" (a different wind) "that does not really even now / exist." For Graham as well as for Edwards, the possibility of a wind that "does not really even now exist" at the same time that it appears indistinguishable from everything it "beats" is nothing if not a "reality of the self." The fact that the wind ceases to exist in a new moment is a function of there being an "even now" as opposed to a "then," a function, that is, of successive moments that require a self to measure them. And the fact that the wind is simultaneously indistinguishable from the effects it causes (like the wind and leaves in "Surface" and like the river in the other "Notes on the Reality of the Self") is likewise an effect, brought on by a self who recognizes a causal relation between what happens at one moment and what happens in the next.

But while Graham makes these phenomenological realities of the self the focus of *Materialism*, for Edwards they are strictly instrumental, serving to mark an incommensurable break between human subjectivity and divine agency. In Graham's poems, as we have seen, disparate acts and things all become part of a seamless fabric of cause and effect that in turn becomes a figure for consciousness itself. Thoroughly contingent relations take on the look of necessity ("themselves now sway") to the perceiving subject who constitutes them. For Edwards, however, treating

contingencies as necessities (and vice versa) is precisely how humans make mistakes about the relationship between God's creative agency and Adam's sin, and between Adam's sin and the sins of his posterity.

The decisive mistake, according to Edwards, is not so much thinking that because our condition is a contingent effect of Adam's sin (and his sin, in turn, a contingent effect of God's creation), it would be unjust to impute Adam's guilt to us. Rather, the problem has to do with treating the relevant relation between Adam's sin (or further back, God's creation) and our condition as *causal* in the first place. When Edwards writes that "it does not at all *necessarily* follow, that because there was sound, or light, or colour, or resistance, or gravity, or thought, or consciousness, or any other dependent thing the last moment, that therefore there shall be the like at the next," he is emphasizing the degree to which nothing is guaranteed to follow from any given moment. And for Edwards, there's an equally important corollary to that claim: "the present existence, either of this, or any other created substance, cannot be an *effect* of its past existence." It is here that Edwards reveals the fundamental condition of *discontinuity* between cause and effect that characterizes his descriptions of nature and that for him, defines temporal existence: "The existences (so to speak) of an effect, or thing dependent, in different parts of space or duration, though ever so *near* one to another, do not at all *coexist* one with the other; and therefore are as truly different effects, as if those parts of space and duration were ever so far asunder" (*Great Christian Doctrine*, 223). The connection to the argument for original sin is now easier to see, though it only emerges in reverse. According to Edwards, to see Adam's sin as a *cause* of our condition (and to see our guilt as unjustified), we also have to believe that Adam's sin and our condition do not "coexist": "The force of the reasons brought against imputing Adam's sin to his posterity (if there be any force in them) lies in this, That Adam and his posterity are not *one*" (226).

For Edwards, however, as we have already seen, Adam and his posterity precisely do "coexist," ontologically united in an expression of divine will: "the derivation or the evil disposition to Adam's posterity, or rather, the *co-existence* of the evil disposition, implied in *Adam's* first rebellion, in the *root* and *branches,* is a consequence of the *union* that the wise Author of the world has established between *Adam* and his posterity" (221). In the temporal world of cause and effect, then – in the world of Graham's poems – marching band members, the bushes, the wind, only become united as one "scintillant beast" through their relation to one another from one moment to the next. The "world" of Edwards's divine "Author," however – unlike Graham's "beast" – is complete from the

start, independent of any effects of sticks on drums or wind on branches, so that, as Edwards explains, "its existence in each successive moment, is altogether equivalent to an *immediate production out of nothing*" (224). There is no such thing as an "immediate production out of nothing" in Graham's "scintillant beast," or for that matter, in language poetry's open texts or minimalism's objects. What matters about them is their status as effects; they consist in the causes that precede them and in the effects they cause. Edwards's divine "Author," meanwhile, creates the world exactly as Stein claims to produce art: by "beginning again and again." And like the work that for Stein is an entity rather than an identity, the work of Edwards's God consists not in successive effects, but in the utter irrelevance of effect.[28] It is, to borrow another of Stein's favorite phrases, a matter of "present immediacy."

Edwards's "Author of the world" operates, in other words, by the same logic according to which "there can be no unfunny jokes." The joke can fail to make us laugh, and Adam can disobey God's command, but the joke never ceases to express the *intention* to make us laugh, and Adam never ceases to express the "*immediate* agency, will, and power of god" (223). At this point, it should hardly come as a surprise that the following two sentences from Edwards's journals should occur in the epigraph to "Art and Objecthood": "it is certain with me that the world exists anew every moment; that the existence of things every moment ceases and is every moment renewed . . .[W]e every moment see the same proof of a God as we should have seen if we had seen Him create the world at first" (cited in Fried "Art and Objecthood," 148). The "proof of God" – i.e., the presence of divine intention – "exists anew at every moment" *because* nothing follows from it. Or to turn the idea around: that the world "exists anew every moment" is what makes it an expression of intention as opposed to any series of effects that might or might not follow from it. To return, then to the earlier argument in Edwards, Adam's posterity is "one and the same" with Adam, rather than succeeding him, because they are united by God's intention. In Fried, the term "intention" never arises, but the logic that forms the union of Adam and his posterity is the same as the logic that unites the elements of modernist sculpture "in a sense inextricably involved with the concept of meaning" ("Art and Objecthood," 161). In short, what distinguishes the presence of meaning/intention from any succession of effects is, finally, what distinguishes art from objects for Fried and divine from human knowledge for Edwards. Put in terms of the stunning conclusion of "Art and Objecthood," "Presentness is grace" (168).

The claim of this book, however, is not that what happens in the movement from modernism to postmodernism is something akin to a fall from grace. Rather, my point has been to expose the transformation – of logic into phenomenology, of intention into attention, of meaning into effect – that has defined the movement from modernism to postmodernism and in the process redefined modernism itself. Seeing modernism's own resistance to that transformation is to see its insistence that meaning and effect, intention and attention, logic and phenomenology, are simultaneous and not only *not* indistinguishable, but categorically distinct. Understanding the fact of that categorical distinction does not entail a return to grace, and certainly in the history of literature and art, the discrepancy between the work and our experience of it has been, if anything, an ongoing source of frustration. Nevertheless, as Edwards says in his treatise, "however the matter be attended with difficulty, fact obliges us to *get over* it" (*Great Christian Doctrine*, 222).

