CROSSROADS POETICS
TEXT IMAGE MUSIC FILM & BEYOND

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Introduction

Drawing upon a corpus of artworks considered across different art disciplines and institutional boundaries, this book works analytically and comparatively with literature, music, video, film, architecture, and performance art. It covers some of the key areas of contemporary theory and criticism and is primarily concerned with the changing nature of poetic practice as it is produced, consumed and disseminated through a variety of works embracing both high and popular culture from early modernism to the present. What the following chapters have in common—besides my conviction that poetry *and* poetics should be "at least as interesting as, and a whole lot more unexpected than, television"[1]—is an attempt to delineate the possibility of a truly transversal poetics, one which creates a space for a reconsideration of contemporary poetic language while navigating through the complex interactions between the artistic and the ideological, the historical and the theoretical.

By virtue of its sheer range of subjects, themes and critical approaches this volume would seem to fall into the rather ill-defined categories of "comparative poetics" and "interdisciplinary studies." While the former refers to an attempt to explore how "contemporary poets turn to mixed genres and mixed forms in their poetic practice, often exploiting new technological possibilities,"[2] the latter has marked contemporary scholarship, and stirred the academic world at large, transforming the way we draw and redraw the cultural field. Writing of the difficulty of establishing the "disciplinary" nature of an interdisciplinary field, Julie Thompson Klein, has remarked that "any attempt to understand the concept of interdisciplinarity is complicated by a considerable difference of opinion about its origin":

> For some it is quite old, rooted in the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, Rabelais, Kant, Hegel, and other historical figures who have been described as "interdisciplinary thinkers." For others it is entirely a phenomenon of the twentieth century, rooted in modern educational reforms , applied research, and movement across disciplinary boundaries.[3]

In other words, interdisciplinarity is likely to be perceived as "both nostalgia for lost wholeness and a new stage in the evolution of science."[4] The purpose of this book is less to position itself towards these extreme positions than to suggest ways of understanding and contextualizing a draft of thinking which is no longer subject to such binaries. One fundamental assumption behind this book is that one possible working method for comparative, intermedial poetics lies in a combination of close readings and critical contextualizations and theorizations on and around texts which straddle across different media and generic conventions and break with institutional divides separating the high and the low, theory and practice, as well as accepted notions of open and closed form. This concern is reflected in the diversity of artists considered in the following chapters, all of which interrogate some recent and current development in contemporary poetics in a way which underlines the specifics of poetic practice to various forms of textual, visual and musical creations. It is my hope to have continued to delineate a few alternative strategies by which to make sense of the proximity of poetic practice to non-textual or para-textual artefacts which return us to Marjorie Perloff's notion of poetry "on and off the page," a notion which is central to this volume, as is Perloff's more general project to map "the historical changes and ruptures that characterize twentieth-century poetics" and describe the transformations and permutations of textual and artistic discourses "as these discourses have evolved in their dialogue with history, culture, and society."[5]

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[1] Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) 3.

[2] Call for papers for the *Princeton Comparative Poetics Colloquium: Poiesis and Techne* (May 5, 2012): http://jacket2.org/commentary/poiesis-techne-princeton-comparative-poetics-colloquium

[3] Julie Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, & Practice* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) 19.

[4] Klein, *Interdisciplinarity*, 12.

Such a project, which charts connections between poetry and poetics to other media, paves the way for a critical investigation of intermediality which—far from positing that "boundary works" and "media crossovers" are new—suggest that "what *is* new is that artists who might, in an earlier time, have become painters or poets, now choose to be video artists or performance poets or makers of bookworks, or like John Cage, workers in what Joyce called the 'verbivocovisual.'"[6] *Crossroads Poetics* give special attention not only to the interdiscursive and synaesthetic nature of literary and extra-literary media (one is also reminded of Charles Bernstein's suggestion that "a poetic reading can be given to any piece of writing")[7] but also that this approach can be extended to the study of contemporary popular culture. The chapters and sections on Stein, Zappa, Feuillade, Jacob and Cornell, in particular, are geared towards an understanding of the "popular avant-garde" as defined by Renee Silverman as zone of exchange in which "the artistic experimentalism and anti-bourgeois attitude of the vanguard successfully turns the raw directness of popular genres into searing popular irony and satire,"[8] the popular acquiring a "critical function with respect to the avant-garde," one which "avoids the divorce of art and praxis, or everyday practice, of which the avant-garde has been accused."[9]

While concerns over over-specialization in the humanities and elsewhere have called for new transversal models likely to revive the idea of "a unified science, general knowledge, synthesis, and the integration of knowledge"[10] this book does not pursue this goal. On the contrary, it offers a multifaceted approach to understanding twentieth century culture which remains faithful to one of the basic tenets of the Liège-based Centre Interdisciplinaire de Poétique Appliquée which I have been directing since 2001: that so-called "transversal" studies need not weaken the autonomy of traditional and emerging (sub-)disciplines and should acknowledge the need to respect disciplinary loyalties and areas of expertise. *Crossroads Poetics* assembles a necessarily partial and selective picture of twentieth-century art. In its refusal to use a single, unified model of methodological and metacritical reflexion, writing "at the crossroads" enacts a move beyond considerations of interdisciplinary and intermedial studies as an ontological and epistemological polemic. As I hope the following chapters will attest, the dominant metaphor of this book suggests a dynamic model which favors bold, heuristic moves while remaining fully aware of the dangers of "the demon of analogy" and "connectivitis" inherent in any comparative study, especially when it deals with different genres, styles and time periods.

This book has evolved over many years. During its slow and often interrupted evolution, it would have been impossible to complete without the love and support of my family. I wish to thank the FNRS and the University of Liège for funding some of this work through a research grant in the academic year of 2011-2012. Among the academic community at large, I owe a lot to the help, guidance and assistance of the following friends and colleagues who provided insights and support to the earlier drafts of the book: Gian Lombardo, Nikki Santilli, Steve McCaffery, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Andrew Norris, Peter

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[5] Marjorie Perloff, *Poetry On & Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions* (Evanston : Northern Illinois University Press, 1998) x.

[6] Perloff, *Poetry On & Off the Page*, xii.

[7] Charles Bernstein, *A Poetics*, 9.

[8] Renée M. Silverman, "The Avant-Garde Is Popular (Again)," *The Popular Avant-Garde*, ed. Renée M. Silverman (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010) 11.

[9] Silverman, "The Avant-Garde Is Popular (Again)," 11.

[10] Klein, *Interdisciplinarity*, 19.

Nicholls, Sascha Bru, Peter Middleton, Leonard Schwartz, Craig Dworkin, Louis Armand, Maxine Chernoff, Karen Mac Cormack, Paul Hoover, Rosmarie Waldrop, Simon Warner, Ed Mann, Jimmy Carl Black, Ron Silliman, Bruce Michelson, Tony Bianco, Carl Havelange, Hugo Martin, Sarah Posman, David Caplan, Peter Johnson, Jonathan Monroe, John Havelda, Jimmy Carl Black, Ben Watson, Steven G. Axelrod, Marco Maurizi, Louis Armand, Brian Clemens, Kornelia Freitag, Paul Carr, Joe Amato, Arakawa, Madeline Gins, Christophe Den Tandt, Bob Perelman, Robert Leroy, Charles Simic, Marc Atkins, Marjorie Perloff, Charles Bernstein, Pierre Michel, Viktoria von Hoffmann, Jan Baetens, and Phil Sicker. My gratitude also goes to Livio Belloï, Christophe Pirenne, William Ian Miller, Gérald Purnelle, Christine Pagnoulle, Pascal Durand, Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Stéphane Dawans, and other members of the CIPA team (www.cipa.ulg.ac.be), whose wise counsel, curiosity and conversation have been invaluable. Special thanks go to Louis Armand and David Vichnar for making this book possible. The ten chapters that make up this volume include new essays alongside revised and expanded versions of articles which appeared in magazines over the last fifteen years and which are largely out of print or unavailable in English. Earlier versions of some portions of this book have been published as separate articles in *Phrasis*, *The Prose Poem: An International Journal*, *Symbiosis*, *Talisman*, *Novelization: From Film to Novel* (Jan Baetens and Marc Lits, eds., Leuven University Press, 2004) and *Architectures of Poetry* (Craig Douglas Dworkin and Maria Eugenia Diaz Sanchez, eds., Rodopi, 2004); they are reprinted here in an adapted and expanded form with kind permission from the editors. Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to the different audiences to which sections of this volume have been presented over the past few years and especially to the friends and colleagues who helped to plan and organize my last round of conferences on crossroads poetics in the Spring and Summer of 2012: Richard Deming (Yale), Vaclav Paris and Charles Bernstein (UPenn), Phil Sicker (Fordham), Susan Bernstein, Rosmarie and Keith Waldrop (Brown), Giampiero Pitisci (ENSAV La Cambre), and Kornelia Freitag (Bochum). Lastly, I am also very grateful to Nancy Kuhl for arranging a visit to the Beinecke to peruse rare Gertrude Stein manuscripts and to Tom Phillips, Marc Atkins and Tina Darragh for kindly granting permission to reproduce their artwork in this volume.

1 Poetry and Silent Film

In *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), Vachel Lindsay hails Thomas Edison—in a proto-McLuhanesque manner—as "the new Gutenberg [who] invented the new printing." He then proceeds to encourage "students of the motion picture side of poetry" to turn to poet-painters William Blake and Dante Gabriel Rossetti "for spiritual precedents", and exhorts modern poets not to confine "the Imagist impulse" to the printed word ("Why would you be imitators of these leaders when you might be creators in a new medium?").[1] A survey of poetry's attempts to emulate the dynamics of the moving image would have to address, amongst many other examples, the Futurist *parole in libertà*,[2] Gertrude Stein's "cinematic phase" (of which more will be said below), the different stages of Blaise Cendrars's filmic aesthetics, H.D.'s film reviews for the journal *Close Up*, and a selection of poems and essays by the likes of Hart Crane, Jean Cocteau, Robert Desnos or Frank O'Hara.

