
Stuplimity: Shock and Boredom in Twentieth-Century Aesthetics
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Sianne Ngai
Harvard University
sngai@fas.harvard.edu

> There is stupid being in every one. There is stupid being in every one in their living. Stupid being in one is often not stupid thinking or stupid acting. It very often is hard to know it in knowing any one. Sometimes one has to know of some one the whole history in them, the whole history of their living to know the stupid being of them.
>
> --Gertrude Stein, The Making of Americans (1906-08)

> Sorry. Sorry. I'm sorry. I regret it. Please accept my apology. I'm extremely sorry. I regret my mistake. Pardon me. Pardon me. I hope you'll forgive me. I'm deeply apologetic. Do forgive me. Pardon me. Accept my apology. Do forgive me. I'm deeply apologetic. Excuse me. Excuse me. It was my own fault. Do forgive me. I'm so sorry...
>
> --Janet Zweig, Her Recursive Apology (sculpture), 1993

"Thick" Language

1. "Gertrude and I are just the contrary," writes Leo Stein in Journey Into The Self. "She's basically stupid and I'm basically intelligent" (Schmitz 100). What Leo perceived "stupid" about Gertrude and the non-linear writing of hers he abhorred is perhaps analogous to what the character Tod finds "thick" about Homer Simpson's use of words in Nathanael West's The Day of the Locust (1939). When Tod coaxes a sluggish, almost comatose Homer to relate his experience of abandonment following the departure of Faye, Homer's speech at first seems incomprehensible to him. "Language leaped out of Homer in a muddy, twisting torrent. [...] The lake behind the dam replenished itself too fast. The more he talked the greater the pressure grew because the flood was circular and ran back behind the dam again" (West 143-4). Yet as Tod discovers, Homer's "muddy, twisting torrent" in its negative insistence conveys a logic of its own--which, when acknowledged, enables his interpretation:

> [A] lot of it wasn't jumbled so much as timeless. The words went behind each other instead of after. What he had taken for long strings were really one thick word and not a sentence. In the same way sentences were simultaneous and not a paragraph. Using this key he was able to arrange a part of what he had heard so that it made the usual kind of sense. (144)

In the case of Homer, the shock of sudden loss produces its own dense or "thickening" rhetoric--one that deceptively simulates an inability to respond or speak at all, by eroding formal

distinctions between word, sentence, and paragraph: the structural units of conventional syntax. To borrow terms Deleuze adduces from philosopher Duns Scotus (whose name gives rise to current usage of the word "dunce"), these formal differences are exchanged for modal differences that are based on intense variations or individuating degrees rather than distinct attributes or qualitative forms (Deleuze 39). Modal differences, in this sense, could be described as moody ones: temperamental, unqualified, or constantly shifting. In West's example, the encounter with language based on such differences involves a transfer of affectivity: Tod finds himself temporarily stupefied by the language generated by Homer's stupor. Which is to say that he discovers that it challenges his own capacity to read, interpret, or critically respond to it in conventional ways.

2. Radically altering the temporal order dictated by normative syntax ("the words went behind each other instead of after"), and blurring the distinction between its building blocks (sentence and paragraph), West's description of "thick" or grammatically moody language strikingly coincides with the signifying logic at work in Stein's dense Making of Americans (1906-8), where words are deliberately presented in "long strings" rather than conventional sentences, and the repetition of particular words or clauses produces a layered or simultaneous effect--Stein's characteristic "continuous present." As Stein puts it in "Poetry and Grammar,"

> Sentences and paragraphs. Sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are.... When I wrote the Making of Americans I tried to break down this essential combination by making enormously long sentences that would be as long as the longest paragraph and so to see if there was really and truly this essential difference between paragraphs and sentences, if one went far enough with this thing with making the sentences long enough to be as long as any paragraph and so producing in them the balance of a paragraph not a balance of a sentence, because of course the balance of a paragraph is not the same balance as the balance of a sentence. (Writings and Lectures 142)

   The deliberate making of sentences "simultaneous and not a paragraph" in The Making of Americans poses a grammatical challenge to the ideology of "essential difference" and the symbolic laws it sustains, a tactics of resistance to dominant systems of sense-making continued throughout Stein's career. The sense of urgency connected to this local struggle becomes amplified in How To Write (1928), whose opening piece, "Saving the Sentence," bears a title suggesting that language, like an occupied territory in time of war, is in need of rescue (7-32). For The Making of Americans, the strategy Stein chooses is primarily an agglutinative one, where the material build-up of language itself is invested with the potential for dissimulation, to achieve the "balance" of larger forms through the accumulation of smaller ones.

3. In "Sentences," Stein makes a similar attempt to recalibrate the reader's sense of syntactic equilibrium when she writes, "What is the difference between words and a sentence and a sentence and sentences" (HTW 181, my emphasis). We can read this as Stein posing a question about the attribute distinguishing two formal structures (words versus a sentence), or singular and plural instances of a particular structure (sentence versus sentences); we can also read it as a statement defining the term "what" as precisely this distinction. Here Stein seems to highlight the

fact that "what" can function as an interrogative pronoun or adjective, as well as a relative pronoun equally substitutable for plural and singular objects. When constituting a full sentence on its own, "what" also has the potential to function as a demand for repetition in itself ("What?" [did you just say?]), or as an expletive conveying a negative emotion such as disbelief, anger, or incomprehension ("What!"). In the latter instance, "what" paradoxically expresses a state of inexpressiveness. Here the term's sense-making agency resides in its impotentiality, or inability to refer and represent, since what it expresses is precisely a situation in which whatever "what!" is being uttered in response to appears to defy expression. Thus in locating the difference between words and a sentence in "what," Stein suggests that the status of such difference might resemble that of the various roles the term "what" assumes--in other words, that the difference is at once relative, interrogative, and potentially stupefying in its affective force. Like the relationship between sentences and paragraphs in The Making of Americans, or "one thick word" and a sentence in Homer's speech, difference as "what" could be described as a difference without fixed or determinate value, or as "difference without a concept"-- one of the ways Deleuze defines repetition in Difference and Repetition.

4. The fact that in its expletive and interrogative roles, "what(!?)" also functions as a demand for repetition, also recalls Deleuze's counterintuitive thesis that repetition is what lies between two differences. Configured as a what, "the difference between words and sentences or a sentence and sentences" could thus be described as a demand for repetition which places us in a relation of indeterminacy, raising a question rather than providing an answer: "What is a sentence. A sentence is something that is or is not followed" (HTW 213). As Stein notes here, "what" becomes a sentence not only when it raises a question but also when it becomes one--when it actively solicits but may or may not be followed by a reply. "Now the whole question of questions and not answer is very interesting" (HTW 32, my italics). The response difference-as-what solicits, as in the case of Tod's response to Homer's speech, seems likely to take the form of an obstruction of response: when the ability to "answer" is frustrated or delayed. In both cases, the negative experience of "stupefaction" (in which this relationship to language is given a specific emotional value) raises the significant question of how we might respond to what we recognize as "the different" prior to its qualification or categorization (as "sexual" or "racial" for instance), precisely by pointing to the limits of our ability to do so. We are used to encountering and recognizing differences assigned formal values; Stein's writing asks us to ask how we negotiate our encounters when these qualifications have not yet been made.

5. Thus in attempting to "break down the essential combination" of sentences and paragraphs, or claiming that "what is the difference between words and a sentence," Stein's agenda is not to be confused with an attempt to level or neutralize difference by repetition, but rather to radically reconfigure one's relationship to difference through repetition and grammatical play. If a particular kind of negative emotion inevitably accompanies or is produced by this new relation, it becomes important to understand how this affective dynamic might organize and inform strategies of reading made possible by it. Throughout Stein's career, but beginning particularly around 1908 when, as Marianne deKoven argues, she started to develop her "insistent" style based on repetition, fixed or "essential"

distinctions are replaced with unqualified ones to generate new frameworks of sense-making: forms of continuity, order, and linguistic equilibrium ("balance") alternative to the symbolic status quo (50). What this requires from the writer, Stein suggests, as well as from her readers, is an experiment in duration--or, more precisely, an experiment in the temporality of endurance, testing whether one can go "far enough with this thing." As any reader of The Making of Americans in its entirety can attest, the stakes of this astonishing 922-page narrative are the exhaustion it inevitably induces, as well as its narrative themes of familial and historical survival. Stein's interest in how astonishment and fatigue, oddly in tandem, come to organize and inform a particular kind of relationship between subjects and language (or between subjects and difference, via language), can be further explored by examining how this peculiar syncretism of affects comes to bear on our contemporary engagements with radically "different" forms in American poetry.