Notes

INTRODUCTION: MODERNISM'S NEW LITERALISM

1 *Marjorie Perloff, 21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 164. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

2 Fredric Jameson's reading of Bob Perelman's poem "China" in *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* helped to situate the language movement at the center of postmodernism in American poetry (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 28–31. Further references appear in parentheses in the text. It also provided a key point of resistance for those, including Perelman himself, who have sought to distance language poetry from postmodernism (see *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996]). For a critique of both Jameson and Ron Silliman in the specific context of Jameson's reading of Perelman, see Robert von Hallberg, "Poetry, Politics, and Intellectuals," (in *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume 8*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 115–19.

3 See, among others, Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Lee Bartlett, "What Is 'Language Poetry'?" *Critical Inquiry* 12.4 (1986): 741–52; Ron Silliman, Introduction to *In the American Tree* (Orono, ME: The National Poetry Foundation, 1986); Jerome McGann, "Contemporary Poetry: Alternate Routes," *Critical Inquiry* 13.3 (1987): 624–47; Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten, "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," *Social Text 19–20* (Fall 1988): 261–75; Keith Tuma, "An Interview with Michael Palmer," *Contemporary Literature* 30.1 (Spring 1989): 1–12; Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Linda Reinfeld, *Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of a Modern American Poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Hallberg, "Poetry, Politics, and Intellectuals"; Perelman, *The Marginalization of Poetry*; Hank Lazer,

Opposing Poetries, Vol. One: Issues and Institutions (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996); Christopher Beach, *Poetic Culture: Contemporary American Poetry between Community and Institutions* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Ann Vickery, *Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000); Juliana Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001); and Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003).

4 Among the dozens of books devoted to the relationship between modernism and postmodernism the primary one for my purpose has been Jameson's *Postmodernism*. For other arguments relevant to my account, see Charles Altieri, *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry during the 1960s* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1979); François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Andrew Ross, *The Failure of Modernism: Symptoms of American Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Ihab Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987); Astradur Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); James Longenbach, *Modern Poetry after Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997).

5 In that respect, it is an attempt also to revise the critical history that has come to parallel this literary history. The postmodern criticism that understands itself as a repudiation of a once mainstream New Criticism should be understood instead, I argue, as its continuation. And it can be argued as well that while postmodern poetry is not an extension of modernist poetry, postmodern criticism is an extension of the New Criticism that has so often been identified with modernism. The twentieth-century *locus classicus* for the opposition between meaning and experience as the opposition between modernism and what followed is Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" (1967), which identifies modernism with "meaningfulness *as such*" and identifies what was not yet called postmodernism with the idea that "experience alone is what matters." (See *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999], 158–62.) The opposition between meaning and experience is already at work in the New Criticism's own valorization of experience. It is also at work in the later debates about authorial intention generated by Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels's 1982 essay, "Against Theory," reprinted in *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and it is revisited in important ways in

Knapp's *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

6 For a brilliant account of how Eliot rehearses the reduction of language to "material form" in order to counteract that reduction with the redeeming prospect of meaning as such, see Daniel T. McGee, "DaDa Da Da: Sounding the Jew in Modernism," *ELH* 68.2 (2001): 501–27.

7 Lyn Hejinian, *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* (1978; Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1996), no. 11 (alphabet and emphasis mine). The book contains no page numbers, suggesting that the poems were composed on a continuous roll of paper (no doubt intended as a manifestation of the material conditions of its typewritten production, discussed below). References to a roll and to rolling occur throughout the poem, most persuasively in no. 14: "legible memory rolls more bits."

8 Reprinted in Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 43. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

9 As Mary Ellen Solt writes in the introduction to her anthology of Concrete Poetry, "the concrete poet is concerned with making an object to be perceived rather than read" (*Concrete Poetry: A World View* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970], 7). See also Eugene Wildman's *Anthology of Concretism* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1969).

10 "Art and Objecthood" first appeared in *Artforum* 5 (June 1967), 12–23. For an important early recognition of Fried's modernism as the logical opposition to the literalist commitments of language poetry, see Charles Altieri's "Without Consequences Is No Politics: A Response to Jerome McGann," in *Politics and Poetic Value*, ed. Robert von Hallberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 301–07.

11 Gertrude Stein, *Writings 1932–1946*, ed. Catharine Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America, 1998), 356. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

12 The frequently quoted dictum is from the 1926 poem "Ars Poetica" by Archibald Macleish.

13 I. A. Richards, *Poetries and Sciences: A Reissue with a Commentary of Science and Poetry* (1926, 1935) (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1970), 22. Further references appear in parentheses in the text. "The Heresy of Paraphrase" is the last chapter of Brooks's *The Well-Wrought Urn* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1956).

14 Evan Carton and Gerald Graff offer a nuanced account of the variations among New Critical positions and the history of their development and institutionalization in "Criticism since 1940," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume 8*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch.

15 See Ransom, "Criticism, Inc." (1938) and Brooks, "The Formalist Critics" (1951). Both are reprinted in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

16 In *Poetic Statement and Critical Dogma* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), Gerald Graff shows how pervasive the opposition between meaning and affect became in subsequent distillations of New Critical doctrine, particularly in instructional texts on poetry published in the 1950s and 1960s.

17 Bernstein, *A Poetics*, 16.

18 John Ashbery, *Other Traditions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1–2. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

19 Hallberg's *Poetry, Politics, and Intellectuals* paraphrases language poetry's point in just these terms: "Words, not poets, produce poems. The proper means of interpreting a poem, therefore, is less the reconstruction of the intention of the author than the sorting out of permissible associations with the words of the text" (117).

20 John Ashbery, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (New York: Penguin, 1976). Although they are not my focus, the self-reflexive structures of Ashbery's poem are obviously essential to it. For an elegant deconstruction of those structures, see Lee Edelman, "The Pose of Imposture: Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 32.1 (1986): 95–114. For a fascinating reading of Ashbery's "convex mirror" in the context of 1960s technologies of surveillance, see Stephen Paul Miller, "'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,' the Watergate Affair, and Johns's Crosshatch Paintings," *boundary 2* 20.2 (1993): 84–115. Susan Schultz's superb introduction to *The Tribe of John: Ashbery and Contemporary Poetry* situates Ashbery across both mainstream and avant-garde traditions (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997).

21 Paul Hoover, Introduction, *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), xxvii. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

22 Charles Bernstein, *Content's Dream* (1986; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 233.

23 Steve McCaffery, *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973–1986* (New York: Roof Books, 1986), 149. Further references appear in parentheses in the text. The poetic text cited is from Bernstein, *Disfrutes* (Needham, MA: Potes & Poets, 1981).