I have chosen to focus on a much more limited corpus which is emblematic not only of poetry's aspiration to the condition of film but also, and more importantly, of the suggestion that the practices of writers translating cinema into poetry constitute a lens through which we can understand specific aspects of intermediality. As Jan Baetens has argued, novelizations and films can be profitably examined "in the context of larger cultural constellations whose structures exceed the univocal, linear and teleological relationships between them."[3] In the following pages, I would like to extend this methodological hypothesis to considerations of genre and form which exceed the traditional and institutional parameters of film adaptation and beg questions that pertain to the various ways in which different genres and media rearrange and reposition themselves and each other through a process of mutual (re)appropriation.

As Marshall McLuhan writes, in *Understanding Media*, "artists in various fields are always the first to discover how to enable one medium to use or to release the power of another."[4] He cites the example of T.S. Eliot, whom he praises on account of his capacity to mix his "media diet" and achieve the "interpenetration of film form and jazz idiom." McLuhan goes on to state that Eliot's *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and *The Waste Land* owe their impact not only to their appropriation of jazz and film form but also to their use of "the film theme of Charlie Chaplin, as did James Joyce in *Ulysses*."[5]

> Joyce's Bloom is a deliberate takeover from Chaplin ("Chorney Choplain," as he called him in *Finnegans Wake*). And Chaplin, just as Chopin had adapted the pianoforte to the style of the ballet, hit upon the wondrous media mix of ballet and film in developing his Pavlova like alternation of ecstasy and waddle. He adopted the classical steps of ballet to a movie mime that converged exactly the right blend of the lyric and the ironic that is found also in *Prufrock* and *Ulysses*.[6]

McLuhan's take on Eliot's appropriation of jazz and film also points to the way in which one medium can be seen to "remediate" another by absorbing it, entirely or in part, into its own fabric so that the differences between the two are minimized. This process of partial absorption, however, "ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remain[ing] dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways."[7] This process of refashioning of earlier media or genres is entirely consistent with McLuhan description of the "media mix" of ballet and film in Chaplin's film choreographies where the classical ballet can only resurface in oblique, parodic, nostalgic or celebratory ways (and/or in ways that are merely structural), creating modal and generic tensions within a performance which is perceived as a single aesthetic event (one thinks of, for example, Joyce's dissolution of Richard III's pathos into Walt Disney's Seven Dwarfs: "Heigh hohse, heigh hohse, our kindom from an orse!"[8]).

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[1] Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000) 149.

[2] See also their various projects for a cinematic extension of the words-in-freedom aesthetics, which included various forms of proto-lettrist performances such as "alphabetical" and "typographical" dramas.

[3] Jan Baetens, « La novellisation, un genre impossible ?," *Recherches en communication* 17 (2002): 218.

[4] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994) 54.

[5] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 54.

[6] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 54.

From the perspective of literary and cultural history, the alliance of the lyric and the ironic (and/or the farcical) which characterizes both Joyce and Chaplin also demands that we examine modernism and mass culture as two interdependent and dialectically related manifestations of one and the same phenomenon. The revolutionary potential of Chaplin's "movie mime" was acknowledged by poets such as Stein or by Williams who saw in film a means of departing from "the banality of sequence" and "the paralyzing vulgarity of logic."[9] Chaplin's "blend of the lyric and the ironic" thus emerges as a compromise between modernist irony and the gestural resistance to syllogistic progression of slapstick. As for Joyce's fusion of Chaplin and Chopin and McLuhan's above-quoted reference to Chaplin's appropriation of Anna Pavlova's classical steps into "alternation of ecstasy and waddle," it refers not only to the disturbing and destabilizing mixture of grace and clumsiness which characterized the tramp's jigging, shiftless gait but also to any kind of popular disfiguration of classical material which defeats the audience's aspirations to (comic or lyrical) closure while converting identity into an ambivalent object of movement, sensation and desire.

Stein and Chaplin: From Male Hysteria to the Burlesque

Stein acknowledged that her repetition with variation technique was indebted to the moving image. The insistent, hypnotic cadences of her "cinematic" prose poetry (a form which gave her the possibility to manipulate the concrete materiality of language and undermine traditional narrative and descriptive modes from within) endeavored to create a "continuously moving picture of any one"[10] born out of the succession of similar enunciations undergoing various additions, subtractions, variations and permutations. What happens at the level of language and repetition in Stein's writings thus aspires to the literary equivalent of filmic movement, which she saw as the visual manifestation of a "continuous present" which embodied "an inevitable beginning of beginning again and again and again."[11]

It is interesting to note that Stein favored Chaplin's early films, which concentrated on movement rather than plot, to the later, post WWI works. For Stein, the emergence of talkies further diminished the gestural fluidity of film: "if you had a voice accompanying naturally after that," she explains, "you could never change the rhythm you were always held by the rhythm the voice gave them."[12] Stein was primarily interested in the rhythms, repetitions and redundancies of everyday conversation, not in any pre-written spoken material. More than anything else, it is the fear of losing the possibility to "escape from actuality" (91) and of becoming trapped in the predetermined cadences of *dialogue* which explains her fondness for the early phases of Chaplin's career. According to Chaplin himself, Stein's admiration of his work was based primarily on her preoccupation with movement and her disregard for plot: "She would like to see me in a movie just walking up the street and turning into a corner, then another corner, and another."[13] Susan McCabe has ingeniously suggested that Stein's nervous, fragmented and repetitive style was influenced, at least in part, by Chaplin's "spasmodic gait, perfected during the First World War," which "simulated a traumatized body: the gesticulatory tics and motor in-coordination of either the war neurotic or the male hysteric."[14] In McCabe's analysis, such a hypothesis is supported by a consideration of Stein's publications in the field of experimental psychology (which connected hysteria to specific types of bodily automatism), of her fascination with film, and of her experience of World War I.

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[7] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001) 47.

[8] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2012) 373.

[9] William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1954) 116.

[10] Gertrude Stein, *Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Writing and Lectures 1909-45* (London: Penguin, 1971) 105.

[11] Dydo, *A Stein Reader*, 499

[12] Cited in Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 91.

One of Stein's own unpublished film scripts, entitled "A Movie,"[15] displays a strong connection with what Chaplin diagnosed as a preoccupation with movement over narrative per se. "A Movie" tells the story of a penniless American painter who decides to become a taxi driver who soon ends up working for the French army. It also depicts the realities of the war in a way which incorporates the hysterical cadences of the battlefield into its very narrative fabric. Unlike her early portraits, "A Movie" creates a "cinematic" experience which is less based on repetitions with variations than on a more traditional, albeit telegraphic, account of the characters' actions, decisions and gestures:

> American painter painting in French country near railroad track. Mobilization locomotive passes with notification for villages. Where are American tourists to buy my pictures sacre nom d'une pipe says the American painter. American painter sits in cafe and contemplates empty pockets book as taxicabs file through Paris carrying French soldiers to battle of the Marne. I guess I'll be a taxi driver here in my gay France says the American painter …. Writer sits in studio trying to learn names of streets with the help of Bretonne peasant and femme de ménage. He becomes taxi driver. Ordinary street & scenes in war time Paris.[16]

The overall factual quality of Stein's text tends to indicate that she really intended it to be not an end in itself but a "scenario" for a film. Still, the script comprises some unusual, more arresting passages, including a short introductory "lettrist" poem whose relationship with the story is unclear even though its contamination by the letter "Z" somehow prefigures the "fussy" and zigzagging movements of the film's plot. The poem also points to a dimension of story-telling which is beyond assimilation by the syllogistic, teleological logic of plot and considers the movement of the letter "Z" as an emblem of "reversal, contradiction, denial, contrariety" and "deviance,"[17] the kind "deviance" which gives the word "princess" an uncanny character and insists on the multiple "buzzing" and "fussing" interferences which disrupt the "business" of converting the dream-like war experience into a straight, sellable film package:

> Eyes are a surprise
> Printzess a dream
> Buzz is spelled with Z
> Fuss is spelled with s

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[13] P. Adams Sitney, *Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 159

[14] McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism*, 58. Filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein wrote about Chaplin's "photogenic neurasthenia," commenting that "his entire performance consists of reflex actions of nervous, tired person" (cited in McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism*, 68).

[15] This section refers to the original 28-page A5 manuscript located at the Beinecke Library.

[16] Gertrude Stein, "A Movie," original manuscript consulted at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, September 2012. Unpag.

[17] Roland Barthes, *Le Grain de la voix. Entretiens 1962-1980* (Paris: Seuil, 1981) 117.

So is business[18]

One of the salient oddities present in the script is the figure of the "Bretone (sic) femme de menage," whom the American painter convinces to work on his behalf when he is too tired to perform his duty ("Being lazy about getting up in the mornings he spends some of his dark nights in teaching Bretonne Femme de menage peasant girl how to drive the taxi so she can replace him when he wants to sleep"). With the introduction of the "femme Bretonne" this tale of shifting identities ("American comes into the war american painter wants be American soldier")[19] becomes a statement about women's participation in the war effort. While the painter's mobilization as a driver for the army is clearly inspired by Stein's and Toklas's experience of driving a car which served as an ambulance for the American Fund for the French Wounded, passing, cryptic references to the Monroe Doctrine ("The United States is comical. Now I want to tell you about the Monroe doctrine. We think very nicely we think very well of the Monroe doctrine.")[20] and the appearance of General Pershing at the very end of the script sketch out an identifiable political and historical context. Stein's script occasionally refers to the atrocities of the war ("Paris carrying French soldiers to battle of the Marne. I guess I'll be a taxi driver here in my gay France")[21] but these are generally subsumed by the rushed, burlesque progress of the narrative. Before the story takes us to "the final triumph of the Allies," the American painter and the femme Bretonne experience a series of misadventures culminating in a car crash causing severe injuries to the American painter and an "exciting duel" between "French gendarme american painter, taxi, f.m. bretone (sic), [and] two american crooks with motorcycles"[22] from whom they manage to recover money stolen from the quartermaster's department.