Poetic Fatigue and Hermeneutic Stupor

6. It comes as no surprise that what Leo Stein, journeying into the self, considered "stupid" language is language that, in undermining conventional patterns of grammar, syntax, and sense, threatens the limits of self by challenging its capacity for response, temporarily immobilizing the addressee as in situations of extreme shock or boredom. In the case of Homer's muddy and twisting rhetoric, the subject no longer seems to be the agent producing or controlling his speech; rather, language "leaps out" with its own peculiar force. Yet as West's scene of interpretation demonstrates, Homer's emotional speech is readable, once the interpreter recognizes that it simultaneously constitutes its own frame of sense-making. Like the affectively charged, insistent language Gertrude Stein uses to create her vast combinatory of "bottom natures" in Making of Americans, Homer's "thick" speech demands to be encountered on its own terms. The critical trajectory or journey it invites is not one into the self, but into the more complex problem of a particular kind of self's relationship to language, where the latter is what radically externalizes the former, pointing to its own incommensurabilities.

7. "The words went behind each other instead of after. What he had taken for long strings were really one thick word and not a sentence. In the same way sentences were simultaneous and not a paragraph" (West 14). Deviating from conventional syntax and its standard organizations of temporality, Homer's gush, like Stein's prose, produces a kind of linguistic overlapping or simultaneity--one that recalls the source of the cryptanalyst Legrand's own experience of stupefaction in Poe's "The Gold-Bug" (1843). In both stagings of hermeneutic perplexity, the obstacle posed to the reader is attributed to a "thickness" or superimposition of forms:

> Presently I took a candle, and... proceeded to scrutinize the parchment more closely. Upon turning it over, I saw my own sketch upon the reverse, just as I had made it. My first idea, now, was mere surprise at the really remarkable similarity of outline--at the singular coincidence involved in the fact, that unknown to me, there should have been a skull upon the other side of the parchment, immediately beneath my figure of the scarabaeus, and that this skull, not only in outline, but in size, should so closely resemble my drawing. I say the singularity of this coincidence absolutely stupified [sic] me for a time. This

> is the usual effect of such coincidences. The mind struggles to establish a connection--a sequence of cause and effect--and, being unable to do so, suffers a species of temporary paralysis. But, when I recovered from the stupor, there dawned upon me gradually a conviction which startled me even far more than the coincidence. (Poe 305, my emphasis)

In the scenes of analytical stupor staged by both West and Poe, the discourse initially stumping the interpreter is based on a logic of vertical stacking or piling rather than a horizontally progressive trajectory in time. Legrand's glyphs, like Homer's words, are placed behind each other instead of after, creating a layered simultaneity of signs. In West's narrative, the "thickening" of Homer's language is explicitly figured as an effect of behindness--that of discursive flow "[running] back behind the dam again" (144), recalling Heidegger's description of poetry as "the water that at times flows backward toward the source" (11). The anteriorizing slippage dramatized in Tod's description of Homer's language is both a convention of Stein's prose, where narration is consequently forced to "begin again," and a stylistic dynamic utilized in Beckett's later writing. In "Stirrings Still" (1988), for instance, a prose poem that deals specifically with a subject's experience of stupefying loss, the overlapping accretion of phrases and word clusters within the boundaries of a severely limited diction results in a language that is paradoxically both ascetic and congested, "thickening" even as it progresses into a narrative of not-progressing:

> One night or day then as he sat at his table head on hands he saw himself rise and go. First rise and stand clinging to the table. Then sit again. Then rise again and stand clinging to the table. Then go. Start to go. On unseen feet start to go. So slow that only change of place to show he went. As when he disappeared only to reappear later at another place. Then disappeared again only to reappear again later at another place again. So again and again disappeared again only to reappear again later at another place again. Another place in the place where he sat at his table head on hands. (259-60)

The familiar theme of "endurance" is conveyed here through a drastic slowing down of language, or a rhetorical enactment of its fatigue in which the duration of relatively simple actions is uncomfortably prolonged through a proliferation of precise inexactitudes. This process occurs not only through repetition, but a series of constative exhaustions staged through the corrective dynamics of retraction and restatement, of statements partially undoing the completion of preceding statements by breaking the movements they describe into smaller intervals. The undoing paradoxically relies on a process of material build-up, where words are slowly added rather than subtracted. Thus the finitude of a simple action such as "he saw himself rise and go" becomes disrupted by being rendered increasingly specific in degree. "He saw himself rise and go." Well actually, no: first he rose and stood--then sat--then rose. Then, he went. Actually, no: then he started to go. No again: then on unseen feet he started to go. The logic of progression from statement to statement is paradoxically propelled by a series of invisible objections continually jerking us backwards, resulting in writing that continually calls attention to itself as lacking even as it steadily accumulates. Because units of meaning are constantly shifting behind one another, Beckett's use of language performs a stacking of multiple temporalities, an

overlapping of instaneities and durations, rather than a linear progression in time.

8. Like Stein's style in the period of Making of the Americans, "Stirrings Still" becomes syntactically dense or complex while remaining minimalist in diction. As in the case of Homer's "timeless" language, its language is marked by the absence of a "sequence of cause and effect," producing the effect of delay, fatigue, or "temporary paralysis." This discontinuity is generated within the speech or text itself, as well as experienced by its interpreter as an interruption of understanding. What Poe, West, and Beckett suggest in different ways is that when language "thickens" it suffers a "retardation by weak links"[1]: it slows down or performs a temporal delay through the absence of causal connectives. It is this change in temporal organization that in turn slows down the interpreter--as if the loss of "strong links" within the original text or narrative paradoxically strengthens the link between it and the reader, enabling the transfer of the former's emotional value.

9. To acknowledge and attempt to understand one's own experience of "stupefaction" by a text or language, as Legrand and Tod do (which gives them endurance and enables them to go on as interpreters in spite of "temporary paralysis"), is not the same as projecting stupidity onto the text instigating this relation--as Leo Stein does, turning his emotional response to Stein's writing into an attribute of the writing in itself. Attempting to analyze the linguistic factors informing this dynamic, rather than dismiss the objects involved as senseless, both interpreters identify: (1) a breakdown of formal differences and a proliferation of modal ones; (2) a "thickness" or simultaneous layering of elements in place of linear sequencing; resulting in (3) the disruption of normative syntax and its patterns of temporal organization. A similar logic presides in contemporary writer Dan Farrell's prose poem 366, 1996 (1997), which bears some stylistic allegiance to the "thick" uses of language in Beckett and Stein:

> Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, going into the woods, Sunday, Monday, typical trees, Tuesday, typical grass traces, Wednesday, Thursday, typical excitations, Friday, typical regional sounds, Saturday, Sunday, why slow rather than slowest, Monday, clouded height, Tuesday, some same ground, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, left and possible, Sunday, right and possible, Monday, Tuesday, could what there is not to be believed be asked, Wednesday, Thursday... (57)

Consider also this passage from Kenneth's Goldsmith FIDGET, a poem/conceptual art piece performed at the New York Whitney Museum in 1997:

> Tongue and saliva roll in mouth. Swallow. Tongue emerges through teeth and lips. Tongue lies on lower lip. Teeth click tongue. Lower jaw drops away from upper. Flesh folds beneath chin. Repeats. Upper lip sucks. Rubs against lower. Swallow. Saliva gathers under tongue. Teeth tuck inside jaw. Gather saliva. Swallow. Left hand, grasping with three fingers, moves toward mouth. Swallow. Arm drops. Arm lifts. Swallow. Arm drops. Swallow. Arm lifts. Arm drops. Eyes move to left. Left hand hits. Arm lifts. Swallow. Arm drops. Right leg crosses left...

Just as Beckett's poem stylistically enacts a form of discursive exhaustion or fatigue, Farrell and Goldsmith's deliberately stupefying poems relentlessly focus on the tedium of the ordinary: the monotony of daily routines organized by calendar headings, the movements of a body not doing anything in particular. Simultaneously astonishing and boring, the experiment in "duration" is taken in each to a structural extreme: Farrell's poem incorporates every single calendar date of the year named in its title (366); Goldsmith's documents the writer's impossible project of recording every single bodily movement made in a twenty-four hour period (Bloomsday).[2] Using a similar conceptual framework, Judith Goldman's poem "dicktee" (1997) described by the author as "a study in the logic of paranoia" and its strategies of negation, is composed of every single word in Melville's Moby Dick that begins with the prefix un-, in the exact order in which they appear:

> under, unite, unless, unpleasant, universal,
> uncomfortable, unaccountable, under, unbiased,
> undeliverable, under, underneath, universe, unequal,
> understanding, unaccountable, unwarranted,
> unimaginable, unnatural, unoccupied, undress,
> unobserved, unknown, unwarrantable, unknown,
> unaccountable, understand, uncomfortable, unsay,
> unaccountable, uncommonly, undressed, unearthly,
> undressing, unnatural, unceremoniously,
> uncomfortableness, unmethodically, undressed,
> unendurable, unimaginable, unlock,
> unbecomingness, understand, under, unusual,
> unrecorded, unceasing, unhealing, unbidden,
> universal, unstirring, unspeakable, unnecessary,
> unseen, unassuming, unheeded, unknown, until,
> uncheered, unreluctantly, unto, unwelcome, unto,
> unearthly, uncouthness, unbiddenly, unite, unite,...