24 Silliman *et al.*, "Aesthetic Tendency," 271. Further references appear in parentheses in the text. For other accounts of the collective participation at the heart of language poetry's political project, see Perelman, *The Marginalization of Poetry*; Beach, *Poetic Culture*; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry 1908–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*; Watten, *The Constructivist Moment* and "The Turn to Language in the 1960s," *Critical Inquiry 29 (Autumn 2002), 139–83; and Vickery, Leaving Lines of Gender. For a brilliant critique of the disjunctions between the language movement's ideas of community and its theoretical commitments, see Oren Izenberg, "Language Poetry and Collective Life," Critical Inquiry 30 (Autumn 2003): 132–59.*

25 W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," reprinted in Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 4. Further references appear in parentheses in the text. For an extended consideration of the meaning of "external evidence" in "The Intentional Fallacy," see Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 191–92. See also Carton and Graff, "Criticism Since 1940,"306.

26 Susan Howe, *Pierce-Arrow* (New York: New Directions, 1999), 5.

27 Susan Howe, *The Birth-Mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 156.

28 My effort to link these commitments on the part of the language poets to similar commitments on the part of the New Critics might raise objections from readers familiar with Ransom's "Criticism, Inc." (1938) or Cleanth Brooks's "The Formalist Critics" (1951). Both argue that the meaning of a poem has nothing to do with either its causes (what Wimsatt and Beardsley call "intention" but that I have identified as authorial "attention") or its effects (what the reader experiences in her encounter with the text). Brooks's formulation is the most succinct: "the reduction of a work of literature to its causes does not constitute literary criticism; nor does an estimate of its effects" (1369–70). My argument, however, is that the combination of insisting that the meaning of the text inheres in its formal features and that its value consists in its appeal to our "emotional attitudes" cannot help but spin out the very logic of reduction to cause/effect that Brooks most vehemently resists. And the inevitable outcome of that reduction is nowhere more evident than in Ransom's own account of the role the material features of the text (explicitly described as its objecthood) play in both the author's attention (which Ransom calls "interests," a term Richards also uses more or less interchangeably with "attention") and the reader's:

> However the critic may spell them, the two terms are in his mind: the prose core to which he can violently reduce the total object, and the differentia, residue, or tissue, which keeps the object poetical or entire. The character of the poem resides for the good critic in its way of exhibiting the residuary quality. The character of the poet is defined by the kind of prose object to which his interest inevitably attaches [or we might say, what he notices], plus his way of involving it firmly in the residuary tissue. (1118)

Douglas Mao confirms this correlation between a text's material presence and its appeal to "attention" in his important reassessment of the New Criticism, "The New Critics and the Text-Object": "Yet for Ransom, the poem protects its particulars not by enclosing them in a space separate from the rest of reality, but by provoking a retraining of attention" (237). The essay appears in *ELH* 63.1 (1996): 227–54. For Mao, this correlation turns out to be a way of defending the New Criticism against the charge of anti-historicism. That is, even as "[Brooks's] urn, with Wimsatt's verbal icon, remains a nexus for misreadings of the New Critics as promoters of the idea that the autonomous text-object can be understood as radically separate from all external contexts,"

Mao argues, the New Critical "text-object" precisely cannot be separate from its external contexts, by virtue of the very same logic that for both Stein and Fried, what makes an object an object is that it exists entirely in relation to an experiencing subject, a beholder who in effect embodies its "external contexts" (237). But whereas Mao is interested in recovering the continuity between the New Criticism and historicism, I am interested in how that continuity also marks the difference between the New Criticism and the modernism with which it is traditionally identified. The logic, in other words, that makes the New Critical "text-object" historicist after all turns out to be the same logic that I am arguing produces the crucial difference between the New Criticism's "text-object" and modernism's art – in short, between objecthood and art.

29 One of the most elegant explications of the language movement's marxist commitments is Michael Davidson's *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). For a compact critique of those commitments see Altieri's "Without Consequences."

30 Helen Vendler, *The Given and the Made* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

31 Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1999), 10.

1 GERTRUDE STEIN FOR ANYONE

1 *Writings 1932–1946,* ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 374. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

2 For a brilliant account of Stein's interest in wholeness in the context of the wider modernist concern with "textual integrity," see Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

3 My interest in mapping the theoretical shifts in Stein's work was sparked by the consistent divide Stein's readers have seen between Stein's early "realism" and her later "abstractionism." The following critical studies were extremely useful to me in constructing my own formulation of this divide: Donald Sutherland, *Gertrude Stein: A Biography of Her Work* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1951); Michael J. Hoffman, *The Development of Abstractionism in the Writings of Gertrude Stein* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965); Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Norman Weinstein, *Gertrude Stein and the Literature of Modern Consciousness* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1970); Wendy Steiner, *Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance: The Literary Portraiture of Gertrude Stein* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983);

Randa Dubnick, *The Structure of Obscurity: Gertrude Stein, Language, and Cubism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); and Lyn Hejinian, "Two Stein Talks" (1986), reprinted in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

4 For a discussion of this theory's development within *The Making of Americans* itself, see Janice L. Doane, *Silence and Narrative: The Early Novels of Gertrude Stein* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986). Stein's *Lectures in America* (1935) is reprinted in *Writings 1932–1946*. In this chapter, I discuss five of the six lectures contained in the original *Lectures in America*. All references to the following lectures — "What Is English Literature," "Plays," "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans," "Portraits and Repetition," and "Poetry and Grammar," are to the Library of America edition and appear in parentheses in the text.

5 Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (1925; Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1995), 191. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

6 For another discussion of the relationship between history and repetition in *The Making of Americans,* see Jayne L. Walker, *The Making of a Modernist: Gertrude Stein from* Three Lives *to* Tender Buttons (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984).

7 For accounts of Stein's theorization of her audience, see Harriet Chessman, *The Public Is Invited to Dance: Representation, the Body, and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989); Lisa Ruddick, *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Peter Baker, *Obdurate Brilliance: Exteriority and the Modern Long Poem* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991); Ellen Berry, *Curved Thought and Textual Wandering: Gertrude Stein's Postmodernism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Bob Perelman, *The Trouble with Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings* (London: Routledge, 1994); Barbara Will, *Gertrude Stein: Modernism and the Problem of "Genius"* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); and Ulla Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003).

8 Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937; New York: Random House, 1964), 52.