Stein's second unpublished film script, which she wrote in French, "Deux soeurs qui ne sont pas soeurs," places a similar emphasis on motion as an end in itself. As the title indicates the story is based on a series of failed encounters and mistaken, shifting identities. The dominant mode is the burlesque of frantic acting as the characters' frantic acting follows the peculiar logic of a short, absurdist and hurried tale filled with psychosexual quid pro quos, theft, suspense, interrupted paths and socio-sexual tensions. The story gravitates around a photograph of two poodles which constitutes an object of desire and worship for several, concurrent characters and whose appearance and disappearances constitute the epicenter of the narrative. The photograph originally belongs to an "elderly laundress"[23] whose admiration for the poodles draws the attention of two ladies who are "full of admiration" for the picture and manage to steal it from her before driving away. Before the leave, they meet and get rid of another woman who looks "as if she had just won a beauty contest" after she has rushed into their car and started bursting into tears. A few hours later, the ladies meet another laundress, who is described as being much younger than the first one, and to whom they show the photograph. The young woman looks at the photograph "with pleasure and excitement" but her interest quickly wanes away and the ladies leave her, dropping a little parcel behind them which later reappears in the hands of "the woman of the beauty contest." Two days later the first laundress sees the two ladies driving their car in the company of a true white poodle holding a little parcel in his mouth.

Unlike "A Movie," "Deux soeurs qui ne sont pas soeurs" does not contain any spoken or internal dialogues or monologues, which makes it qualify as a "silent poem," a direct equivalent of the pre-talkie short film. Whatever one makes of the dream-like logic which characterized the meanders of Stein's script, the general atmosphere is one of hysteria and sexual repression, of which the figure of the poodle becomes a salient, albeit ambivalent, symbol highlighting the instability of the self as it develops through Stein's fractured narrative. Far from being a free-floating signifier destined to prompt the action and delay the film's closure, the poodle serves to mediate anxieties about sexual and social definition. It emerges as powerful symbol of the *failed* domestication of sexual energy, a situation further complicated by the social conflict which explicitly opposes the two ladies and the two laundresses. Stein's use of the poodle is a symptom of sexual repression and of the struggle for social and sexual emancipation uncannily anticipates Joyce's own punning interpretation of poodles as a symptom of sexual frustration or decline in *Finnegans Wake* ("With her poodle feinting to be let off and feeling dead in herself. Is love worse living?").[24]

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[18] Stein, "A Movie," unpag.
[19] Stein, "A Movie," unpag.
[20] Stein, "A Movie," unpag.
[21] Stein, "A Movie," unpag.
[22] Stein, "A Movie," unpag.
[23] Gertrude Stein, "Deux soeurs qui ne sont pas sœurs," original manuscript consulted at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, September 2012. Unpag.

The fact that Stein herself was the proud owner of two poodles (Basket and Basket II) should not obscure the fact that the poodle was one of the most popular pet actors appearing in the pre-talkies era. The rather unlikely "Poodle History" website[25] cites fifty-nine silent films featuring that particular breed of pet actors. One of them, "le caniche Barnum," appeared in no less than seven Romeo Bosetti productions (the Brescia-born film director was at the time one of the masters of the silent burlesque) released by Pathé in the years 1911 and 1912. The role played by pets in early silent century movies was largely confined to threatening domestic or public order. Poodles were arguably more popular than other dog species because of their capacity to learn tricks quickly and mimic human attitudes (they were and still are very popular in circuses). Their anthropomorphic attributes and general morphological plasticity may also account for their popularity with artists (from Stein to Thomas Mann, Schopenhauer, Zappa and beyond).[26] For Stein, however, Basket, her "large [male] unwieldy poodle," is a foundational element of the development of her general prosody and understanding of how literary language works: she claims, for instance, that "listening to the rhythm of his water-drinking made her recognize the difference between sentences and paragraphs, that paragraphs are emotional and that sentences are not."[27] By suggesting that the rhythm of the water-lapping of a dog enabled her to distinguish between affective and non-affective units of compositions, Stein attempts to alert us to the fact that the progress from of a sentence to a paragraph or a series of blocks of prose has spatial and emotional properties which exceed their linear narrative features. Whereas the sentence, just like the word as such, can still be regarded as a material unit, Stein regards paragraphs as "emotional" in the sense that their sheer length creates a movement towards an "emotional plot" in which the continuous movement of the "lapping" builds into a "wave" of meaning which exceeds the sum of its parts and allows various forms of affective identification and permutations to be integrated by the reader. Stein's dismissal of the sentence as emotionally incomplete is of course highly problematic as it posits the sentence as a self-contained semantic building block which can only acquire the equally dubious status of a sub-affective unit once it becomes part of the general progression towards closure:

> Sentences are contained within themselves and anything really contained within itself has no beginning or middle or ending.[28]
> But one sentence coming after another sentence makes a succession and the succession if it has a beginning middle and ending does form create and limit an emotion.[29]

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[24] Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 269.

[25] www.poodlehistory.org

[26] See, also, Ben Watson's amusing Adornoite theorizing of "poodle play" as a profit fetish, a symbol of consumerism and of the genesis of the minimalist movement (Ben Watson, *Art, Class and Cleavage* [London: Quartet, 2004]139-60).

[27] Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage, 1990) 264.

[28] Gertrude Stein, *Narration: Four Lectures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) 20.

Elsewhere, Stein elevates the flow of “prose” as the combination of sentence and paragraph which allows a balance between the imperatives of attending to the materiality of words and of surrendering to the emotional rhythm of the “whole”:

> Prose is the balance the emotional balance that makes the reality of paragraphs and the unemotional balance that makes the reality of sentences and having realized completely realized that sentences are not emotional while paragraphs are, prose can be the essential balance that is made inside something that combines the sentence and the paragraph.[30]

Whatever we makes this distinction, Stein’s reliance on an organic model (the peculiar noise/music of Basket’s water-lapping) to develop a prosodic theory once again foregrounds the physiological basis of her understanding of a cinematico-poetic narrative in which movement, far from being merely plot-oriented, becomes an end in itself. Such a choreography of talking bodies unfettered by the counter-rhythms of dialogue could only be generated by silent film (or poetry). Delighting in further complications, incongruities and dislocations the talking body - whether of the Steinian or Chaplinesque varieties - enacts the frail and precarious character of selfhood in silent film. The incomplete, speechless body engenders a sensory, physical experience which is never fully contained by the pressures of linear continuity, and the motility and gesticulatory logic of Stein’s “poetic scripts” can only enacts a struggle *towards* narrative which shows the irregular and evanescent substance of the silent image.

Max Jacob’s Fantômas

> Écoutez... Faites silence...
> La triste énumération
> De tous les forfaits sans nom,
> Des tortures, des violences
> Toujours impunis, hélas!
> Du criminel Fantômas.
> -Robert Desnos, “La Complainte de Fantômas”

If Chaplin’s grimacing, shifting body echoes the urgent and syncopated cadences of Stein’s poetry, the examples considered so far have above all revealed similarities between the disjunctive and simultaneist aesthetics of modernist poetry and the art of cinematic montage. But for many modernist poets, the seductive power of film is not limited to its promotion of an anti-narrative aesthetics. McLuhan’s emphasis on “the right blend” of lyric and ironic modes of expression also points to a basic ambivalence underlying the conversion of the “classical” into the popular, one which also enacts a transition from the poses and steps of ballet to a reframing and relocation of bodily content which becomes the main center of attention in the silent environment of early film. Early cinema provides a corrective to the dominant models of high modernist, ironic detachment from corporeality in addressing the recipient and transmitter of the continuous mutations, sensations and adjustments of the performing body. Cinema provides a platform on which traditional notions of the body can be rethought and literally re-organized.

The poems I have chosen to discuss in this sub-chapter are taken from Max Jacob’s prose poem collection, *The Dice Cup* (1916). They belong to a subgenre of modern poetry which has been praised (and criticized) precisely for its capacity to “debunk” the high-blown

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[29] Stein, *Narration*, 22.

[30] Stein, *Look at Me Now and Here I Am*, 137.

ambitions of the "poetic" and achieve the "right blend of the lyric and the ironic" praised by McLuhan. The prose poem is widely regarded as a genre that emerged primarily as a revolt against dominant poetic forms, "a critical, self-critical, utopian genre, a genre that tests the limits of genre,"[31] a genre which is representative of "how literary forms conceal traces of their own underlying aesthetic contradictions, including the fact that such meta-genres as "poetry," "narrative" and the "lyric" are always already contaminated by the traces of other generic categories they tend to subscribe to or exclude."[32] The popularity of the French prose poem since Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen*, in particular, largely results from the need to break through the metrical and rhythmic constraints of the Alexandrine. In this sense, the prose poem can perhaps be seen to "remediate" traditional, versified poetry by allowing it to reclaim other genres, functions and modes (fiction, the essay, the parable, etc.) which have come to be associated more or less exclusively with prose literature.