In a dramatization of modal differences usurping formal ones, the poet converts Moby Dick into moby dictation, producing a hyperbolic version of the collage of quotations compiled by the Sub-Sub-Librarian in Melville's novel. If for Melville the Sub-Sub is always already a small subject encompassed by a big and relentless system (hence in many ways a "postmodern" subject), Goldman comically positions herself as an even smaller one. The exaggeration of language's citability and iterability (for Goldman, against conventional poetic lyricism) is similarly enacted in Goldsmith's encyclopedic No. 111 2.7.93-10.20.96 (1997),[3] a collection of linguistic materials compiled over the period of three years (including lists, phrases, conversations, found passages, and entire pieces of fiction) that all end on the sonority of the schwa (rhyme) and then are laboriously ordered by syllable count, from a series of one-syllable entries to a piece containing precisely 7228 (meter). Taking a more traditional versifier's attention to prosodic constraints to an extreme, Goldsmith's Sub-Subish work also results in what Raphael Rubinstein blurbs as "a weirdly constructed Baedeker to late 20th Century American society." In MDCLXXXVI, whose title reflects the number of syllables determining its order in the volume, constative fatigue is hilariously performed through an overdetermined self-referentiality and use of "literary devices" as clichés. Or, in persistently subsuming content to the ruthless demands of its self-imposed, unusual rhyming pattern and metrical structure, does a text which self-referentially appropriates a prototypically postmodernist text in its own parody of

postmodern appropriation and self-referentiality exhaust the parodying of these devices as well as the devices themselves?[4]

> This is the first sentence of the story. This is the second sentence. This is the title of the story which is also found several times in the story itself. This sentence is questioning the intrinsic value of the first two sentences. This sentence is to inform you in case you haven't already realized it that this is a self-referential story containing sentences that refer to their own structure and function. This is a sentence that provides an ending to the first paragraph. This is the first sentence of a new paragraph in a self-referential story. This sentence comments on the awkward nature of the self-narrative form while recognizing the strange and playful detachment it affords the writer. Introduces in this paragraph the device of sentence fragments. A sentence fragment. Another. Good device. Will be used more later. This is actually the last sentence of the story but has been placed here by mistake. This sentence overrides the preceding sentence by informing the reader... that this piece of literature is actually the Declaration of Independence but that the author in a show of extreme negligence (if not malicious sabotage) has so far failed to include even ONE SINGLE SENTENCE from that stirring document although he has condescended to use a small sentence FRAGMENT namely "When in the course of human events" embedded in quotation marks near the end of the sentence... (Goldsmith 565-66)

In extremely different ways, the conceptual work of Farrell, Goldsmith, and Goldman continues a tradition of poetic experimentalism grounded in the work of Stein--including her interest in affectively reorganizing the subject's relationship to language through stylistic innovation. Though such diverse texts should not be reduced to a common equation, each could be described as simultaneously astonishing and (deliberately) fatiguing; much like the signifying logics at work in Beckett's late fiction, or the experience of reading The Making of Americans. Through hyperbolic uses of repetition, reflexivity, citation, and clichés, the poems perform a doubling-over of language which, as in the case of Legrand's confrontation with a layered configuration, actively interferes with the temporal organization dictated by conventional syntax. When words or glyphs are placed "behind" each other, instead of after, "The mind struggles to establish a connection--a sequence of cause and effect--and, being unable to do so, suffers a species of temporary paralysis" (Poe 305). Yet "temporary paralysis" is not merely a state of passivity; rather, it bears some resemblance to what Stein calls "open feeling," a condition of utter receptivity in which difference is felt rather than qualified or assigned a particular value. The next section examines ways in which contemporary artists engender this affective dynamic through their work.

From Stupefaction to Stuplime Poetics

> Words are too crude. And words are also too busy--inviting a hyperactivity of consciousness that is not only dysfunctional, in terms of human capacities of feeling and acting, but actively deadens the mind and senses.
>
> --Susan Sontag, Styles of Radical Will

> quaqua on all sides then in me bits and scraps try and hear

a few scraps two or three each time per day and night
string them together make phrases more phrases

--Samuel Beckett, How It Is

10. The sudden excitation of "shock," and the desensitization we associate with "boredom," though diametrically opposed and seemingly mutually exclusive, are both responses that confront us with the limitations of our capacity for responding in general.[5] Both affects are thus frequently invoked in responses to radical art usually dismissed as unsophisticated; few savvy, postmodern readers are likely to admit to being "bored" by The Making of Americans and perhaps even less likely to being "shocked" by Jeff Koons or Cindy Sherman. By pointing to what obstructs critical response, however, astonishment and boredom ask us to ask what ways of responding our culture makes available to us, and under what conditions. As "dispositions" which result in a fundamental displacement from secure critical positions, the shocking and the boring usefully prompt us to look for new strategies of engagement and to extend the circumstances under which engagement becomes possible. The phenomenon of the intersection of these affective dynamics, in innovative artistic and literary production, will thus be explored here as a way of expanding our notion of the aesthetic in general.

11. As Stein acknowledges, "Listening to repeating is often irritating, listening to repeating can be dulling" (Making 302). Yet in the taxonomy or system for the making of human "kinds" that is The Making of Americans, repeating is also the dynamic force by which new beginnings, histories, genres, and genera are produced and organized. As Lacan similarly suggests, "repetition demands the new,"(Four 61) including new ways of understanding its dulling and irritating effects. It thus comes as no surprise that many of the most "shocking," innovative, and/or transformative cultural productions in history have also been deliberately tedious ones. In the twentieth century, systematically recursive works by Warhol, Ryman, Johns, Cage and Glass bear witness to the prominence of tedium as aesthetic strategy in avant-garde practices; one also thinks of the "fatiguing repetitiveness" of Sade[6] and the permutative logics at work in the writings of Beckett, Roussel, Perec, Cage, Mac Low, and of course, Stein. This partnership between tedium and shock in the invention of new genres is not limited, however, to avantgardisms. The same intersection of affects can be found in the modern horror film, which in its repetitive use of a limited number of trademark motifs replicates the serial logics of its serial killers, and the pulsating, highly enervated, yet exhaustively durational electronic music known as techno or house which completely transformed musical subcultures in the 1980s.

12. Though repetition, permutation, and seriality figure prominently as devices in aesthetic uses of tedium, practitioners have achieved the same effect through a strategy of what I call agglutination; quite simply, the mass adhesion or coagulation of data particles or signifying units. Here tedium resides not so much in the syntactic overdetermination of minimalist dictions (as in Ryman's white paintings), but in the stupendous proliferation of discrete quanta held together by a fairly simple syntax or organizing principle. This logic, less mosaic than congealaic, is frequently emphasized by sculptor Ann Hamilton in her installations, which have included 16,000 teeth arranged on an examination table, 750,000 pennies immobilized in

honey, 800 men's shirts pressed into a wedge, and floors covered by vast spreads of linotype pieces and animal hair (Wakefield 10). A similar effect is achieved by Gerhard Richter's Atlas (1997), which confronts the spectator with 643 sheets of over 7,000 snapshots, newspaper cuttings, sketches and color fields, each arranged on white rectangular panels. While here the organization of material is primarily taxonomic rather than compressive in its grammar, the accumulation of visual "data" induces a similar strain on the observer's capacities for conceptually synthesizing or metabolizing information. In this manner, the fatigue of the responsivity Atlas solicits approaches the kind of exhaustion involved in the attempt to read a dictionary.

13. This mode of tedium is specifically foregrounded in Janet Zweig's computer/printer installations, where rhetorical bits and scraps are automatically produced in enormous quantities, then stacked, piled, enumerated, weighed in balances, or otherwise "quantified." To make Her Recursive Apology (1993), for example, four computers, each hooked to a dot-matrix printer, were programmed to randomly generate apologies "in the smallest possible type" on continuously-fed paper. As Zweig notes, "The printer apologized for two weeks, day and night. Whenever a box of paper ran out, the computer displayed the number of times it had apologized. Because the apologies were randomly chosen by the computer, no two sheets of paper are alike. I arranged the pages in a recursive spiral structure, each stack one sheet larger than the next" (Zweig 248-9). Pushing the boundary between the emotive and the mechanical, and ironically commenting on the feminization of apologetic speech acts, Her Recursive Apology stages the convergence of gendered subject and machine not via fashionable cyborg, but through a surprisingly "flat" or boring display of text, its materiality and iterability foregrounded by the piles of its consolidation. Zweig's work points to the Lacanian notion that language is precisely the site where subject and system intersect, as Stein similarly demonstrates through her own vast combinatory of human types--a text in which new "kinds" or models of humans are made through the rhetorically staged acts of enumerating, "grouping," "mixing," and above all repeating. For both Stein and Zweig, where system and subject converge is more specifically where language piles up and becomes dense.