9 Stein studied philosophy and psychology with James while she was a student at Radcliffe, during which time she certainly would have had occasion to study James's treatment of habit in *Psychology: Briefer Course* (cited below), required reading in his introductory classes. For this and other biographical information, I have drawn from James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974). For accounts of the relationship between James's psychological theory and Stein's compositional theory, see Ronald B. Levinson, "Gertrude Stein, William James, and

Grammar," *American Journal of Psychology* 54 (January 1941): 124–28; Lisa Ruddick, "Fluid Symbols in American Modernism: William James, Gertrude Stein, George Santayana, and Wallace Stevens," in *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) and *Reading Gertrude Stein*; Clive Bush, *Halfway to Revolution: Investigation and Crisis in the Work of Henry Adams, William James and Gertrude Stein* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Judith Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Jonathan Levin, "'Entering the Modern Composition': Gertrude Stein and the Patterns of Modernism," in *Rereading the New: A Backward Glance at Modernism*, ed. Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); Steven Meyer, "Writing Psychology Over: Gertrude Stein and William James," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 8.1 (1995): 133–63 and *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000; Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); Michael Trask, *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); and Maria Farland, "Gertrude Stein's Brain Work," *American Literature* 76.1 (2004): 117–48.

10 William James, *Psychology: Briefer Course* (1892; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 126. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

11 Gertrude Stein, *How Writing Is Written*, ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1974), 155. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

12 William Gass discusses Stein's theory of the relationship between immediacy and spatiality in his groundbreaking essay on *Tender Buttons*, "Gertrude Stein and the Geography of the Sentence," in *The World within the Word* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979). For discussions of landscape as an analog (as well as a counterterm) to the spatialization Stein imagines for writing, see Hejinian, "Two Stein Talks," in *The Language of Inquiry*; Ulla Dydo, "Landscape Is Not Grammar: Gertrude Stein in 1928," *Raritan* 7.1 (1987): 97–113; and Elliott L. Vanskike, "'Seeing Everything as Flat': Landscape in Gertrude Stein's *Useful Knowledge* and *The Geographical History of America*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 35.2 (1993) 151–67. For an account of Stein's concern with the spatiality in the context of print see Michael Kaufmann, *Textual Bodies: Modernism, Postmodernism, and Print* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994).

13 Stein explains this inability to achieve wholeness as a failure of empire in "What Is English Literature." I discuss the connections Stein sees between literary and national wholeness in the first section of the longer version of "Gertrude Stein for Anyone" that appeared in *ELH* 64.1 (1997): 289–331.

14 Stein and Whitehead were, in fact, friends. During a visit to England at the beginning of World War I, Stein first met Whitehead, along with Russell, at a dinner party in Cambridge. Biographical lore has it that by the end of the evening, Stein had concluded that Whitehead, not Russell, was surely responsible for the major ideas in the *Principia Mathematica* (Mellow, *Charmed Circle*, 211). For accounts of Stein's relation to Whitehead's ideas, see Weinstein, *Literature of Modern Consciousness*, as well as Victoria Maubrey-Rose, *The Anti-Representational Response: Gertrude Stein's* Lucy Church Amiably (Uppsala, Sweden: Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia, 1985).

15 Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy, 2nd ed.* (1920; Minneola, NY: Dover Publications, 1993), 13. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

16 Alfred North Whitehead, *An Introduction to Mathematics* (1911; London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 148. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

17 Gertrude Stein, *Narration* (1935; New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 17.

18 For analysis of *Lucy Church Amiably* as an "attempt to replace the noun," see Maubrey-Rose, *The Anti-Representational Response*, as well as the first chapter of Elizabeth Frost's *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003).

19 Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), reprinted in *Writings 1903–1932*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 900. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

20 Gertrude Stein, *Lucy Church Amiably* (1930; New York: Something Else Press, 1969), 130–31. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

21 The prose style of this passage is typical of what many critics have characterized as Stein's "difficult" style, as opposed to the more "mainstream" or "accessible" style of, say, *Three Lives* or *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. The "accessible"/"difficult" opposition reproduces in many respects the divide in Stein's work that can be characterized in terms of "realism"/"abstractionism." Analyses of the "difficult"/"mainstream" opposition can be found in DeKoven, *A Different Language*; Dubnick, *The Structure of Obscurity*; Marjorie Perloff, "Six Stein Styles in Search of a Reader," in *A Gertrude Stein Companion: Content with the Example*, ed. Bruce Kellner (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988); and Elizabeth Fifer, *Rescued Readings: A Reconstruction of Gertrude Stein's Difficult Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992). For an analysis of the stylistic characteristics of *Lucy Church Amiably* in comparison to the characteristics of "computer-generated" writing, see Carolynn Van Dyke, "'Bits of Information and Tender Feeling': Gertrude Stein and Computer-Generated Prose," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 35.2 (1993): 168–97.

22 *Writings 1903–1932*, 524.

23 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 167.

24 For a discussion of how Stein imagines alternatives to the naming function of nouns, see Neil Schmitz, *Of Huck and Alice: Humorous Writing in American Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

25 Shari Benstock makes the important formal observation that for Stein "meaning lies not in linguistic representation or reference, but within its own principles of operation" (*Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900–1940* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986], 160–61). To my knowledge, Sutherland was the first to remark in mathematical terms on Stein's understanding of the relationship between word and number:

> Naturally any word at all contains to start with an abstraction from many experiences in life, and each word in isolation does convey a generality which is used in life, in thinking and in conversation about particular complexes of experience. Any word if it is a traditional word is bound to convey its generality. In this way they are like numbers, like 1, 2, 3, which inevitably convey the generality of unity or of duality or of triads, no matter what particular things you may be counting. (Sutherland, *Gertrude Stein*, 80)

26 For differing accounts of Stein's autobiographical projects, see Leigh Gilmore, "A Signature of Lesbian Autobiography: 'Gertrice/Altrude,'" in *Autobiography and Questions of Gender*, ed. Shirley Neuman (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1991), 56–75; Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject*; Catharine R. Stimpson, "Gertrude Stein and the Lesbian Lie," in *American Women's Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory,* ed. Margo Culley (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 152–66; John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and James Goodwin, *Autobiography: The Self Made Text* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993). Karin Cope critiques Stimpson in "'Moral Deviancy' and Contemporary Feminism: The Judgment of Gertrude Stein" in *Feminism Beside Itself,* ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman (New York: Routledge, 1995).