One of the most important features of the Jacobian prose poem is its willingness to turn the "tiny" into the "enormous" ("Le minuscule, c'est l'énorme,"[33] he writes in his "Poem in a Style Not My Own," a piece dedicated to Arthur Rimbaud).[34] As Jonathan Monroe points out, resorting to a pre-cinematic metaphor, "in the 'camera obscura' world figured in Jacob's texts, where what is small may loom quite large and the relative importance generally attributed to the aesthetic and the political are reversed, a prose poem may be as big as a novel."[35] The implications of this in the context of the history of the prose poem are all the more important as Des Esseintes, the protagonist of Huysmans' *A rebours* (1884), had already defined the form as a kind of "condensed novel" for readers with a short attention span, a form which should "contain within its small compass…the power of the novel, while eliminating its tedious analyses and superfluous descriptions."[36] As for Baudelaire, the official founder of the prose poem, his *Paris Spleen* (1869) describes the genre as a serpent which is "at once both head and tail, alternating and reciprocal,"[37] a form which the reader can chop up "into many fragments," only to discover that "each is able to exist apart."[38]

Jacob's *The Dice Cup* also plays with the ambiguities of a form which hesitates between fiction and poetry, the narrative and the lyric mode. Like many other poems in the collection, his "Roman Populaire" seeks to parody the conventions of popular fiction, a technique Jacob was later to develop in his comic novels, most notably in *Filibuth ou la Montre en or* (1922) while simultaneously assimilating the lessons of pictorial cubism:

> I don't have much more to say. I've got to respond to the examining magistrate on behalf of my friend. Where are the keys? They aren't in the school. Excuse me, your honor, I need to look for the keys. There they are! And what a situation for the judge! In love with the sister-in-law, he was on the verge of renouncing his part in the whole affair, but she came to plead with him to proclaim a mistrial and then she would be all his. Actually, the judge is quite annoyed by the whole affair. He dawdles over details: why all these sketches? I'm launching into a veritable course in aesthetics. An artist has many works around him from which to choose his forms. Evening falls; the judge doesn't understand! He speaks of forgeries. Some friends arrive. The

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[31] Jonathan Monroe, *A Poverty of Objects : The Prose Poem and the Politics of Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987) 16.

[32] Michel Delville, *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida) 9.

[33] Max Jacob, *Le Cornet à dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967) 34.

[34] In his Preface to *The Dice Cup*, Jacob dismisses Rimbaud as "the triumph of romantic disorder," a writer whose work has "neither style nor situation" (Jacob, *Le Cornet à dés*, 22).

[35] Monroe, *A Poverty of Objects*, 173.

[36] J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature: A rebours*, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 162.

[37] Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen: Little Poems in Prose* trans. Keith Waldrop (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009) 3.

[38] Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, 3.

> wide of the accused proposes everyone to go out for a spin and the judge accepts hoping the accused will know how to escape.[39]

The parodic impulse which lies at the heart of Jacob's cubist slaptick in "Roman populaire" should not obscure his genuine admiration for popular fiction and, in particular, for the serial crime thrillers of Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain as well as their cinematic extensions in the films of Louis Feuillade (1913-14). Jacob, who co-founded the *Société des amis de Fantômas* with Guillaume Apollinaire in 1913, was only one of a group of major writers whose admiration for Fantômas led them to pay tribute to the Genius of Crime. Max Jacob, Jean Cocteau, Blaise Cendrars, Robert Desnos, Ernst Moerman, Pablo Neruda and Ernst Moerman (who also directed a short film called "Monsieur Fantômas" in 1937) all wrote poems inspired by Fantômas, and André Breton, Louis Aragon and Benjamin Péret included his name in their genealogy of "accursed literature," a list which features Fantômas alongside the names of Lautréamont, Arthur Rimbaud and Alfred Jarry.[40] Whereas for Georges Franju, the appeal of Feuillade's films lies in their use of a cinematic language which is at once "sentimental, limpid, poetic and modern," Jean Cocteau praised the "absurd and magnificent lyricism of Fantômas."[41] This description could equally apply to Max Jacob's *Dice Cup,* which was itself inspired by "all the manifestations of the unconscious mind: *mots en liberté*, hazardous associations, night- and daydreams, hallucinations, etc."[42] According to Robin Walz, one possible explanation for the affinity the French avant-garde (and, in particular, the surrealist group) felt for Feuillade's silent movies lies in their use of four basic motifs he identifies as the "mass-culture 'stimulators' of surrealism": "displaced identities, endless detours, uncanny objects, and sublime horror."[43] At least the first three of these features are present in Jacob's "Roman Populaire." The absence of clear referents in Jacob's use of pronouns, in particular, makes it impossible for the reader to understand whether the speaker of the poem is indeed the accused or whether he is defending a friend. We are left wondering about the nature of the drawings that puzzle the judge and we know very little about the sister-in-law, who may or may not be related to the speaker or to his friend. The element of social and legal transgression is clearly evocative of a genre whose popularity, perhaps more than that of any other fictional genre, has often relied on the power of unsolved mysteries, mysterious, uncanny objects (the keys, the drawings) and sensational love affairs: the end of Jacob's poem indeed suggests that a "promenade générale" will simultaneously open up the possibility of an animated sexual romp and enable the accused to escape! Lastly, the overall comic effect of the piece results from the interpenetration of the mechanical and the farcical, a mixture which characterized some of the most memorable avatars of the modernist spirit, from Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* to Eliot's "Prufrock" and, of course, Chaplin's slapstick.

Jacob's playful deconstruction of the popular novel is also apparent in the two Fantômas poems contained in *The Dice Cup*. The first one, simply entitled "Fantômas", clearly deals with the theme of "displaced identities," an aspect of Feuillade's films most apparent in the sequence introducing Fantômas at the beginning of the fourth episode, *Fantômas contre Fantômas* (1914), where the actor René Navarre is first shown as "himself" before dissolving into an old man, a middle-aged American detective and, finally, Fantômas himself.

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[39] Max Jacob, "Roman Populaire" trans. Jonathan Monroe, Monroe, *A Poverty of Objects*, 165.

[40] (Walz 52)

[41] Liliane Brion-Guerry, ed., *L'Année 1913: Les formes esthétiques de l'œuvre d'art à la veille de la première guerre mondiale*. Vol. 3 (Paris: Klinksieck, 1973) 599.

[42] (16)

[43] Robin Walz, "Serial Killings: Fantômas, Feuillade, and the Mass-Culture Genealogy of Surrealism," *The Velvet Light Trap : A Critical Journal of Film and Television* 37: 51. François Lacassin notes that in the *Fantômas* series "there was an overflowing of the fantastic into the daily life which seems to have had an affinity with surrealist preoccupations—an insolent challenge to aesthetic and social taboos, a relentless demystification, an historical continuity with what André Breton called dark humor. And above all, objective chance" (cited in Walz, "Serial Killings,"52).

Ultimately, Fantômas' ephemeral selves are perhaps best captured in Michel Leiris' description of Feuillade's protagonist as a free-floating signifier whose shifting identity resides above all in the typographical shapes of his name ("the circumflex accent hovers above the O like a huge wing, and the F sets up its gallows in front of the S's lightning whip").[44] In breaking with the Manichean logic of the melodramatic *feuilleton*, Feuillade's series ultimately enacts a principle of "reversibility of the real"[45] and creates narratives that are built on abrupt transitions between opposite states of being and consciousness, shifting as they do from the conscious to the unconscious, from life to death, from youth to old age (Fantômas occasionally disguises himself as an old man), from respectability and wealth to disgrace and poverty. In Jacob's poem, the dislocated identities of the Fantômas stories extend to the blurring of the distinction between motion and stasis, people and objects, the miniature and the gigantic as well as the confusion of living and dead matter:

> On the burnished silver door knocker, soiled with age, grimed with the dust of time, some sort of sculpted Buddha with an unusually high forehead, pendulous ears, and the look of a sailor or a gorilla; it's Fantomas. He was pulling on two ropes to haul up I don't know what. His foot slips; hung by a thread; the summoning knob must be answered, before the rat has a chance to bore through the rubber ball. But, it's nothing more than a sculpted silver door knocker.[46]

Like its "sequel" (another short sketch entitled "Encore Fantômas" and relating a conversation taking place in a restaurant between a couple of bourgeois gourmets and the Genius of Evil disguised as a cook!), Jacob's "Fantômas" gives the reader the impression that "the everyday world is *truqué*, loaded in favor of the Emperor of Crime."[47] In other words, in the hallucinated world of Jacob's prose poems, Breton's notion of "objective chance is not only possible, it is inevitable."[48] The silver knocker of Jacob's "Fantômas" alludes to the process which animates ordinary things and turns them into lethal enemies that constantly thwart Juve's and Fandor's attempts to put an end to Fantômas' rule of terror. Among these uncanny objects, doors, windows and walls figure prominently in Feuillade's films, as in *Fantômas contre Fantômas*, where a stream of blood suddenly gushes out of an apartment wall or in the traditional scene where Fantômas manages a narrow escape through a secret panel wall. Typically, Feuillade's sensational liminal imagery conveys a sense of terror which stems from the physical world's constant threat to rebel against human subjectivity.

In the light of this analysis, Jacob's "Fantômas" is clearly in line with the hypothesis posited at the beginning of this essay that modern poetry's aspirations to the condition of cinema is often motivated by an interest in pure movement and a commitment to what Stein saw as "freedom from reality bestowed by silence."[49] Once again, what surfaces in the radical rewritings of Feuillade is the suggestion that "cinematic" poetry can enact a crisis of individuality and characterization and express a gesturality unburdened by the constraints of dialogue. Jacob's commitment to pure rhythm is also reminiscent of the early years of cartoon animation, which also displayed a tendency to animate and/or anthropomorphize objects at the same time as they turn human beings into machines. From Esther Leslie's Benjaminian perspective, such a tendency is primarily a symptom of the power of commodity fetishism to "freeze humans in the icy air of reification"[50] and confer to ordinary things "a ghostly objectivity"[51] that allows them to lead their own life, a feature Benjamin himself sees as originating in Jean-Jacques Grandville's 19th century caricatures. Be that as it may, many modernists artists working in other media were attracted to cartoons because they "rebuff so ferociously painterly realism and filmic naturalism," are "are set inside a universe of transformation, overturning and provisionality,"[52] at least before this universe became increasingly normalized from the 1930s onwards:

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[44] Michel Leiris, *Mots sans mémoire* my translation (Paris : Gallimard, 1969) 97.