14. Like the massive Making of Americans, the large-scale installations of Zweig, Hamilton, and Richter register as at once exciting and deenervating, astonishing yet tedious. Inviting further comparison with Stein's taxonomy is the fact that each of these installations functions as an information processing system--a way of classifying, ordering, and metabolizing seemingly banal "bits" of data: newspaper clippings, snapshots, teeth, words and phrases, repetitions. To encounter the vastness of Stein's system is to encounter the vast combinatory of language, where particulars "thicken" to produce new individualities. As an ordering of visual data on a similar scale, what Richter's Atlas calls attention to through its staggering agglomeration of material it is not so much information's sublimity, but the sublimity of its ability to condense.

15. Yet "sublime" seems an inappropriate term to use here, even in spite of its critical voguishness today, which marks the persistence of an older aesthetic tradition where it was typically invoked in response to things overwhelmingly vast or massive and large (mountains, seas, the infinite, and so

forth)--things that threaten to crush the subjectivity out of us, as the works of Stein or de Sade similarly do, and point to the limits of our psychological and cognitive faculties. In this sense, the term seems fully applicable. But while the sublime encompasses the feeling of awe or astonishment The Making of Americans solicits from its reader, it fails to circumscribe the concomitantly solicited effect of boredom. This response, invoked in tandem with the feeling of awe, is absolutely central to Stein's quasi-scientific experiment in narrative, which deliberately forces the reader to participate in its accumulation, enumeration, organization, and interpretation of human "data." Though useful as an index of the general value of affectivity in the negotiation of aesthetic experiences, sublimity becomes a profoundly unsatisfactory way of characterizing the particular kind of affective relationship configured by twentieth-century agglutinations such as Atlas or Americans, since here the experience of being aesthetically overwhelmed involves not so much fear, terror, or even euphoria, but something much closer to an ordinary fatigue. In this relationship, a similarly negative emotivity is summoned, one in which the self is made aware of his or her own powerlessness or impotence, but one conspicuously less romantic, or auratic. How the observer encounters a work like Atlas thus approaches the experience of reading Stein and Joyce, whose postmodernisms avant le lettre similarly seems to call for a rethinking of what it means to be aesthetically overpowered: a new way of theorizing the negatively affective relationship to stupefying objects previously designated by the older aesthetic notion of the sublime. One way of calling attention to the affinity between exhaustion and the astonishment particular to the sublime, invoking the latter while detaching it from its previous romantic affiliations, is to refer to the aesthetic experience I am talking about--one in which astonishment is paradoxically united with boredom as the stuplime.

16. Though criticism continually relies on and returns to older aesthetic categories, even in its engagement with radically different forms of cultural production, these often call for new terms for describing our responses to innovative works, new dictions to be used in the work of critically commenting on them. An encounter with The Making of Americans does seem to approach the experience of the sublime, yet also very much not. Upon first encounter it astonishes and awes, yet like the "bottom natures" it inventories, draws us down into the agglutinative domain of language and its dulling and irritating iterability. The same could be said for the scatological sludge in How It Is, in which the subject is literally pulled face down. Hamilton's vast spreads of hair or typographical rubble seem to deliberately invite yet ultimately veer away from their characterization as such. What constitutes the stuplime will become increasingly clear below, but for now I will briefly describe it as a syncretism of boredom and astonishment, of what "dulls" with what "irritates" or agitates, of excessive excitation with extreme desensitization or fatigue. Whereas the former traditionally finds a home in the lyrical or tragic, the latter could be said to more properly belong to the artificial, the dirtier environments of what Stein calls "bottom humor."

17. Like the Kantian sublime, the stuplime points to the limits of our representational capabilities, not through the limitlessness or infinity of concepts, but through a no less exhaustive confrontation with the discrete and finite in repetition. The "bits and scraps" of what surrounds the self on all sides is what Beckett calls "quaqua," the discursive logic of a larger

symbolic system. As such, "it expresses a power peculiar to the existent, a stubbornness of the existent in intuition, which resists every specification by concepts no matter how far this is taken," (Deleuze 13) a characterization mirroring a claim made in Kierkegaard's comic discourse on repetition: "Every general esthetic category runs aground on farce" (159). Unlike the sublime, the stuplime paradoxically forces the reader to go on in spite of its equal enticement to surrender, inducing a series of comic fatigues or tirednesses rather than a single, earthshattering blow to one's conceptual apparatus, thus pushing the reader to constantly formulate and reformulate new tactics for reading. Confrontations with the stuplime bear more resemblance to the repetitive exhaustions performed by Kierkegaard's Beckmann, Buster Keaton, or Pee-Wee Herman than the instantaneous breakdown dramatized in encounters with elemental forces. In the stuplimity of slapstick comedy, which frequently stages the confrontation of small subjects with the large Systems encompassing them, one is made to fall down (typically in an exaggerated expression of inexpressiveness) only so as to get up again, counteracting tragic failure with an accumulation of comic fatigues. Significantly, Deleuze's prime example of this blockage of the sublime and the surrender it induces is words, as these "possess a comprehension which is necessarily finite, since they are by nature the objects of a merely nominal definition. We have here a reason why the comprehension of the concept cannot extend to infinity: we define a word by only a finite number of words. Nevertheless, speech and writing, from which words are inseparable, give them an existence hic et nunc; a genus thereby passes into existence as such; and here again extension is made up for in dispersion, in discreteness, under the sign of a repetition which forms the real power of language in speech and writing" (Deleuze 13).

18. In this manner, stuplimity pulls us downward into the denseness of language rather than lifting us upwards toward unrepresentable divines--a realm much like the mud in How It Is, where bits and scraps accumulate in being transmitted through a narrator who only quotes what he receives from an external yet infiltrating source: "I say it as I hear it." This mud is both the site enabling the series of arrivals and separations that comprise the basic movements in the narrative, and yet an inertial drag or resistance that renders them exhaustingly difficult or slow: each act of "journeying" and "abandoning" thus involves a laborious and (as William Hutchings notes) peristaltic crawl (65), leading us through "vast tracts of time" (Beckett, How 39). Stein's writing operates through a similarly anal dynamic, as Lisa Ruddick argues, of "pressing" and "straining" (81). While Beckett's mud obstructs or slows the physical movements of individual characters toward and away from one another, it also seems to enable a process of cohesion, by which the discrete extensions of Pims, Boms and Bems, "one and all from the unthinkable first to the no less unthinkable last" come to be "glued together in a vast imbrication of flesh without breach or fissure" (Beckett, How 140). The social community it creates is thus one of discursive condensation, as visually suggested through the absence of punctuation.

19. Here, finitely large numbers substitute for the infinities we associate with the sublime, yet the effect of these enumerations is to similarly call attention to representational or conceptual fatigues, if not destructions. Such tiredness results even when the narrator subdivides the enormity of what we are asked to imagine into more manageable increments: "a million then if a million strong a million Pims now motionless agglutinated two by

two in the interests of torment too strong five hundred thousand little heaps color of mud and a thousand thousand nameless solitaries half abandoned half abandoning" (Beckett, How 115-116). Though the narrator often resorts to such calculations to negotiate his relationship to this mud, and to facilitate understanding of the "natural order" or organizing principle of the system he lives in (one legislated by its "justice" or the disembodied, external "voice of us all" from which he receives the words of his narration), these acts of enumerating, grouping and subdividing only produce further fatigues; thus the double meaning of the narrator's comment "I always loved arithmetic it has paid me back in full" (Beckett 37). Attempting to make sense of his situation by finding smaller, more easily manipulable systems of ordering within the larger one, the narrator finds these micrologics ultimately subsumed and thwarted by what encompasses them. We see this in his attempt to describe how information is exchanged in the world he inhabits: to understand the ordering principle behind this we are asked to take twenty consecutive numbers, "no matter which no matter which it is irrelevant"

> 814326 to 814345
>
> number 814327 may speak misnomer the tormentors being mute as we have seen part two may speak of number 814326 to number 814328 who may speak to him to number 814329 who may speak of him to number 814330 and so on to number 814345 who in this way may know number 814326 by repute
>
> (Beckett, How 119)
>
> similarly number 814326 may know by repute number 814345 number 814344 having spoken of him to number 814343 and this last to number 814342 and this last to number 814341 and so back to number 814326 who in this way may know number 814345 by repute [...]
>
> but question to what purpose
>
> for when number 814336 describes number 814337 to number 814335 and number 814335 to number 814337 for example he is merely in fact describing himself to two lifelong acquaintances
>
> so to what purpose
>
> (Beckett, How 120)

As in the case of the repeated pratfalls of the slapstick comedian, stuplimity emerges in the performance of such fatigue-inducing strategies, in which the gradual accumulation of error often leads to the repetition of a refrain: "too strong"; or "something wrong there." In this manner, every attempt to account for or explain the "natural order" or "logic" of the encompassing system (and the acts of movement, information exchange, narration, and violence it determines) by means of a smaller logic paradoxically culminates in the understanding of the wider principle being blocked. There is a multiplicity of such attempts, ranging from Euclidean geometry describing the trajectory of subjects (based on a circle and its division into chords "AB" and "BA"), to simple arithmetic describing the durations, distances, and velocities involved:

> allowing then I quote twenty years for the journey and

> knowing furthermore from having heard so that the four phases and knowing furthermore from having heard so that the four phases through which we pass the two kinds of solitude the two kinds of company through which tormentors abandoned victims travelers we all pass and pass again being regulated thus are of equal duration
>
> knowing furthermore by the same courtesy that the journey is accomplished in stages ten yards fifteen yards at the rate of say its reasonable to say one stage per month this word these words months years I murmur them
>
> (Beckett, How 125)

We are thus brought to a series of calculations which in this case lead to a finite solution--if our fatigue permits us to follow them. In spite of its empirical faultlessness, however, on the page the accumulation of figures visually suggests babble:

> four by twenty eighty twelve and half by twelve one hundred and fifty by twenty three thousand divided by eighty thirty-seven and a half thirty-seven to thirty-eight say forty yards a year we advance
>
> (Beckett, How 125)

The linguistic environment of How It Is thus provides a model for better understanding stuplimity as an aesthetic strategy in contemporary practice, insofar as it entails an affective reorganization of one's relationship to language, as well as a veering away from the older category of the sublime. Unlike the instantaneous or sudden defeat of comprehension instigated by the latter, the stuplime belongs to a different temporal and emotional register, involving not an abrupt climax of excitation in terror, but rather an extended duration of consecutive fatigues. What facilitates this relationship is an encounter with the finite (though vast) operations of a symbolic order, the artificial system or "justice" encompassing the subject who confronts it, rather than an encounter with radically external and uncontrollable forces of Nature. In experiencing the sublime one confronts the infinite and elemental; in stuplimity one confronts the machine or system, the taxonomy or vast combinatory, of which one is a part. Recalling Stein's fascination with "mushy masses" in The Making of Americans, How It Is also suggests features specific to the anti-romantic environment of the stuplime text: linguistic bits and scraps, discarded "cultural" waste (torn sacks, empty food tins, dropped can openers), and the dross or mud in which all acts of socialization and communication occur and subjects find themselves partially submerged. The discursive economy supported by this mud, the basis for all relationships and social organization, is one of rhetorical "incoherencies" (gasps and pants, babble or quaqua), enumerations, repetitions, permutations, retractions and emendations, agglutinations, measurements and taxonomic classifications, and rudimentary arithmetical and algebraic operations (grouping, subdividing, multiplying).

20. Since the forms of exhaustion described above are related to tedium in a highly particular way, Beckett's example indicates that there are different kinds or uses of tedium in general, necessitating some differentiation between them. What stuplimity does not seem to involve is the kind of spiritualistic,

mesmerizing tedium aimed at the achievement of "higher" states of consciousness or selfhood, as engendered by metaphysical plays of absence against presence in the work of Meredith Monk, Brice Marsden, or Donald Judd. In this case, tedium assumes a seriousness and a transcendence more proper to the sublime than the stuplime, to an absorptive rather than anti-absorptive agenda. Stuplimity also evades the kind of wholly anti-absorptive, cynical tedium used to reflect the flattening effects of cultural simulacra, as in the work of Warhol and Koons. Here tediousness is frequently adopted as aesthetic self-stylization or mannerism, which often registers as smugness or self-satisfied irony. Whereas the first type of tedium is auratic or hypnotic, the effect produced by works utilizing tedium in this manner could be described as euphoric.

21. What stuplime productions do rely on is an anti-auratic, anti-euphoric tedium which at times deliberately risks seeming obtuse, rather than insist upon its capacity for intellectual or spiritual transcendence and/or clever irony. Rather than being centered around grandiose questions of being or the proliferation of larger-than-life iconography, this boredom resides in relentless attention to the abject and the small, the bits and scraps floating in what Ben Watson has called the "common muck" of language (223). The stuplime resides in the synecdochal relationship between these minute materials and a vast ecology of repetition and agglutination, the system ensuring that parapraxes, portmanteaus, and clichés (rotting metaphors) continue to be made. As Beckett writes, "What more vigorous fillip could be given to the wallows of one bogged in the big world than the example of life to all appearances inalienably realised in the little?" (Beckett, Murphy 181). Absurdity and black humor play significant roles in this aesthetic use of tedium to facilitate linguistic questioning, even when such inquiry leads to direct confrontations with questions of violence and suffering, as evinced in much post-WW II writing. The particular use of "obtuse" boredom as means of engaging in linguistic inquiry is also demonstrated in the following anecdote, told by Lacan in his 1959 seminar to introduce a definition of das Ding as "that which in the real suffers from the signifier":

> During that great period of penitence that our country went through under Pétain, in the time of "Work, Family, Homeland" and of belt-tightening, I once went to visit my friend Jacques Prévert in Saint-Paul-de-Vence. And I saw there a collection of match boxes. Why the image has suddenly resurfaced in my memory, I cannot tell.
>
> It was the kind of collection that it was easy to afford at that time; it was perhaps the only kind of collection possible. Only the match boxes appeared as follows: they were all the same and were laid out in an extremely agreeable way that involved each being so close to the one next to it that the little drawer was slightly displaced. As a result, they were all threaded together so as to form a continuous ribbon that ran along the mantelpiece, climbed the wall, extended to the molding, and climbed down again next to a door. I don't say that it went on to infinity, but it was extremely satisfying from an ornamental point of view.
>
> Yet I don't think that that was the be all and end all of what was surprising in the collectionism, nor the source of the satisfaction that the collector himself found there. I

> believe that the shock of novelty of the effect realized by this collection of empty match boxes--and this is the essential point--was to reveal something that we do not perhaps pay enough attention to, namely, that a box of matches is not simply an object, but that, in the form of an Erscheinung, as it appeared in its truly imposing multiplicity, it may be a Thing.
>
> In other words, this arrangement demonstrated that a match box isn't simply something that has a certain utility, that it isn't even a type in the Platonic sense, an abstract match box, that the match box all by itself is a thing with all its coherence of being. The wholly gratuitous, proliferating, superfluous, and quasi absurd character of this collection pointed to its thingness as match box. Thus the collector found his motive in this form of apprehension that concerns less the match box than the Thing that subsists in a match box. (Seminar 113-14)

Lacan uses this "fable" as illustration of his formula for sublimation ("[the raising] of an object to the dignity of the Thing" [112]), but it works equally well as an example of stuplimation, as the concatenation of awe (inspired by "the truly imposing") with what refuses awe (the "wholly gratuitous, proliferating, superfluous and quasi absurd"). The description of the array of matchboxes and their internal voids seems meant playfully to recall an earlier moment in the seminar, where Lacan claims that the Thing, das Ding, "has to be identified with the Wieder zu finden, the impulse to find again that for Freud establishes the orientation of the human subject to [a lost/absent] object" (Seminar 58). The impulse to find again is an impulse towards repetition, one centered around and organized by negativity. In the fable above, the repetition which Lacan finds simultaneously imposing and ridiculous, threatening and non-threatening, leads him straight to this Thing, enabling "the sudden elevation of the match box to a dignity that it did not possess before" (Seminar 118). Yet this elevation is paradoxically achieved through a lowering or abjection, an emphasis on the undignified or "wholly gratuitous... superfluous and quasi absurd" status of the collection through the proliferation of bits and scraps. As the producer of "multiplicities," repetition seems to do opposite things simultaneously in this anecdote: elevate and absurdify. In conjoining these divergent dynamics (raising and lowering, trajectory upwards and trajectory downwards), the repetition in the fable recalls a similar conjunction of rising and falling in the stuplime, through its syncretism of excitation and enervation, extreme "selected attentiveness" and deficit of the same. Lacan's stuplime array also recalls the structure of a typical sentence from The Making of Americans, in which the tension created by slightly overlapping phrases performs the functions of both disjunction (that which calls attention to the spaces between signifying units, figured in the image of "the little drawer" exposed) and what Peter Brooks calls the "binding" action of repetition (the agglutination expressed in "threaded together") (101). And as in the case of Stein, its particular kind of tedium also seems willing to risk a certain degree of shock value, unlike metaphysical boredom, which risks none, and cynical boredom, which demands more than we are often willing to give.

22. The aesthetic differences between sublimity and stuplimity call attention to the fact that not all repetitions are alike, a point also foregrounded in Kierkegaard's Repetition. When the

young man on a quest for "real repetition" in Kierkegaard's narrative euphorically (and erroneously) believes he has found it in the final outcome of his unconsummated love, "[His] perhaps disturbing enthusiasm is expressed in terms that only a little earlier in aesthetic history were standard when describing the sublime: 'spume with elemental fury,' 'waves that hide me in the abyss... that fling me up above the stars'" (Melberg 76). Significantly, these prototypical invocations of sublimity involve the image of elevation, situating the young man's relationship to the "ocean providing his 'vortex of the infinite'" as an experience of verticality and depth (222). In contrast, having chosen to pursue repetition in a comic/materialist rather than tragic/romantic arena, Constantin Constantius's description of farce as a "frothing foam of words that sound without resonance" (Kierkegaard 156) ironically references this sublime imagery only to flatten or deflate it, reconfiguring the experience of genuine repetition as one of a superficial and almost abject horizontality.