27 My understanding of the mathematical "exactness" Stein attributes to her literary experiments stands in opposition to a long tradition of Stein criticism that depends on seeing the results of Stein's experiments as fundamentally unintelligible. Among many of Stein's contemporaries, this charge functioned primarily as a means of dismissing her work, but even among more recent critical accounts that situate her as a precursor to postmodernism (see the previous chapter), what used to be her unintelligibility has in effect been refigured as indeterminacy or indefinition in order to become Stein's strongest virtue. The early, dismissive accounts focus, of course, on the reductive quality of Stein's vocabulary, citing a semantic impoverishment as the sign of her imaginative or intellectual impoverishment, whereas recent accounts focus on the indeterminacy of the writing as a source of its semantic, and thereby its imaginative, plenitude. For an account by one of Stein's contemporaries that partakes fully of the idea of her inscrutability, see Conrad Aiken's review of *The Making of Americans* ("We Ask for Bread," *The New Republic,* 7 April 1934: 219). For other examples, see also Wyndham

Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (1927; Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993); Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932); Desmond McCarthy, *Criticism* (London: Putnam, 1932); B. F. Skinner, "Has Gertrude Stein a Secret?" *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1934): 50–57; Kenneth Burke, "The Impartial Essence," *The New Republic*, 3 July 1935: 227; and B. L. Reid, *Art By Subtraction: A Dissenting Opinion of Gertrude Stein* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958). Wilson's view is by no means wholly dismissive, but the criteria by which he chooses to reject certain works and elevate others are consistent with those of Stein's harsher critics. For examples of critical works that helped initiate that celebratory turn, see especially Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999); "Reading Stein," in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984); Judy Grahn, *Really Reading Gertrude Stein: A Selected Anthology with Essays by Judy Grahn* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1989); Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics*; Berry, *Curved Thought*; Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Alison Rieke, *The Senses of Nonsense* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992); While I would identify Stein's work most closely with the Ludwig Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, another incarnation of the Stein committed to indeterminacy emerges in critical work that pairs her with the later Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*. See particularly Marjorie Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), and, for an account that comes closest to taking measure of Stein's resistances to indeterminacy, Jonathan Monroe's very fine article "Syntextural Investigations," *Diacritics* 26.3–4 (1996): 126–41.

28 I argue elsewhere (in "How Can a Lesbian Be an Adulteress: Marriage and Promiscuity in Gertrude Stein's Domestic Fictions," *Western Humanities Review* 53.1 [1999]: 54–64) for reading Stein's anecdote about the parlor as a celebration of promiscuity, but the promiscuity that Stein invites is precisely not analogous to the structures of indeterminacy that so many recent critics have claimed she intended to produce. For a compelling (but in my view mistaken) analysis of tropes of promiscuity in Stein, see Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry 1908–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

2 MAKING THE ROSE RED: STEIN, PROPER NAMES, AND THE CRITIQUE OF INDETERMINACY

1 At the time when this chapter was being completed for publication in article form there were few attempts to extricate Stein from the grip of postmodernism. One of the better attempts was Nicola Pitchford's "Unlikely Modernism, Unlikely Postmodernism: Stein's *Tender Buttons*," *American Literary History* 11.4 (1999): 642–67. Unfortunately, although Pitchford neglects to engage the postmodernizing accounts of Stein that appear in the

context of language writing, she simply reinscribes Stein's style as postmodernist in exactly their terms. For a brilliantly argued account of Stein's view of art, read in the context of the art criticism of Wyndham Lewis on the one hand and Michael Fried on the other, see Lisa Siraganian, "Out of Air: Theorizing the Art Object in Gertrude Stein and Wyndham Lewis," *Modernism/Modernity* 10:4 (2003), 657–76.

2 *Writings 1903–1932,* ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America, 1998), 387–96.

3 *Writings 1932–1946* ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America, 1998), 313–14. Further references appear in parentheses in the text. Marjorie Perloff's phrase is the title of her 1981 book: *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

4 Gertrude Stein, *Four in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 1. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

5 *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, tr. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969). Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

6 See Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" in *Mysticism and Logic* (1917; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1981). Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

7 Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* (1918, 1924; LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1994), 62. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

8 See also Russell, "On Denoting" (1905) in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. Robert Charles Marsh (New York: Macmillan Company, 1956) 45–47.

9 I am indebted for my account of the commonality between Frege and Russell to two texts: John R. Searle, "Proper Names," *Mind* 67 (1958): 166–73; and Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

10 Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation,* ed. Christie V. McDonald, tr. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 93. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

11 Albert Cook invokes a similar notion of reference in "Some Notes on Stein and Deixis," *Arizona Quarterly* 53.1 (1997): 91–102.

12 In *Henry James, Gertrude Stein, and the Biographical Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), Charles Caramello sees *Four in America* as an exercise in self- or what he calls "autoreferentiality" (169–200).

13 See Thornton Wilder's introduction to *Four in America* (iv).

14 Jackson Mac Low, "Reading a Selection from *Tender Buttons*," in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, ed. Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 202.

15 The standout exception is Robert Grenier's response in the same sequence, which calls the effort to align Stein with language poetry's materialist commitments a "creative misreading" (*ibid.* 206).

16 Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence* (1987; New York: Roof Books, 1995), 12. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.
17 Charles Bernstein, "Artifice of Absorption," reprinted in *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 86. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

3 LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON AND T=H=E N=E=W C=R=I=T=I=C=I=S=M

1 Nancy Newhall, *P. H. Emerson: The Fight for Photography as a Fine Art, Aperture* 19.3&4 (1975): 93. All biographical information about as well as quotations from Emerson come from that volume. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.
2 See, for example, Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Charles Bernstein's introduction to Laura (Riding) Jackson and Schuyler Jackson, *Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words,* ed. William Harmon (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); and Lisa Samuels's introduction to Laura Riding, *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Further references to *Anarchism Is Not Enough* appear in parentheses in the text.
3 Steve McCaffery, *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973–1986* (New York: Roof Books, 1986), 14. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.
4 Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten, "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," *Social Text* 19/20 (Fall 1988): 261–75. The passage cited is on page 269.
5 (Riding) Jackson and Jackson, *Rational Meaning*, 212. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.
6 I. A. Richards, *Poetries and Sciences, A Reissue with a Commentary of "Science and Poetry (1926, 1935)* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1970), 33. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.
7 Stein, *Writings 1932–1946*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America, 1998), 326.
8 While Stein did not explicitly articulate her antipathy to the history of word use until "Poetry and Grammar," (Riding) Jackson saw this antipathy in Stein's work in the late 1920s and wrote about it in "The New Barbarism and Gertrude Stein" (*transition* [June 1927]: 153–68). (Riding) Jackson and Robert Graves's Seizin press published Stein's *Acquaintance with Description* in 1929, and (Riding) Jackson also corresponded with Stein for a number of years. Steven Meyer produces a fascinating analysis of their correspondence in "'An Ill-Matched Correspondence': Laura Riding's Gertrude Stein," *Raritan* 19.4 (2000): 159–70.
9 *Writings 1932–1946*, 467.