[45] (Dominique Païni; Fantômas DVD leaflet notes 10).

[46] Max Jacob, "Fantomas," trans Pat Nolan *Exquisite Corpse* www.corpse.org

[47] Robin Walz, "Serial Killings," 54.

[48] Robin Walz, "Serial Killings," 54.

[49] McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism*, 91. In Stein's writing, this hypostasis of movement and rhythm goes hand in hand with a rejection of the metaphorical and a "Cubist" interest in the literal shapes of things. Interestingly, Roman Jakobson associates Cubism and cinema in that Cubism, "where the object is transformed into a set of synechdoches", like film, is basically metonymic. Jakobson concludes, however, that some film-makers nevertheless make use of metaphoric techniques, such as Charlie Chaplin's "'lap dissolves,'" which he describes as "filmic similes" (Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987] 111).

> Modernist curiosity about animation combined with animadversion; that is to say modernist watched as an anarchic and utopian form exploded into the culture scene, its little strips bouleversing logic and order and propriety, only later to be betrayed by the most successful makers' insistence on developing a coy bourgeois "realism."[53]

The radical freedom of form and content which characterized the early days of silent film—and which cartoons share to a large extent with Feuillade's proto-surrealist aesthetics—proved fascinating to poets and urged them to emulate the seemingly infinite fluidity and flexibility of the moving picture. By contrast, with the transition to the talkies, the plasticity of the celluloid image ceased to fascinate most modernist poets who, like Stein, felt that the silent film offered "an escape from actuality."[54] Arguably, the black and white medium also played an important part in emphasizing the autonomous quality of the motion picture, and the advent of color contributed to a lessening of the semi-abstract, quality of film and drew the medium even further towards realistic modes of narration and representation. A quick comparison between Walt Disney's early *Silly Symphonies* to his later, increasingly "cosy" and family-oriented fairy tales rewritings would reveal a gradual move towards an assimilation of film culture into illusionistic paradigms. Whereas one the effects of early cartoons was to "mock photographable reality,"[55] post-silent developments shifted the medium towards traditional modes of narration which undermined and marginalized any attempt to hypostasize the expressive complexities of sheer rhythm. Disney's "Steamboat Willie" and "Skeleton Dance" (1929) are two examples of animated films which seek to capture the synthesis of music and movement and capitalize on the disjunctions of montage in a way which is unfettered by the constraints of the physical or rational world. As Leslie suggests, what is at stake here is the difference between an attack on reality which is made possible by the medium itself and the plasticity of its means of production (a skeleton using a ribcage as a xylophone) and one which is legitimated by a narrative device (the use of a magic feather to convince Dumbo that he can fly).

Before this paradigm shift of the film industry happened, while poets became inspired by the unprecedented stylistic force and the sense of formal freedom afforded by film, filmmakers began to liken their art to a kind of visual equivalent of poetic language. For Sergei Eisenstein, the "poetry" that emerges from film results from the "concept of intervals" afforded by montage techniques so that the plot became "no more than a device."[56] More generally, "as the silent film cried out for sound," to quote Eisenstein, the only alternative left to poets was to create powerful images that are liable to rival the iconic power of the visual arts (e.g., Pound's "imagism" or concrete poetry) and, with the invention of cinema, the dynamics of the moving image (e.g., Stein or Marinetti's cinematic prose).[57] But the emphasis on *phanopoeia* (described in Ezra Pound's *How to Read* as the projection of images upon the visual imagination) in modern poetry must not overshadow the crucial role played by contemporary poets (and prose poets) in redefining the traditional functions of narrative. As Jan Baetens reminds us, the essential difference between the "industrial novelization" and the "literary adaptation" is that the former does not seek to compete with the image but, rather, "concentrates on the story, whereas the latter foregrounds . . . what film can only render with some difficulty: the omnipresence of a narrative voice."[58] In the case of Jacob's poetic adaptations, however, the conventional, linear plot of the popular novel gives way to a narrative of undecidability which often seems to tell a story for its own sake (or for the sake of indulging in the most unlikely meanders of the poet's oneiric imagination), a story which empties in a seemingly endless series of alterations, contradictions and metamorphoses. Jacob's prose poems thus do not so much endeavor to revise the traditional conventions of the lyric mode as to subvert the conventions of popular narrative from within: the creation of suspense (which largely depends on the spectator's identification with a hero or villain), for example, a trademark of the crime novel, is constantly undermined by the associational and absurdist logic of Jacob's prose.

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[50] Esther Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant-Garde* (London:Verso, 2004) 6.

[51] Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, 7.

[52] Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, vi.

[53] Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, vi.

[54] McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism*, 91.

[55] Leslie, *Hollywood Flatlands*, 202.

[56] McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism*, 58.

Jacob's prose poems are of course symptomatic of the modernist obsession with simultaneism, dislocation and juxtaposition. Like Apollinaire and his Cubist mentors, Jacob opted for an aesthetics of disjunction which undermined the seamless, linear "naturalness" of the flow of prose. By limiting and complicating the narrative progression of the story, *The Dice Cup* does not just merely transpose the concerns of post-impressionist painting (a space art) onto a literary medium (a time art). They also keep the reader's attention at the level of the individual sentences which become so many semi-autonomous units that undermine any attempt at a totalizing reading of the story. In this respect, Jacob's disjointed narratives (whether they were intended as a tribute to Allain and Souvestre's novels or to Feuillade's adaptations or both[59]) would seem to confirm Susan Stewart's suggestion that "the printed text is cinematic before the invention of cinema."[60] Not only does "the adjustable speed of narration" and "the manipulatability of the visual" turn the reader into "a spectator enveloped by, yet clearly separated from, the time and space of the text"[61] but "the absent location of origin and authority in the novel might be compared to other postliterate modes of aesthetic production:"[62]

> Just as the reader impossibly aspires to take the position of the narrator, standing above and outside the narrative, so Benjamin explains, does the audience take the position of the camera in watching a film.[63]

Whatever one thinks of Stewart's interpretation of the printed page as proto-cinematic, Benjamin's suggestion that the audience identifies with the camera, rather than with the actor, helps to account for the impersonal and atemporal quality of Jacob's exploded narratives. Contrary to the traditional third person narrator, who "works to disguise the temporality of his or her own voice,"[64] Jacob's "Fantômas" shifts from the past to the present tense as if to emulate the dialectics of presence and absence, emergence and disappearance, that characterizes the *Fantômas* stories. Benjamin's comparison between filmic and literary narration and his suggestion that narrative stability depends on an absent authorial presence are all the more interesting in the context of the history of silent film, at a time when narrative continuity was often achieved with the help of title cards and inter-titles. One of the effects of the use of text in between images was to create disjunction within linearity. Inter-titles also draw attention to the material conditions of film production—or, to use a more fashionable word, the "artifice" of the moving image—rather than contribute to the illusion of reality and "transparent immediacy" which has since then characterized the film industry.[65] Whereas cinema's main concern is to link one image to the next while concealing the mechanical (or electronic) apparatus that creates the illusion of movement, Jacob's "cinematic" poetry can only hope to create the illusion of movement by transferring these concerns onto the two-dimensional space of the page, remunerating the distance that separates the reader from the time and space of the text.

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[57] By contrast, Eliot's *Prufrock* considers the film medium as symptomatic of the failure of speech as a tool for self-expression: "It is impossible to say just what I mean! / But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in / patterns on a screen " (T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* [London: Faber, 1963] 16-17).

[58] Jan Baetens, "La novellisation, un genre impossible?," *Recherches en communication,* 17 (2002): 219.

[59] Even though Jacob himself specifies that the war poems of *The Dice Cup* were composed as early as 1909, the dates of composition of the other poems contained in the collection are uncertain.

[60] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) 9.

[61] Stewart, *On Longing,* 9.

[62] Stewart, *On Longing*, 10.

[63] Stewart, *On Longing*,10-11.

Blaise Cendrars's "Fantômas" poem (1914) begins with the recognition that "le simultanéisme est passéiste."[66] Should this statement be understood as the lament of a writer who has realized that modern poetry's aspirations to movement and simultaneism have been irremediably surpassed by the new medium of cinema? The answer to this question matters less than the suggestion that Jacob's "cinematic style," unlike that of many of his contemporaries, was not based on radical formal experiments (one thinks, for example, of Stein's "serial prose" or the kineticism of Marinetti's unpunctuated *parole in libertà*) but, rather, on a self-conscious subversion of traditional narrative conventions from within. Jacob's "poetic novelizations" in *The Dice Cup* do not only enact the tension between different media. By encouraging us to identify with the camera rather than the subject(s) of the poem and redefining the ambitions and constitutive tensions of modernism along the lines of dislocation and farce (two notions quite distinct from the oft-mentioned concepts of "fragmentation" and "irony"), they also emerge as an important, if underestimated, interface between low and high modernist art forms, one which affirms the necessity of repositioning poetry in the larger context of an age of technological innovation.

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[64] Stewart, *On Longing*, 10.

[65] Such effects of transparent immediacy are of course never possible in literature since the reader's physical engagement with the book, the concrete tangibility of the printed word and the necessary unfolding of the pages never reduce narrative movement to a merely visual phenomenon.

[66] Blaise Cendrars, *Du Monde entier: poésies complètes 1912-1924* (Paris : Gallimard, 1967) 99.