> Thus did I lie in my theater box, discarded like a swimmer's clothing, stretched out by the stream of laughter and unrestraint and applause that ceaselessly foamed by me. I could see nothing but the expanse of theater, hear nothing but the noise in which I resided. Only at intervals did I rise up, look at Beckmann, and laugh so hard that I sank back again in exhaustion alongside the foaming stream. (Kierkegaard 166)

In a satirical twist of the young man's invocation of the sublime, Constantin's description of his stuplime encounter with farce places him not in the elemental fury of a vast and abyssal sea, but rather horizontally alongside a mild and insipidly picturesque stream; it depicts him not as a mortal body engulfed, but as a pile of garments discarded by an absent body. Instead of the roaring or crashing of oceanic waves in which one becomes lost, we have "plaintive purling" of a small brook on the site of the family farm (166). As a "frothing foam of words that sound without resonance," farce finds its structural counterpart in the mode of its reception: laughter. This laughter foams and flows by a self with no substantive content or body. Much like the "mushy mass," "flabby mass," or "lax condition" Stein attributes to "the being all independent dependent being in possibility of formation" in The Making of Americans (386), the self who experiences farce is described as a body's outline gone flaccid, one having lost its original form. In laughter, the self becomes "stretched out" like the Steinian sentence itself, which would seem to generate a linguistic foam of its own through the cumulative build-up of repeated phrases and the repeated abutment and overlapping of clauses against others.

23. Unlike the upheaval of waves that fling the young man towards the sky, linguistic "foam" would seem to cling by cohesion to the ground, often in accumulated lumps. It is the "vast sea" slaver or waste product: the dross of the sublime. Since to froth is to produce foam and foam is what froths, Constantin Constantius's phrase "frothing foam" is itself a repetition (like his own name); one accordingly used by him to characterize the form of comedy he finds most repetition-friendly. One seeks repetition in what foams or bubbles; thus the comic genius Beckmann is described as a "yeasty ingredient" (Kierkegaard 165). The littoral environment of farce in which Constantin pursues repetition might here recall the importance of "foaming" language to Stein's comic taxonomy of human "types" in The

Making of Americans, as exemplified in this description of "bottom nature"--where bottom is literally "ground" in the sense of dirt:

> The way I feel natures in men and women is this way then. To begin then with one general kind of them, this a resisting earthy slow kind of them, anything entering into them as a sensation must emerge again from through the slow resisting bottom of them to be an emotion in them. This is a kind of them. This bottom in them then in some can be solid, in some frozen, in some dried and cracked, in some muddy and engulfing, in some thicker, in some thinner, slimier, drier, very dry and not so dry and in some a stimulation entering into the surface that is them to make an emotion does not get into it, the mass then that is them, to be swallowed up in it to be emerging, in some it is swallowed up and never then is emerging. (343)

If Constantin seeks repetition not in the vast sea, but on a ground covered by its dross, Stein pursues it in the "slow resisting bottom" of language: a relentlessly materialist environment of words which similarly summons, yet ultimately deflates, the traditional romanticism of the sublime.

24. Since for Stein, as for Deleuze, all repetition is repetition with an internal difference ("a feeling for all changing" [Making 301]), for "getting completed understanding [one] must have in them an open feeling, a sense for all the slightest variations in repeating, must never lose themselves so in the solid steadiness of all repeating that they do not hear the slightest variation" (294, my emphasis). In contrast to the sublime's dramatic awes and terrors, "open feeling" is also described as an emotion of indeterminate emotivity, a state of utter receptivity that actually slows or impedes reactivity, as both astonishment and fatigue are wont to do:

> Resisting being then as I was saying is to me a kind of being, one kind of men and women have it as being that emotion is not poignant in them as sensation. This is my meaning, this is resisting being. Generally speaking them resisting being is a kind of being where, taking bottom nature to be a substance like earth to someone's feeling, this needs time for penetrating to get reaction. Generally speaking those having resisting being in them have a slow way of responding, they may be nervous and quick and all that but it is in them, nervousness is in them as the effect of slow-moving going too fast... (Making 347-48, my emphasis)

The "open feeling" of resisting being is thus an undifferentiated emotional state, one which lacks the punctuating "point" of "poignancy." Skepticism is to be expected here: how can an affective state exist prior to the making of affective distinctions or values? Since, as Greimas and Fontanille point out, we tend to automatically assume and "reiterate uncritically the notion that living beings are structures of attractions and repulsions," it becomes quite difficult to imagine how "phoria [might be] thought of prior to the euphoria/dysphoria split" (3). Yet stuplimity as "open feeling" could serve as an example of the phoria or "not-yet-polarized tensive horizon" Greimas and Fontanille ask us to imagine; a realm of "gluey" emotivity [Stein] which could perhaps be described as "the individual's possibility [wandering] about in its own possibility" (Kierkegaard 155).[7]

It is important to note here that Stein describes the kind of subject with "open feeling" as "that kind of being that has resisting as its natural way of fighting rather than... that kind of being that has attacking as its natural way of fighting" (Making 296, my emphasis). As a mode of "open feeling" engendered by the syncretism of shock and boredom (that is, engendered by an encounter with difference prior to its conceptualization), stuplimity also functions as state of receptivity that paradoxically enables this tactics of "resistance" as a form of critical agency; one which the next section attempts to elaborate.

Linguistic "Heaps"

25. In one of his most influential and much-discussed essays, Frederic Jameson describes postmodernism as an "aesthetic situation engendered by the absence of the historical referent," or as an ongoing process of simulacratic spatialization disabling our capacity for temporal organization and hence relationship to "real historical time" (25). The here and now becomes the erewhon of the simulacrum, which "endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy image" (21). As Jameson continues,

> Yet this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our living possibility to experience history in some active way. It cannot therefore be said to produce this strange occultation of the present by its own formal power, but rather merely to demonstrate, through these inner contradictions, the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience. (21)

The subject is described as impotent in this regard, having lost the ability to "organize [his or her] past and future into coherent experience" (Jameson 25, my emphasis).

26. Since coherent representations of current experience are what Jameson (in 1984) finds most lacking in postmodernism as an "aesthetic situation engendered by the absence of the historical referent," we might take a closer look at how these breakdowns in reference and coherence are described, and what types of production they are said to result in (25). A good place to do so is where Jameson begins to delineate a common feature of postmodern textuality, or the "schizophrenic" writing he later associates with Cage, Beckett, and Language poetry:

> If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but "heaps of fragments" and in practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory. These are, however, very precisely some of the privileged terms in which postmodernist cultural production has been analyzed (and even defended, by its own apologists). They are, however, still privative features... (25, my emphasis)

The language of this passage clarifies what Jameson understands and expects coherence to be, and what forms he assumes it can take. In the movement from "heaps of fragments" to "the fragmentary," used to relate a specific kind of production back

to the practice engendering it, what gets eclipsed from the sentence (and the theory) is the heap.

27. Effaced perhaps in the desire to emphasize fragmentation in general (as privation) over its potential effects, this heap disappears from the critique of postmodernity just as the historical referent is said to do within the aesthetic situation it engenders. According to the logic of the paragraph, then, "heaping" does not appear to be a valid means of cohering, nor a proper form of organization. Yet insofar as for something to cohere is for it "to hold together firmly as parts of the same mass; broadly: STICK, ADHERE," a heap does seem to be a coherence of some sort. The difference seems to be the degree of "firmness" involved in the act of sticking, though this is only a difference of degree; a less than firm consolidation of parts would still be a proper coherence. We might think here of the "slowly wobbling," "flabby mass of independent dependent being" that is Stein's Martha Hersland, or the "slimy, gelatinous, gluey" substance that is "attacking being" disguised as "resisting being" (Making 349). As Stein insists, "[s]ome are always whole ones though the being in them is all a mushy mass." Thus Jameson seems to have a more specific, dictionary definition of "coherence" in mind when he excludes from it acts of holding-together in general. Insofar as it does not seem to cover particular forms of adhesion perceived as loose, limp, or unstable (such as heaps or mushy masses), what constitutes a legitimate form of coherence here would seem to be the process of making "(parts or components) fit or stick together in a suitable or orderly way," implying "systematic connection," especially in "logical discourse" (Webster's 216, my italics). In its orientation toward (phallo)logical firmness, this definition would seem to disavow limpnesses or flaccidities as equally viable organizations of matter.

28. An obvious point that must be stressed here is that what constitutes "logical consistency" or "logical discourse" is always a standard imposed by the cultural status quo. Might not unpredicted and seemingly "accidental" ways of cohering, then--even those resulting in unsightly heaps, lumps, and flabby masses--point to the possibility of new systems, enabling us to critique traditional assumptions about what "systematic connection" should look like?