10 For informative accounts of (Riding) Jackson's relation to the Fugitives, see especially William Pratt, *The Fugitive Poets: Modern Southern Poetry in Perspective* (1965; Nashville, TN: J. J. Sanders & Company, 1991) and Deborah Baker's excellent biography, *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (New York: Grove Press, 1993).

11 William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930). All subsequent references are to the second edition (New York: New Directions, 1947) and appear in parentheses in the text.

12 Robert Graves and Laura Riding, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1927), 5. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

13 (Riding) Jackson, "On Ambiguity," in *Rational Meaning,* 510. For a detailed account of the exchange between (Riding) Jackson and Empson, see Baker, *In Extremis*, 143–45.

14 *New York Times*, 4 September 1991, B9.

15 (Riding) Jackson's papers are housed in the Rare and Manuscript Collections at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

16 Of course Richards's demonstrations in *Practical Criticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929) point overwhelmingly to the idea that the meaning of any given poem is independent of any individual reader's experience of it. See in particular the "Documentation" for Poem 3, which begins with a discussion of "misunderstanding" (40 ff.). My interest, however, is in the logic that entails such surveying in the first place.

17 Riding, *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, 16.

18 For by far the best account of old and new romantic efforts in the nineteenth century to equate sounds with specific avenues of rhapsodic inspiration and identification (in this case, national and racial), see John D. Kerkering, *The Poetics of National and Racial Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

19 (Riding) Jackson, *The Poems of Laura Riding* (New York: Persea Books, 1980). Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

20 Joyce Piell Wexler, *Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1979), 150. Wexler's book offers by far the most sustained, accurate analysis of (Riding) Jackson's poetry and poetic theory available in monograph form to date.

21 In "The Talking World" the speaker of the poem proclaims an end to "truth" by means of mere "talk":

> Let the uses of words prevail over words.
> Let there be many ways of not lying
> And no ways of truth-telling.
> Let there be no wrong because no right (lines 67–70)

22 Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

23 McGann, *Black Riders*, 128.

24 (Riding) Jackson, "Introduction for a Broadcast," *Chelsea* (September 1962), 4. I am indebted to Wexler for identifying this crucial passage. (See *Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth*, 145.)
25 Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence* (1987; New York: Roof Books, 1995), 12.

4 MODERNISM'S OLD LITERALISM: POUND, WILLIAMS, ZUKOFSKY, AND THE OBJECTIVIST CRITIQUE OF METAPHOR

1 Conrad Aiken, "We Ask for Bread," *The New Republic,* 7 April 1934: 219.
2 Barrett Watten's *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003) offers further evidence of the poetic interest in Basic during the 1930s: a translation of *Finnegan's Wake* into Basic by James Joyce and C. K. Ogden, which Eugene Jolas published in his avant-garde magazine *transition* in March, 1932. The translation appears in *In "transition": A Paris Anthology* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1990).
3 Or, for that matter, to James Joyce's 500,000-word vocabulary – which comparison, as Watten notes, is the main sensational claim in Ogden's translation of *Finnegan's Wake* into Basic English (Watten, *Constructivist Moment,* 7).
4 I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden, *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar, Eighth Edition* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1940), 43. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.
5 Louis Zukofsky, "Basic" (1943), reprinted in *Prepositions +: The Collected Critical Essays*, ed. Mark Scroggins (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 156. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.
6 Gertrude Stein, *Writings 1932–1946,* ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 313. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.
7 My interest in this opposition is indebted to the following indispensable critical accounts of Pound, Williams and Zukofsky: J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967); Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Knopf, 1974); Charles Altieri, "The Objectivist Tradition," *Chicago Review* 30.3 (1979): 5–22; Joseph Riddel, *The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Michael Heller, *Conviction's Net of Branches: Essays on the Objectivists and Poetry* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of a Modern American Poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and John Lowney, *The American Avant-Garde Tradition: William Carlos Williams, Postmodern Poetry, and the Politics of Cultural Memory* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1997).
8 Laura (Riding) Jackson, *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, ed. Lisa Samuels (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 16–17.

9 Louis Zukofsky, "Comment," *Poetry* 37.5 (1931): 273–274.

10 C. K.Ogden, *Debabelization, with a Survey of Contemporary Opinion on the Problem of a Universal Language* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1931), 56. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

11 Compare to Bertrand Russell's claim in *Mysticism and Logic* (1917; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1981) that the only truly proper names are "this" and "I" (162).

12 There are two "examples of word order," which are intended to suffice for teaching the student of Basic how to construct meaningful sequences of words: (1) "The camera man who made an attempt to take a moving picture of the society women before they got their hats off did not get off the ship until he was questioned by the police," and (2) "We will give simple rules to you now" (insert).

13 Gertrude Stein, *Writings 1903–1932*, ed. Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 395. See Thornton Wilder's introduction to Stein's *Four in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), iv.

14 Reprinted in William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations* (New York: New Directions, 1970), 107. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

15 William Carlos Williams, "A 1 Pound Stein," reprinted in *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 163.

16 For an analysis of *Spring and All* – and of "the rose is obsolete" – in light of Williams's interest in modern painting, see Charles Altieri, *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist Poetry* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1989). In *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983) Henry Sayre discusses Williams's rose in the context of Stein, but in order to claim that Williams's project is serving as an effort to redeem metaphor. For a discussion of William Carlos Williams's "obsolete" rose and Stein's circular rose in the context of a critique of Aristotelian poetics, see Piotr Parlej, "Imagine the Outside: Metaphor in William Carlos Williams, in *William Carlos Williams and the Language of Poetry*, ed. Burton Hatlen and Demetres Tryphonopoulos (Orono, ME: The National Poetry Foundation, 2002), 157–68.

17 Useful accounts of Williams's critique of Pound's imagism can be found in Riddel, *The Inverted Bell*, in the chapter entitled "From Mathematics to Particulars," 101–52, and in Tom Orange, "William Carlos Williams between Image and Object" in Hatlen and Tryphonopoulous, *William Carlos Williams*, 127–56.