2 To Be Sung

The Ideology of Melody

Melody is in many ways the parent pauvre of modern musicology. As Gino Stefani has remarked, “music schools have courses and examinations in harmony, counterpoint, musical forms, etc., but not in melody.”[1] While there is no dearth of twentieth century studies dealing with harmony and (more recently) rhythm, the bibliography for “melody” in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* lists no more than four books entirely devoted to the subject from 1900 to 1965; by contrast, the “harmony” section contains 35 entries. The following definitions give the flavour of some of the issues which make musical melody a complex and elusive matter:

(1) a series of “notes of different pitch arranged as to constitute a unit”[2]: this minimalist definition merely distinguishes the horizontal nature of melody from the “vertical” relationships established by harmony, on the one hand, and the durational complexities of rhythm and time-intervals, on the other.

(2) “a line of successive sounds disposed in highness and duration and intelligible as a whole”[3] to the listener: by introducing duration, this description incorporates rhythm in the texture of melody. It also insists on the necessity to perceive the melody as a segment which exists in (semi-)isolation from the whole.

(3) “a very general notion that covers all the possible relationships in the order of succession … implicating all aspects of musical relationships … to the exclusion of effective simultaneous relationships.” This third definition, which is offered by Belgian Surrealist musician and poet André Souris, excludes melodic polyphony in considering melody as “synonymous of any *solo* music”[4] and thus appears at once too broad and too restrictive to account for the complexities of modern and contemporary melodic models.

An earlier definition, provided by Oscar Bie in the July 1916 issue of *The Musical Quarterly*, insists on the physical “palpability” of melody which he describes as “the clearest and most tangible recollection of music which we possess, and the form in which we assimilate it.”[5] Melody, for Bie, is primarily an affective and expressive category. Rooted in the body and the awakening of the senses, it is radically opposed to the newly-born modernist ethos, which is “unable to admit even the semblance of melody, but so clever and conscientiously as to immolate this melody in favour of the loftier, chilly, rationalistic wisdom.”[6] Writing in 1916 Bie associates modernism’s rejection of melody with what he sees as the excessive, near-pathological impact of self-conscious intellectualization on the compositional process. Like Richard Strauss, many of Bie’s contemporaries indeed seem “assailed by the Mind” that dismisses melody as sentimentality (or entertainment and/or commodification, to adopt a more Adornoite perspective) and increasingly “commandeers her for an accompanying music, for satire and farce, for the sake of style and color, down to the *Rosenkavalier* waltzes.”[7] What Bie could not have anticipated is that melody, along with modernist music’s abandonment and/or deconstruction of fixed forms and structures, was also to become a politically-charged category liable to be assimilated to the culture of order and control of totalitarian regimes and their attempts to celebrate the emotional power of music and combat the atonal and fragmented aesthetics of *entartete Kunst* and other forms of artistic expression that resist what Adorno once called "commanded collectivization."[8]

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[1] Gino Stefani, “Melody: A Popular Perspective,” *Popular Music*. 6.1 (1987): 21.

[2] Stefani, “Melody,” 32.

[3] Stefani, “Melody,” 32.

[4] Stefani, “Melody,” 33.

[5] Oscar Bie, “Melody.” *The Musical Quarterly*. 2.3, (1916): 402.

[6] Bie, “Melody,” 417.

[7] Bie, “Melody,” 417.

Modernism's aversion to the familiar and the affective is perhaps best summarized by Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, a novel which attempts to theorize the development of modernist art in the context of the history of the Third Reich. Mann offers an apt perspective on the notoriously unmelodious developments in orchestral music in the first half of the twentieth century. In the novel narrator Serenus Zeitblom, an old-fashioned humanist academic, desperately seeks to come to terms with the new music and musical theories of the novel's protagonist. Leverkühn, whose ideas are based on the work of Arnold Schönberg, and the birth of serial, twelve-tone music accounts for his rejection of harmony in favor of polyphony in the following terms:

> I find that in a chordal combination of notes one should never see anything but the result of the movement of voices and do honor to the part as implied in the single chord-note—but not honor the chord as such, rather despise it as subjective and arbitrary, so long as it cannot prove itself to be the result of part-writing [part-writing = refers to the art of the counterpoint: the combination of independent melodies which is here understood as merging into a single harmonic texture while retaining their linear, independent character]. The chord is no harmonic narcotic but polyphony in itself, and the notes that form it are parts.[9]

Leverkühn's refusal to honor the "chord as such," his substitution of polyphony *as* dissonance for the narcotic effects of tonality and his contempt for "subjective" appropriations of music point to modernism's ambivalent relationship with the emotional power of music. Leverkühn elaborates: "The more discordant a chord is, the more notes it contains contrasting and conflicting with each other, the more polyphonic it is, and the more markedly every single note bears the stamp of the part already in the simultaneous sound-combination."[10] When Leverkühn prefers the part (the isolated note) over the wholeness of the chord, he argues for an understanding of music as an affectless field of expression in which there is little room for a notion such as melody which, traditionally, connotes tunefulness and plenitude. Indeed, the exchange of affect and expression for a "chilly, rationalistic wisdom" is exactly what Oscar Bie—unaware of the ideological connotations twentieth-century history would bestow on melody—in the July 1916 issue of *The Musical Quarterly* deplores about modernist music which he finds himself "unable to admit even the semblance of melody."[11]

Melody vs. Literary Modernism

Literary modernism, with its attempts to emulate visual and musical models, has tended to privilege the "vertical" relationships afforded by counterpoint and/or (dis-)harmony, placing the emphasis on simultaneity rather than linearity, which includes the "horizontal" development of melody. From Mallarmé's *Coup de Dés* to Marinetti's *parole in libertà* and on to further developments in concrete and sound poetry, such an aesthetics results in a wide range of (verbi-voco-visual) experiments with counterpoint, stream-of-consciousness, "simultaneous" interior monologues, as well as other, lesser-known inventions such as Amy Lowell's "polyphonic" or "contrapuntal" prose patterns, which first appeared in the volume

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[8] Theodor Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music* (London: Sheed & Ward 1994) 197.

[9] Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. Helen Tracy Lowe-Porter (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948) 74.

[10] Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 74.

[11] Bie, "Melody," 402.

Can Grande's Castle in 1918 and was originally inspired by Paul Fort's experiments with "rhythmic prose". Lowell's circular, contrapuntal patterns were largely based on "the long, flowing cadence of oratorical prose."[12] Their "musical" and poetic quality relied on "the recurrence of a dominant *thought or image,* coming in irregularly and in varying words, but still giving the spherical effect . . . imperative in all poetry."[13]

If modernism is defined by its aversion to linearity, unicity, identity and closure and its fascination with the antipodal categories of disjunction, fragmentation, alienation and process, then melody belongs to the former series. Melody develops in time and necessarily involves repetition and/or variation as well as changing patterns of duration that undergo various structural and textural changes. In order to qualify as a melody a musical segment must be perceived as a single entity by the listener because (and despite the fact that) it is repeated throughout the piece in identical or slightly different forms. In other words, the effects of the melody must be cumulative and detectable in a way that allows the listener to memorize it and appropriate it in a durable way. The main criteria required for such an appropriation of a melodic segment would thus seem to be (1) its (relative) simplicity and continuity *within* the segment/unit or, in the case of so-called 'complex' melodies, its capacity to "detach" itself from other more narrative, impressionistic or abstract parts; (2) its repetition throughout the piece, which guarantees its "memorability" and ensures a perceptual response to a certain degree of regularity, familiarity, stability and continuity : it is necessary to repeat the melodic segment at least once to be able to isolate it from the rest of the piece, as such it comes close to the function of the leitmotiv or "refrain" (> Old French "refraindre," "to repeat"). These features are basically what distinguishes, say, Deep Purple's clear-cut theme in "Smoke on the Water" from the more disjunctive tactics of Boulez's *Marteau sans maître* in which the complex lacings and transitions between the musical lines defeat the listener's attempts to isolate them and figure out where they begin and where they end. In the case of the Deep Purple classic, the "Smoke on the Water" passage is the "clou-motive […] around which the rest of the melody is diluted, as if resting and waiting for the return of the motive."[14] Melody, in other words, marks the affective (at least from the perspective of the average listener's perspective, who wants "more of that," who longs for the riff to return) rather than the analytical memory.

Because it has tended to be associated with the expression of a single voice (unencumbered by harmony and polyphony), a "melodic vocal minimum," a "spoken melody" which keeps "the sound on the same pitch for a syllable or more,"[15] the study of melody seems particularly relevant to a formal analysis of literary artefacts insofar as it epitomizes the nightmare from which modern literature has desperately tried to awaken: the difficulty for the two-dimensional page to truly aspire to the condition of music, a nightmare which reaches a climax in countless modernist works that seek to emulate the harmonic, polyphonic and contrapuntal strategies of music by opting for an aesthetics of disjunction and simultaneity. While it is true that the listener must experience a sense of closure to perceive melody, the potential for segmentation and memorization I described earlier increases with our capacity to recognize the melodic segment and "return" to it in a way which relates to a multiplicity of aesthetic and non-aesthetic factors such as the recognizability of a melodic line within a given cultural or generic framework, the sheer complexity and length of the melodic segments or the temporal distance that separates them within the piece, all of which play an important part in augmenting or diminishing our potential for identification and appropriation.

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[12] Amy Lowell, *Can Grande's Castle* (New York: Macmillan, 1918) 12.

[13] Lowell, *Can Grande's Castle,* 15. My emphasis.

[14] Stefani, "Melody," 26.

[15] Stefani, "Melody," 23-24.