29. Thus if we follow the logic of Jameson's passage, "coherence" appears to be something that can only be imposed from without, an abstract concept rather than active manifestation, a stabilizing, fixed idea of order dictating in advance how particles might be molded or organized, rather than a particular activity or becoming by which things are brought together, made, into some order. Yet if coherence must imply suitability and orderliness as well as adhesion, then how does one describe the way hair, teeth, and linotype pieces come to accumulate in Hamilton's installations, or words and phrases in the poetry of Kenneth Goldsmith? As a noun rather than a verb, the radical potentiality of "coherence" to generate new forms and new theories of formation becomes limited, restricted to the safe domain of the suitable, the orderly, and the aesthetically consistent.

30. Both Jameson's and Stein's notions of coherence are informed by and diverge precisely around this question of "consistency." Whereas for Jameson the term would seem to imply regularity or conformity to a particular ideal, an absence of variations or contradictions, consistency for Stein is a matter of

irregularity and constant flux, as well as a matter of matter:

> There must now then be more description of the way each one is made of a substance common to their kind of them, thicker, thinner, harder, softer, all of one consistency, all of one lump, or little lumps stuck together to make a whole one cemented together sometimes by the same kind of being sometimes by the other kind of being in them, some with a lump hard at the centre liquid at the surface, some with the lump vegetablish or wooden or metallic in them. Always then the kind of substance, the kind of way when it is a mediumly fluid solid fructifying reacting substance, the way it acts makes one kind of them of the resisting kind of them, the way another substance acts makes another kind of them the attacking way of them. It and the state it is in each kind of them, the mixing of it with the other way of being that makes many kinds of these two kinds of them, sometime all this will have meaning. (Making 345, my emphasis)

Hilarious and stuplime, this description usefully eludicates the main differences between the two notions of coherence. For Stein, coherence is a mode of substantiation--a material process of making rather than a value or ideal imposed on things made. As such, it involves an active potentiality or becoming--pointing not just to the creation of new "kinds," but of futural meanings. Secondly, coherence structurally complexifies, as a process diverse and varied in the ways in which it can occur, and the forms in which it may appear. Thirdly, coherence functions as a vast combinatory, in which new consistencies are produced through the "mixing" or hybridization of others.

31. We can also see that different kinds of material consistency are emphasized in the two notions of coherence: firmly constituted versus mushy or gelatinous; graspable versus slimy. Generally speaking, Jameson's notion of coherence seems a lot less messy than Stein's--free of heaps, masses, and lumps. In the passage above, the disappearance of the "heap" seems related to the fact that Jameson very much wants to see the heaping of fragments as indicative of privation rather than accrual--perhaps because the accrual implied is so, well, unsightly. Yet as those with agricultural, laundry, postal, or waste disposal experience might attest, a heap is an organization, though perhaps a not particularly organized-looking one.

> This coming together in them to be a whole one is a strange thing in men and women. Sometimes some one is very interesting to some one, very, very interesting to some one and then that one comes together to be a whole one and then that one is not any more, at all, interesting to the one knowing the one. (Stein, Making 382)

This passage suggests that how things cohere or come together is of intellectual interest to Stein, perhaps more so than the actual entities produced through this process. Following her lead we might similarly ask, how do the fragments in Jameson's "heap of fragments" get heaped? "Practices of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory" would seem to account for the fragments themselves, but leaves the question of their particular accumulation unexplained. To further elucidate this characterization of late twentieth-century experimental writing, Jameson refers to what he calls Lacan's "schizophrenic" theory of language, as a "linguistic malfunction" or breakdown

of the relationships between signifiers in the signifying chain that ultimately results in "the form of a rubble" (27). While this reference to Lacan seems to elaborate causes for the fragmentation discussed above, it nevertheless continues to evade, or withhold acknowledgment of, the particular structure or organization these fragments assume. Just as the heap in "heap of fragments" disappears from critical scrutiny, so does the form in "form of rubble." One wants a less reductive or dismissive analysis of "breakdown" here, as well as less narrow definition of "coherence." Are there not, as Stein suggests, multiple and various ways of heaping and cohering?--as well as different kinds of linguistic or semiotic rubble? An isolated fragment may be an "inert passivity" (Jameson 31), but a heap of fragments is more accurately described as a constituent passivity, or "passive synthesis"--a term Deleuze applies to the work of repetition for itself (72).

32. Significantly, Jameson finds the waning of historicity endemic to postmodernism (as reflected in its textualities) concomitant with "a waning of affect" and negative affect in particular. Thus "concepts such as anxiety and alienation... are no longer appropriate in the world of the postmodern" (14); rather, Jameson sees them displaced by euphoria, which he describes as a "joyous" or "hallucinatory exhilaration" (33), an ecstasy or high. Yet anxiety and alienation in their most hyperbolic manifestations--shock and boredom--converge in attempts to negotiate historicity by Beckett and Stein, writers Jameson himself considers "outright postmodernists" (4). For Stein, the work of "telling" or "making" history is inseparable from the labor of making of subjects ("kinds of men and women"), which itself entails the tedious labor of enumerating, differentiating, describing, dividing and sorting, and mixing within the chosen limits of a particular system. Such making does have its moments of exhilaration, but more generally takes place as a painstakingly slow, tiring, and seemingly endless "puzzling" over differences and resemblances. Temporal and taxonomic "organization" becomes marked by a series of fatigues rather than of euphoric highs. Stein accordingly acknowledges the number of failures occurring in this struggle for coherence (also described as "learning" or "studying" of a new discursive system), as well the alienation and anxiety it induces: "Mostly every one dislikes to hear it" (Making 289). With this projection of a less than receptive audience, writing becomes a seemingly isolating enterprise for the taxonomist-poet, who finds herself forced to announce "I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way I can do it" (289). This address can be read as a more inclusive formulation of audience, however, rather than a restriction of one, if we perceive Stein's writing itself as a process of "strangering," of forming community based on something other than the satisfactory fulfillment of membership conditions.

33. Reflecting an essentially constructivist world view, everyone for Stein is a "kind of," and thus strangered. Yet the alienating effects of this subjection are themselves perceived as valuable subjects for study: "Mostly always then when any one tells it to any one there is much discussing often very much irritation. This is then very interesting" (Making 338). Thus the narrator finds herself able to continue even at moments where she finds herself "all unhappy in this writing... nervous and driving and unhappy" (348). For above all, the making of "completed history" that is the self-consciously impossible (and thus unhappy) fantasy of The Making of Americans, which even more impossibly depends on the consolidation of the completed

history of every single subject, is absolutely synonymous with repeating:

> Often as I was saying repeating is very irritating to listen to from them and then slowly it settles into a completed history of them... Sometimes it takes many years of knowing some one before the repeating in that one comes to be a clear history of such a one. Sometimes many years of knowing some one pass before repeating of all being in such a one comes out clearly from them... This is now more description of the way repeating slowly comes to make in each one a completed history of them. (292)

Stein's comment that "sometimes many years pass" before repeating slowly comes to make a "completed history" finds contemporary realization in On Kawara's One Million Years (Past) (1970-1972), a series of ten black, official-looking ledgers, each containing 2000 pages listing 500 years per page, from 998031 B.C. to 1969 A.D.[8] The sublimity of such a vast amount of time is trumped by its organization into bureaucratic blandness; comprehension of one million years is rendered manageable, if also tedious, when consolidated in a set of ring binders bearing some resemblance to the complete Starr Report. Yet this tedium turns back into astonishment when we come to realize the amount of time and labor it took (two years worth) to make such a severely minimal product. Dedicated to "All those who have lived and died," what this piece records is not so much a completed "history," though it certainly speaks to the fantasy of or desire for this, but the time spent in the attempt to organize one even in the most stark and reductive way. The hic et nunc postmodernism of Kawara may be very different from Stein's avant le lettre variety, yet the comparison points to how The Making of Americans deliberately stages its own failure by setting itself against an impossible fantasy of absolute historical coherence or explicitness, usually imagined as an incipient future: "Sometime there will be here every way there can be of seeing kinds of men and women. Sometime there will be then a complete history of each one" (290); "Sometime then there will be a complete history of every one who ever was or is or will be living" (283). Or even more hyperbolically: "Sometime there will be a description of every kind of way any one can know anything, any one can know any one" (311); "sometime there will be a completed system of kinds of men and women, of kinds of men and kinds of women" (334).