18 T. S. Eliot, ed., *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 154–55. Hugh Kenner discusses this passage in the context of both Dante's and Pound's "ideogrammic method" in his early book, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1968), 233–236. See also Walter Baumann, *Rose in the Steel Dust* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1967), 161. There is a remarkable echo of the "rose in the steel dust" in Pound's presentation of the "ideogrammic method" in his 1934 essay *ABC of Reading* (New York: New

Directions, 1960). As he explains how color is depicted in (colorless) ideograms, the "steel dust" becomes "iron rust":

> He [the Chinaman] is to define red. How can he do it in a picture that isn't painted in red paint?
>
> He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures of
>
> ROSE CHERRY
> IRON RUST FLAMINGO (22)

19 *Ezra Pound, Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (Hessle, East Yorkshire: The Marvelle Press, 1960), 91. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

20 Charles Altieri situates Pound's impulse to transform emotional particulars into universals in the context of both "Vorticism" and the early cantos in *Painterly Abstraction*. See also Altieri's earlier article, "From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern American Poetics," *boundary 2* 1.3 (1973): 601–42.

21 Zukofsky, *Prepositions+*, 150. Further references appear in parentheses in the text. The lines by Williams are from "The Wind Increases," which appeared in Richard Aldington *et al.*, *Imagist Anthology, 1930: New Poetry* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1930).

22 As Zukofsky notes, the phrase "alphabet of trees" appears in Williams's poem "The Botticellian Trees," which Zukofsky would include in his "objectivists' issue" of *Poetry* (February 1931).

23 Ezra Pound, *Confucius: The Unwobbling Pivot & the Great Digest* (1928; Washington: Square Dollar Series, 1951), 51. Subsequent references to Pound's forward as well as to the translation of Fenollosa appear in parentheses in the text.

24 For a reconstruction of the impact of Pound's "idea of Chinese" on his own English style, see Christine Froula, "The Beauties of Mistranslation: On Pound's English after *Cathay*," in *Ezra Pound and China*, ed. Zhaoming Qian (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

25 The poems, both written in 1934, are reprinted in Louis Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

26 Zukofsky's interest in the materials of language is deeply bound up with the materialist critique on which his lifelong commitment to socialist politics was based. The following offer valuable accounts of the relationship between Zukofsky's politics and his poetics: Stanley, *Louis Zukofsky*; Ron Silliman, "Z-Sited Path," in *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1995); Edward Schelb, "The Extraction of Song: Louis Zukofsky and the Ideology of Form," *Contemporary Literature* 31.3 (1990): 335–53; Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Mark Scroggins, "The Revolutionary Word: Louis Zukofsky, *New Masses*, and Political Radicalism in the 1930s," Barry Ahearn, "Zukofsky, Marxism, and American Handicraft," and Alec Marsh, "Poetry and the Age: Pound, Zukofsky, and the Labor Theory of Value" in *Upper*

Limit Music: The Writing of Louis Zukofsky, ed. Mark Scroggins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Eric Homberger, "Communists and Objectivists" and Michael Heller, "Objectivists in the Thirties: Utopocalyptic Moments" in *The Objectivist Nexus*, ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999); and Watten, *The Constructivist Moment*. Following Davidson's analysis, Michael Szalay, in his superb book on the 1930s, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000) reads Zukofsky's objectivist program as participating in a larger project on the part of left "radical writers" to assert a labor theory of art in which writing becomes "valuable, not as an object (as potential property) but as a form of labor" (42).

27 Louis Zukofsky, "*A*" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 39.

28 In *Zukofsky's "A": An Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), Barry Ahearn notes that "'dead men' is slang for 'empty bottles.'" In the context of the fact that "jiggers" refers to "measures of whiskey" in addition to "streetcars and dancers," he argues that these lines continue the poem's "resurrection theme" by suggesting that the "spirits" be put "back into the bottles" (62). My argument would suggest that if the dead men also represent the exhausted metaphors of poetic tradition, it's the letter, not the spirit, of the word that Zukofsky thinks will revive them.

29 Stanley points toward this literalist reading when she says that in "*'A'-7*" "the great 'I AM'" of "extrahuman providence" is required to "give way to the material 'A' and 'M' of the sawhorses" (*Louis Zukofsky*, 105).

30 *Silliman, The New Sentence*, 146.

31 Some works by Zukofsky do not conform to the larger literalist project that I have been identifying so far primarily with language poetry. Zukofsky's translations of Catullus, for example (the language poets' affection for them notwithstanding), are governed by a theory of meaning that is much closer to the modernist one we have seen in the work of Stein, (Riding) Jackson, and Michael Fried.

32 Robert von Hallberg remarks suggestively in *Poetry, Politics and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) that Zukofsky was "the master" of the "poetry of the eyes" (98).

5 AUTHORIAL INATTENTION: DONALD DAVIDSON'S LITERALISM, JORIE GRAHAM'S MATERIALISM, AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE'S EMBODIED MINDS

1 Donald Davidson, *"What Metaphors Mean," in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

2 Davidson isn't exactly thinking of paintings when he refers to pictures (the reference is clearly to photographs, where one might just as easily imagine a tourist's snapshot from a vacation as anything made by an artist). But even if

we apply Davidson's claims to the most mundane pictures, the comparison to Ashbery nevertheless holds. As Fried argues in "Art and Objecthood," (*Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) thinking the "effects" of the picture matter is precisely a way of demanding that it not be art.

3 John Ashbery, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (New York: Penguin, 1976), lines 46, 447–48.

4 Steven Knapp, *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4–5. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

5 Steven Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, "Against Theory," reprinted in *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism,* ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

6 The fact that what is specifically "literary" about "literary interest" is not reducible to its history, either in the form of its causes (whether we locate them in the author's mind, brain, body, or all of the above or in her larger social and historical environment) or its effects (whether we locate them in the reader or in her environment) might be understood as a variant of Robert Von Hallberg's claim in "Literary History and the Evaluation of Poetry," *American Literary History* 15.1 (2003): 7–13: "Poems pull away from their moments of production exactly when they succeed most as poems" (10).

7 Not surprisingly, postmodernism finds its extension in cognitive theory in Stein criticism as well. Steven Meyer's *Irresistible Dictation: Gertrude Stein and the Correlations of Writing and Science* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) sees in Stein a cognitive theorist, and more particularly, one whose writing involves a transformation of textual effects into bodily ones, exactly on the model of cognitive science's "embodied mind."

8 Ellen Spolsky, *Gaps in Nature: Literary Interpretation and the Modular Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 5. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

9 The most influential presentations of Edelman's "mapping" theory are contained in *Neural Darwinism: The Theory of Neuronal Group Selection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Further references to *Bright Air* appear in parentheses in the text. The key text by Jerry Fodor is *The Modularity of Mind: An Essay on Faculty Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

10 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 4. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

11 Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

12 Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970), 153. The phrase "gross body of life" is from William K. Wimsatt and

Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," reprinted in Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

13 Cleanth Brooks, "The Formalist Critics," reprinted in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2001), 1369-70.