Unsurprisingly, the definitions we have considered so far situate contemporary melody on the side of popular culture and/or the arrière-garde. Melody thus appears as the "familiar, the friendly face of music," "*a relatively autonomous* part of a musical piece" which listeners identify as being "the same melody in different arrangements and contexts"[16] and for which they develop a particular fondness. It stands out as the dimension of music which everyone can hum, sing, or dance to. Just like a Boulez or Schönberg piece does not make you pick up your dancing shoes, modernist literature itself hardly lodges itself readily in your mind.

It appears that what survives of melody in both modernist music and writing comes in shreds. As Christopher Butler has noted, the patches of expressive melody modernist experimental music retains "seem to lack conventional relationships to one another"[17] due to the absence of identifiable tonal reference points (in Schönberg) or to rhythmic disjunctions which seem "detached from melodic reasoning."[18] Modernist writing, in its attempts to emulate musical models, has tended to privilege the "vertical" relationships afforded by harmony (or disharmony/dissonance, for that matter), placing the emphasis on simultaneity rather than linearity, which includes the "horizontal" development of melody. It is not that melody disappears from experimental modernist poetry or fiction but the very concept of the interior monologue, for instance, largely echoes Leverkühn's praise of polyphony, and his conception of the chord as a contrapuntal space where "the movement of voices" resist integration into the harmonic texture of the piece and retain, to some extent, their independent character.

Stein's Sonatinas: From Melody to Melodicity

One way of exploring the relationships between literary modernism and "popular" melody would be to focus on the historical avant-garde's assimilation, transformations and disfigurations of melodic material, with examples drawn from, say, Dada's experimental Cabaret and Italian Futurist music-hall or from the countless citational and allusive uses of popular songs in other, less performance-oriented modernist works. Literary modernism's take on melody is of course as varied as there are modernist writers: when James Joyce cites and alludes to ballads and music hall songs in *Ulysses* these turn into fleeting and isolated points of anchorage in strange surroundings. As we will see, when Gertrude Stein takes on board melody she makes us revisit the musical fragmentation championed by Leverkühn in a rather different way, one which suggests that the persistence and transformations of "melodicity"—by which I stress the functioning of melody as opposed to its commoditized end result—and of the concurrent notion of "memorability," can be detected in the very texture of some of the most radical experiments of the modernist literary avant-garde.

Gertrude Stein's musical illiteracy did not stop her from composing what she called "sonatinas." Since she never wrote them down, we know very little about these peculiar piano pieces except that they were improvised on the white keys of the piano only and that they somehow inspired a section from from *Bee Time Vine and Other Pieces (1913-1927)* entitled "A Sonatina Followed by Another" (1921)—in the opening paragraph of the section Stein expresses her love for and gratitude to Alice Toklas and urges her to sing songs and surrender to the more liberal manners of "the South," where the power of "song" is equated with the freedom to (presumably) abandon the "games" and "repetitions" which gives a euphemistic expression to their relationship and allows them to fully surrender to the life of the senses out in the open:[19]

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[16] Stefani, "Melody," 21.

[17] Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 48.

[18] Butler, *Early Modernism*, 48.

[19] The piece is probably a reference to their summer trips to Italy, Spain and the South of France. As for the affectionate reference to the "little Jew", it darkly prefigures their situation in Nazi-occupied France, more specifically in the small village

> Thank you very much, how often I have thanked you, how often I have cause to thank you. How often I do thank you.
> Thank you very much.
> And what would you have me do.
> I would have you sing songs to your little Jew.
> Not in the form of games not in the way of repetitions. Repetitions are in your first manner and now we are in the South and the South is not in the North. In the North we resist even when we are kissed and in the South we are kissed on the mouth. No sonatina can make me frown.[20]

Stein's friend the composer Virgil Thomson claimed that "Satie's piano music and Stein's *Tender Buttons* had changed his life" and would seem to refer to Stein's musical "compositions" in his "Piano Sonata No. 3, on white keys for Gertrude Stein." Thomson's dedication may also be a reference to Stein's fondness for Erik Satie. Upon hearing *Socrate* performed for her by Thomson, Stein labelled herself "a Satie enthusiast."[21] The sheer melodic and rhythmic simplicity of *Socrate*, reflecting the composer's desire to make the piece sound "white and pure like antiquity"[22] (allegedly, to achieve this "whiteness," Satie claimed that he had resolved to eat only white foods while composing the piece) may have inspired some of Stein's own compositional constraints.

John Herbert Gill offers another, more dubious explanation for Stein's decision to "limit her range" as a writer of "sonatinas:"

> It may have had something to do with her lifelong preoccupation with the number five. Her father's insistence on having exactly five children had meant that two of the original Stein children had died in order that Gertrude and her brother Leo could be born. It would be consistent with her superstitious fear of that number that she would choose to leave those five black keys alone.[23]

There is, of course, another, more obvious explanation: Stein, who could not read, write or play music did what most beginners do when they sit in front of a piano and are seized by an urge to fiddle with the instrument. If you randomly play the white notes you will inevitably end up improvising something on various diatonic scales without being exposed to the risks and delights of dissonance and disharmony**.** Stein's use of the term "sonatina" (literally "a small sonata": an ill-defined genre which generally capitalizes on brevity, lightness and technical simplicity) indicates that she considered these attempts (which she always performed in private) as a minor exercise in amateurish improvisation. Stein herself, in sketching her piano playing in *Everybody's Autobiography*, likens the black keys to chords and harmony ("black keys are too harmonious and you never want to do a chord."[24] Although this explanation does not appear to make much sense, there is, perhaps a Steinian logic to it: the combination of white and black keys - as opposed to the white keys with which you can improvise and infinite number of melodies based, say, on the sole C Major scale—suggest more complex and sophisticated forms of chordal and harmonic simultaneities. Furthermore, Stein, as Bryony Randall recently noted, did not share the typical modernist valorisation of

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of Bilignin where they began to spend part of the year from the 1920s onwards, a place where they managed to escape deportation in Nazi-occupied France thanks to the retrospectively embarrassing protection of Vichy collaborator Bernard Faÿ.

[20] Gertrude Stein, *Bee Time Vine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) 31.

[21] Peter Dickinson, "Stein Satie Cummings Thomson Berners Cage: Towards a Context for the Music of Virgil Thomson," *The Musical Quarterly*, 77.3 (1986): 399.

[22] *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Satie, Erik": www.oxfordmusiconline.com. Satie's *Menus Propos Enfantins* (1913) also makes a systematic use of the white notes.

[23] John Herbert Gill, "The Music of Gertrude Stein": www.gertrude-stein.com

[24] Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1993) 236.

simultaneity over succession.[25] The white keys, one can think along with Stein, stretch out on an uninterrupted horizontal plane and appear to invite improvisation in the continuous present—the time dimension Stein wanted her writing to express.[26] What the white keys stand for, then, is an ever-developing melody which knows neither beginning not end.

Going by these "white key" sonatinas, it would seem Stein's writing encourages actual melody-making. Virgil Thomson took on this challenge by setting a couple of Stein pieces to music. Even a quick look at the score of Thomson's 1929 score for Stein's "Portrait of F.B," however, reveals that Thomson's take on melody differs from Stein's.[27] Thomson's neoclassicism (not to speak of his fondness for popular songs and hymns) confers to Stein's words the *memorable* "melodicity" they arguably lack on the page. The appeal of melody, for Stein, lay not in the notion's connotations like tunefulness or regular repetition, although like her modernist peers she too sprinkled her work with shreds of popular songs and Mother Goose fragments, but in its going on—the white keys stretching out. The capacity for Stein's work to be memorized and "appropriated" by readers, not surprisingly, is often defeated not just by its unorthodox use of syntax and semantic obscurity but also by the sheer length of her texts. As Peter Dickinson puts it, "because of the length of her writings, Stein herself is only memorable in patches: "Pigeons in the grass, alas" or "[Rose is a] Rose is a Rose is a Rose."[28]

Likewise, Modernist experimental music, whether of the Schönbergian or Stravinskian type—pace Adorno—can still retain individual patches of expressive melodicity but these—to quote from Christopher Butler's *Early Modernism*—"seem to lack conventional relationships to one another" due to the absence of identifiable tonal reference points (Schönberg) or to rhythmic disjunctions which seem "detached from melodic reasoning."[29] Thomson's adaptations, by contrast, Dickinson writes:

> refer[] to the past, the hymns and popular songs of his Missouri childhood combined with Classical music. This range of reference, a type of neo-classicism, is far broader than Stein's, who said she wanted to "recreate the word," and who, according to Riding and Graves, sterilized words of their history. Thomson's strength is that he does not do this. It is impossible: a triad is a triad is a triad.[30]

"Four Saints in Three Acts," Stein's first major collaboration with Thomson (1927-28), was first performed in 1934, at a time when she was actively engaging with the expressive musicality of words *as* sounds while simultaneously growing more and more distrustful of her own fascination with "the beauty of sounds" and singing.[31] In "Portraits and Repetitions," she opposes the "strict discipline" which characterized the *Tender Buttons* and "early Spanish and Geography and Plays period" to the more "musical" texts that followed (she mentions "Susie Asado" and "Preciosilla" which had produced "an extraordinary melody of words and a melody of excitement"). Stein's fear of becoming "drunk with the melody of words" led to the composition of a libretto which first created some embarrassment for Thomson. Thomson's ambivalent attitude to Stein's "Four Saints in Three Acts," which he first received in June 1927, best summarizes his approach to the musicality and "melodicity" of Stein's texts. While remaining faithful to his motto that "anything can be set to music," Thomson expressed his reservations about the fact that Stein had not assigned parts to individual singers and that the text thus looked like “one compact mass of words”[32] to him, a response which reflected his incapacity to relate her words to specific meanings or emotions and inevitably urged him to investigate and develop the sonic and rhythmic potentialities of the piece.