34. While stuplimity offers no fantasy of transcendence, it does provide small subjects with what Stein calls "a little resistance" in their confrontations with larger systems. The fatigues generated by the system which is The Making of Americans may be "nervous and driving and unhappy," but such fatigues can also be darkly funny, as Beckett's Molloy, Keaton, Harpo Marx, and Pee Wee Herman remind us by their exhausting routines: running endless laps around a battleship, trying to enter a door, falling down and getting up again, collapsing in heaps. Significantly, the humor of these local situations usually occurs in the context of a confrontation staged between the small subject and powerful institutions or machines: thus we have Chaplin versus the assembly line; Keaton versus military engines such as The Navigator (a supply ship) and The General (a locomotive); Lucille Ball versus domesticity. Here we might add: Stein versus her own taxonomy. Critics have persuasively suggested that Stein's refusal of linear for cyclical or repetitive time signals a rejection of official (male) history for a temporality specific to feminine subjectivity, formulated

by Kristeva as "the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm" (113). Yet this preference for the cycle, one of "driving" excitations and fatigues, could equally suggest Stein in Chaplin drag. By adopting this particular cultural role, Stein chooses the artifice of comedic "types" over the seriousness of "biological rhythm" as a preferred strategy for feminist and linguistic change.

35. Just as in Kierkegaard's Repetition, where Constantin describes himself, consumed by laughter at a farce, as a pile of discarded clothes, the "kinds" of subjects produced in The Making of Americans function like garments without bodies, heap-like outlines, as it were, waiting to be "filled up" with the repeating (the discourse) that makes them "whole ones." Whole--but loose as opposed to firm. In The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, Stein calls attention to the male comedian's use of misshapen or "misfit" clothes "later so well known on Charlie Chaplin," clothes that "were all the delight of Picasso and all his friends" (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 75)--i.e., Stein herself, well known for her own loose and flapping garb. We see here again the role of limpnesses or "flabby masses" in counteracting an oppressive System's fantasies of phallic virility: the clothes worn by Chaplin so admired by Stein are, of course, always falling down. Hence slackness becomes underscored by slacklessness. Stein's love of the wobbling heap or mushy mass similarly recalls the strange fascination with dough in Chaplin films. As if in anticipation of Oldenberg's soft and puffy typewriters and other machines, or Yayoi Kusama's squishy penis-shaped pillows covered with polka-dots, Chaplin shapes flabby substance into handcuffs and missiles (Dough and Dynamite, 1914). Perhaps to ask us to imagine: what might happen to the machine when the exaggeratedly obedient cog within it, while continuing to maintain its function, goes limp? As when the characters played by Chaplin or Keaton, continually in confrontation with the larger systems enclosing them, repeatedly fall into heaps? Here we might also imagine the incontinent Molloy, collapsed under his bicycle, or Murphy, overcome by the "total permutability" of his biscuit assortment ("edible in a hundred and twenty ways!") (Beckett, Murphy 97).

36. In the tradition of Beckett and Stein, formulating a materialist poetic response to the "total permutability" of language is perhaps what is most at stake for poets like Farrell and Goldsmith, as well as visual artists like Zweig. For these postmodern practictioners, the staging of "accidental concretions," as Constantin describes the comic character in farce [Kierkegaard 163], strategically enables us to find new forms of "coherence" in an incoherent world--such as seen in Alice Notley's feminist epic poem, The Descent of Alette (1996):

> "When the train" "goes under water" "the close tunnel" "is transparent" "Murky water" "full of papery" "full of shapelessness" "Some fish" "but also things" "Are they made by humans?" "Have no shape," "like rags" "like soggy papers" "like frayed thrown-away wash cloths"... [16]
>
> "There is a car" "that is nothing but" "garbage" "Shit & spittle" "dropped food" "frayed brownness" "dirty matter" "pressed down & flattened" "Paper piled" "piled on the floor" "heaped on the benches" "Napkins yellowed" "tampons bloody"... (17)

Each quoted phrase, in being presented as a citation, becomes "thick" and carries with it a behindness or prior

context--creating a series of halts or delays in the narrative produced through their accumulation.[9] There's clearly nothing "accidental" about this concretion of language, yet the poem nevertheless seeks to look like one. For like the massive accumulations of "dirty matter" in Hamilton's installations, Stein's mushy masses, and the lumps formed by comic actors in their continual collapses and falls, such concretions challenge existing notions of form and aesthetic order. We can see how unsightly "heaping" offers what Stein might call a "little resistance" strategy for the postmodern subject, always already a linguistic being, hence always a small subject caught in large systems. For as Deleuze suggests,

> There are two known ways to overturn moral law. One is by ascending towards the principles: challenging the law as secondary, derived, borrowed, or 'general'; denouncing it as involving a second-hand principle which diverts an original force or usurps an original power. The other way, by contrast, is to overturn the law by descending towards the consequences, to which one submits with a too-perfect attention to detail. By adopting the law, a falsely submissive soul manages to evade it and to taste pleasures it was supposed to forbid. We can see this in demonstration by absurdity and working to rule, but also in some forms of masochistic behaviour which mock by submission. (5)

This "too-perfect attention to detail" is the main strategy utilized by Notley, Goldsmith, and Farrell, all of whom exaggeratedly follow structural laws in their work; Farrell the days of the calendar ("Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday... "), Goldsmith the mechanisms of the body ("Swallow. Arm lifts. Arm drops... "). It appears also the main strategy used by Stein's endlessly classifying and subdividing narrator in Making of Americans, as well as by the comic in farce. For as Deleuze also notes, while one can oppose the law by trying to ascend above it, one can also do so by means of humor, "which is an art of consequences and descents, of suspensions and falls" (5, my emphasis). Like other "falsely submissive souls" before them, some postmodern American poets follow this path in their confrontations with the systems encompassing them, formulating a stand-against by going limp or falling down, among the bits and scraps of linguistic matter.

Department of English and American Literature and Language
Harvard University
sngai@fas.harvard.edu

Notes

1. I've imported this expression from Duchamp's TRANS/formers, Lyotard's study of Duchamp's Large Glass. Lyotard's analysis of Duchamp's aesthetics as underwritten by a logic of "inexact precision" and "intelligent stupidity" seems very much in attunement with the poetics of Stein and contemporary Steinians.

2. Quotations are taken from the FIDGET website, which is sponsored by the Whitney Museum of American Art, Printed Matter, and Stadium, and is available at <http://stadiumweb.com/fidget/>. FIDGET was originally commissioned by the Whitney Museum and was performed in collaboration with vocalist Theo Bleckmann on June 16, 1998 at the Whitney. A book and compact disc were issued by the Maryland Institute of Art in 1998.

3. As Raphael Rubinstein notes in his blurb for this volume, "Goldsmith's epic litanies and lists bring to the textual tradition of conceptual art not only an exploded frame of reference, but a hitherto absent sense of hypnotic beat. Under its deceptively bland title, No. 111 2.7.93-10.20.96 attempts no less than a complete reordering of the things of the world."

4. For those curious about the (original?) text claiming to "appropriate" the Declaration of Independence which Goldsmith edits for incorporation into his own conceptual framework, the self-referential story is written by mathematician David Moser and cited by Douglas Hofstadter in Metamagical Themas, 37-41. Ultimately, however, what determines this text's positioning between MDCLXXXV and MDCLXXXVII in Goldsmith's poem? encyclopedia? Baedeker? is the fact that it contains the appropriate number of syllables, and, like the other rhymed "verses," ends with a sound related to the sound "R": "Harder harder" [568]. Yet the point is not simply to dramatize a privileging of form over content, since the hetergenous assortment of works chosen to build this aggressively prosodic text pointedly direct us to the untotalizable linguistic world of the late twentieth century.

5. Frederic Jameson makes this point about boredom alone in "Surrealism and the Unconscious," his chapter on video in Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism: "Boredom becomes interesting as a reaction to situations of paralysis and also, no doubt, as defense mechanism or avoidance behavior" (71-72). Deleuze suggests similar possibilities in noting that "fatigue is a real component of contemplation" (77).

6. I am convinced this characterization is Sontag's but have been unable to find source.

7. This description by Constantin of farce and its effect on spectators suggests that its "frothing foam of words" is yet another modulation of nonpolarized "phoric tension": "Seeing a farce can produce the most unpredictable mood, and therefore a person can never be sure whether he has conducted himself in the theater as a worthy member of society who has laughed and cried at the appropriate places" (Kierkegaard 160); thus farce enables the viewer to "maintain himself in the state in which not a single mood is present but the possibility of all" (161). Farce obstructs the "unanimity" of emotional impressions "and, strangely enough, it may so happen that the one time it made the least impression it was performed best" (160, my emphasis).

8. Exhibited at PS 1, Deep Storage. New York, 1998.

9. In the Author's Note to The Descent of Alette, Notley offers "A word about the quotation marks. People ask about them, in the beginning; in the process of reading the poem, they become comfortable with them, without necessarily thinking precisely about why they're there. But they're there, mostly, to measure the poem. The phrases they enclose are poetic feet. If I had simply left white spaces between the phrases, the phrases would be rushed by the reader—read too fast for my musical intention. The quotation marks make the reader slow down and silently articulate—not slur over mentally—the phrases at the pace, and with the stresses, I intend. They also distance the narrative from myself, the author: I am not Alette. Finally they may remind the reader that each phrase is a thing said by a voice: this is not a thought, or a record of thought-process, this a story, told."

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