14 Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 110. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

15 Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* (New York: Harcourt, 1999), 9. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

16 Both Edelman and Damasio criticize this inference. Damasio does so in the context of our "sense of self": "The failure of the homunculus-style knower, however, does not suggest that the notion of self should or could be discarded along with that of the homunculus. Whether we like the notion or not, something like the sense of self does exist in the normal human mind as we go about knowing things." (*ibid.*, 190). Edelman shifts this criticism into the broader region of consciousness and then to the question of meaning, arguing that because "human minds are *characterized* by having semantic contents," they are not reducible to "programs. . .defined strictly by their formal syntactical structure." According to Edelman (this time following Hilary Putnam) "meaning is interactional," and "because it is only *through interactions with the world* that appropriate response patterns are selected," the "individual history of each system" matters (*Bright Air, 224*). It is not clear, however, whether simply complicating and individuating the system of causes and effects actually gets around the functionalist problem. For a concise explanation of the limits of Edelman's account, see John Searle, *The Mystery of Consciousness* (New York: *The New York Review of Books*, 1997).

17 Jorie Graham, *Materialism* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press, 1993), 60. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

18 I don't mean to suggest that Graham couldn't have known about Damasio's work at the time she was writing the poems of *Materialism*. Another popular book by Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon, 1994), puts forward many of the same claims. Graham also overlapped with Damasio during her tenure at the University of Iowa from 1983 to 1999.

19 For an important account of how cognitive structures are narratively modeled in postmodern novels as well as in and through new media, see Joseph Tabbi, *Cognitive Fictions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

20 For explicit instances of the attack, see, for example, Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman, and Barrett Watten, "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," *Social Text* 19/20 (Fall 1988): 261–75; and Lee Bartlett "What Is 'Language Poetry,'" *Critical Inquiry* 12.4 (1986): 741–52.

21 Steve McCaffery, *North of Intention: Critical Writings 1973–1986* (New York: Roof Books, 1986).

22 Helen Vender *The Given and the Made* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 129. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

23 For a lively assessment of the division between mainstream and avant-garde poetries, situating Vendler's canon on one side and Perloff's on the other, see the online transcript of a Poetry Society of America symposium called "Poetry Criticism: What is it For?" *Crossroads Online* (Spring 2000), <http://www.poetrysociety.org/journal/offpage/vendler-perloff.html>.

24 The "hole" is a ubiquitous occurrence in Graham, which takes multiple forms – gaps, rents, tears, and most strikingly, blanks – what Thomas Otten calls "word-length line segments denoting language's absence" ("Jorie Graham's ____s," *PMLA* 118.2 [2003]: 239–53).

25 "Bullock Returns to Camp," *Deadwood,* writ. Jody Worth, dir. Michael Engler, HBO, 3 May 2004.

26 Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume I,* ed. Elizabeth Goodman, 24 October 2002, Christian Classics Etherial Library at Calvin College, 4 February 2005 <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.html>, 221. All further references to Edwards's treatise will be cited in parentheses in the text. Graham's excerpt from the treatise appears in *Materialism,* 109–11.

27 Graham, *The End of Beauty* (New York: Ecco Press, 1987).

28 In "Science and Poetry" I. A. Richards distinguishes between the emotions we feel in reacting to a poem, and what he sees as the real object of interpretive description, namely identifying what he calls the "attitude" the poem induces in us:

> Emotions are what the reaction, with its reverberation in bodily changes, feels like. Attitudes are the impulses towards one kind of behaviour or another which are set ready by the response. They are, as it were, its outgoing part, though they may go no further than a provisional setting for occasions which never arise. . . *In a fully developed man a state of readiness for action will take the place of action when the full appropriate situation for action is not present.* An essential peculiarity of poetry as of all the arts is that the full appropriate situation is *not* present. It is an *actor* we are seeing upon the stage, no Hamlet. So readiness for action takes the place of actual behaviour.

See Richards, *Poetries and Sciences, A Reissue with a Commentary of "Science and Poetry" (1926, 1935)* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1970), 28–29. The distinction here between the emotional effects of poems and "actual behaviour" has always been puzzling to me because it looks like it might correspond to what I have been identifying as the distinction between intention/meaning on the one hand and cause/effect on the other. But in fact, this strikes me now not as a turning away on Richards's part from thinking of poems as causing effects (rather than expressing intentions), but rather as a refinement of the whole causal apparatus. That is, if the particular emotional state we experience in response to a poem is here less important than our being induced into a *readiness* for experience, that potential to act is not at all logically equivalent to an intention to act. To speak of our potential

to act is simply to speak of a causal sequence that hasn't taken place yet, but it's still to be speaking in causal terms. My point about Edwards thus far has been that there is no causal relation whatsoever at work in the logic of intention, whether we are talking about divine agency or literary agency. Thus it's a point that can be made about Richards as well, except that Richards comes out on just the opposite side of things (on the side of cause/effect rather than on the side of meaning/intention).

I am grateful to have been able to see this opposition more clearly in the course of a conversation between Gerald Graff and Ruth Leys at the University of Illinois at Chicago English Department Friday Colloquium on 11 February 2005. Leys had just presented an unpublished paper on the prevalence of shame in current theories of affect, in which her concern was more specifically their emphasis (by contrast to theories of guilt) on the subject's lack of intentional agency. One particular theorist, according to Leys, celebrates shame as the kind of thing that one can acknowledge in another person and that, while one cannot experience the other's shame, can nevertheless place one in a position of experiencing the other's "vulnerability" to shame. To some in the audience, it looked for a brief moment as if this "vulnerability" were nothing if not a description of an intentional state, despite Leys's insistence that theories of shame are distinguished above all by their refusal of intention. It was when Graff spoke to propose a connection between I. A. Richards's work on "emotional" meaning and the current developments in affect theory that Leys had been criticizing that we were able to see (a) how the idea of a potential to act is not equivalent to the idea of intention and (b) why Leys could adhere to the position that intention was being evacuated from agency in theories of shame. Leys's new work holds, in just this regard, enormous import for literary theory. For a stunning critique of another area of the history of psychology that has already had a significant effect on literary study, see Leys's brilliant book on trauma theory: *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For a full account of what Richards meant by "emotional" meaning, see also Richards and C. K. Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and the Science of Symbolism* (1923; New York: Harvest Books, 1989).

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