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[25] Bryony Randall, *Modernism, Daily Time and Everyday Life* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007) 104.

[26] For a contextualized account of Stein's notion of the "continuous present" see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press 2003) 85-86.

[27] Dickinson, "Stein Satie Cummings Thomson Berners Cage," 402.

[28] Dickinson, "Stein Satie Cummings Thomson Berners Cage," 403.

[29] Butler, *Early Modernism*, 48.

[30] Dickinson, "Stein Satie Cummings Thomson Berners Cage," 403.

[31] Ulla Dydo, *A Stein Reader* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1993) 178.

In a rare instance where she commented upon the meanings of the libretto, Stein, zooming in on the opera’s most famous passage, “Pigeons on the grass alas …,” indirectly accounts for the difficulties readers like Thomson experience in emotionally or indeed “melodically” appropriating the “mass of words” that made up her text:

> That is simple I was walking in the gardens of the Luxembourg in Paris it was the end of summer the grass was yellow I was sorry that it was the end of summer and I saw the big fat pigeons in the yellow grass and I said to myself, pigeons on the yellow grass, alas, and I kept on writing pigeons on the grass, alas, short longer grass short longer longer shorter yellow grass pigeons on the grass pigeons large pigeons on the shorter longer yellow grass, alas pigeons on the grass, and I kept on writing until I had emptied myself of the emotion. If a mother is full of her emotion toward a child in the bath the mother will talk and talk and talk until the emotion is over and that’s the way a writer is about an emotion.[33]

Stein’s cathartic use of repetition can be considered in the light of Adorno’s famous opposition between Stravinsky’s “regressive” use of rhythm and the uncommodifiable syntax of Schoenberg’s music. Adorno compares the song of the Sirens to Stravinsky’s power to “attract all those who wish to rid themselves of their ego,”[34] dancing their subjectivity away and giving up on all hopes of resistance to commodification. Seen from Adorno’s rather Manichean perspective, it would be tempting to consider Stein—whose work had long been likened to serialism and proto-minimalism—as the epitome of a site of resistance to the process of self-annihilation allegedly enacted by Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*. (Stein’s celebrated use of repetition-with-variation is based on the use of a limited number of simple linguistic units and therefore invites a comparison with musical composition and, in particular, serialism and its later minimalist developments.) Only a reductive vision of Stein’s œuvre, however, would surrender such conclusions as it would have to ignore her interest in incorporating diverse elements of popular culture ranging from cookbooks, primers, detective stories and slapstick comedy.

More fundamentally, the peculiar cathartic function of Stein’s repetition-with-variation would thus seem to lead to a gradual move towards a kind of writing whose “abstract” character—far from being a mere attempt to emulate the strategies of pictorial Cubism as is so often argued—enacts the potential of repetition to gradually “purge” words of their denotative and connotative meanings. Thomson’s attempts to “mainstreamize” and affectively re-activate the “impressive obscurity” of Stein’s libretto (and re-establish a linear continuity which is missing in her writing) are in tune with his conscious decision to write an opera that would exchange the demands of modernist classical music for the cadences of the American language. The composer felt at the time that “modernist music—saturated with dissonance, descended from the pre-World War I triumvirate of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Debussy—had arrived at its end point.” In Thomson’s words:

> I had a moment of truth if you wish in which I said, “This is old-fashioned and there is very little profit to be derived in trying to continue it beyond the recent masters.” What I had better do is to write as things come into my head rather than with a preoccupation of making it stylish

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[32] Watson, *Prepare for Saints*, 47.

[33] Cited in Watson, *Prepare for Saints*, 48.

[34] Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, 197.

> and up to date, and it was by the discipline of spontaneity, which I had come into contact through reading Gertrude Stein, that made my music simple.[35]

What remains scattered throughout the writing, and therefore difficult to appropriate affectively or physically, is foregrounded in Thomson's adaptation of Stein's texts. Thomson drew on vast repertoires of popular traditions ranging from marches, Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, American hymns and children's songs—and the crowds loved him for it. After attending the premiere of the opera Carl Van Vechten wrote Stein that he had not "seen a crowd more excited since *Sacre du Printemps*" and even Wallace Stevens, who was very skeptical at first, was carried away by the show and declared that "the opera immediately becomes a delicate and joyous work all around."[36] Thomson's "disciplined spontaneity," which he claims to have learnt from Stein, was thus complemented and strengthened by an apparent simplicity which was "arrived at through the most elaborate means."[37] Another famous member of the audience, the art historian Alfred Barr is reported to have been so amazed by the performance that he looked up and exclaimed to the people around him "Well, I'm not drunk,"[38] unwittingly confirming Stein's worst fears about the intoxicating power of language *as* sound/music which she expressed above in her discussion of the genesis of her libretto.

Yet Thomson's "simple" music leaves little room for the purging/cathartic spiral that is Stein's text. Where Thomson celebrates the baroque gamut of things coming into his head, Stein scrutinizes her spontaneous input via relentless, repetitive "talk and talk and talk." Whatever we may think of Thomson's "transformation," "democratization" or, "mainstreamizing" of Stein's text, the least one can say is that it neutralizes, to some extent, Stein's proto-Cagean, pre-Warholian, you-name-it, aesthetics of boredom, a category which Fredric Jameson, writing about Raymond Roussel and video art, considers as an essential part of cultural production and reception.[39] For Jameson boredom "can always be used productively as a precious symptom of our own existential, ideological, and cultural limits, an index of what has to be refused in the way of other people's cultural practices and their threat to our own rationalizations about the nature and value of art."[40] By converting Stein's libretto into a saleable commodity, a successful Broadway show, Thomson deprives it of one of its most subversive qualities, namely that of eliciting "boredom and panic" on the part of the reader, two responses which are, in Jameson's words, "appropriate reactions and a recognition of the meaning of that particular aesthetic act" of "outright aggressivity."[41]

In Anticipation of the Loop: Textual Melody

If not exactly through Thomson's music, which turns Stein's text into a merry myriad of American melodies, then, how can we understand Stein's investing in melody? When Stein engages with melody as such—as in the following excerpt from *Mrs Reynolds*—it is often in the form of poems inspired by the tender-cruel cadences of children's songs and nursery rhymes:

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[35] Cited in Watson, *Prepare for Saints*, 49-50.

[36] Carl Van Vechten to Gertrude Stein, Hartford, 8 February 1934, cited in Donald Gallup, ed., *The Flowers of Friendship: Letters Written to Gertrude Stein* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953) 275; Wallace Stevens to Harriet Monroe, February 12, 1934, cited in Watson, *Prepare for Saints*, 279.

[37] Watson, *Prepare for Saints*, 50.

[38] Watson, *Prepare for Saints*, 279.

[39] The extent to and conditions in which Stein's text was "mainstreamized" by Thomson is of course subject to discussion. I am grateful to Sarah Posman for her astute comments on an earlier version of this essay. As she rightly points out, via Daniel Albright's analysis of "Four Saints in Three Acts," a number of aspects of Stein's "radical experiment" were in tune with Thomson's adaptation. See Sarah Posman, "Response to Michel Delville," *New Conceptions of Literary Dynamics,* eds. Jan Baetens, Dirk de Geest and Jürgen Pieters (Brussels: VWK, 2008) 93-94.

[40] Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991) 72.

[41] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible,* 73.

> Angel Harper was forty-six
> Exactly forty-six.
> Really when Angel Harper was forty-six he was in a fix.
> And so was anyone. And every one. Believe it or not it is true and
> it made every one pretty blue.

"Red Roses," another much earlier example taken from *Tender Buttons*, also possesses a similar highly-alliterated singsong quality, and which is also reminiscent of a nursery rhyme or, for that matter, of the "childish chatter" of Satie's white-note *Enfantines*:

> A cool red rose and a pink cut pink, a collapse and a sold hole, a little less hot.

I would like to end this chapter by suggesting that the melodicity of Stein's writings is also inextricably linked with her use of the loop, a technique I have analyzed and theorized elsewhere and whose extra-literary avatars will be examined further in Chapter 9. As Livio Belloï and myself have argued in our readings of her "portraits" of Picasso and Nadelman, Stein's experiments with the loop must be distinguished from more orthodox forms of repetition:[42]

> What is at stake in Stein's loops is more than just the reduction of language and the subject to a moment of repetition. Stein's looping prose is perhaps best understood in the light of Deleuze's understanding of variation as a feature which is "not added to repetition in order to hide it, but is rather its condition or constitutive element, the interiority of repetition *par excellence*. Such is indeed the effect of the loop which necessarily returns us to a previous segment to which it retrospectively confers the quality of being "repetitive" by virtue of its difference from pervious and later segments … another notable consequence of the literary loop is that the segment to which the reader "returns" can no longer be read as a primary text—it can only be *reread* in the light of further developments it undergoes in the subsequent paragraphs of the piece.

Stein's use of the loop as a constraint which is both procedure and process—a device which "returns upon itself" and thereby undermines traditional expectations regarding narrative, descriptive and syllogistic progression and closure—consolidates her position both as an odd fish in literary modernist waters (unlike her most of her contemporaries Stein does not consider repetition as an expression of the alienating repetitiveness of modern life), an emulator of cinematic techniques (an aspect of her work examined in the previous chapter of this book) and a precursor of developments in minimalist music.[43] As the "Pigeons on the grass alas" passage of "Four Saints in Three Acts" shows, one of the most striking features of Stein's work is her decision to incorporate and *complicate* repetition[44] as a key structural feature of her prose. This method would seem to confirm Jameson's thesis that one way of neutralizing the deadening effects of repetition is to incorporate it into the very texture of the writing:[45]

> Pigeons on the grass alas.

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[42] Livio Belloï and Michel Delville, "Understanding the Loop: Gertrude Stein and Martin Arnold," ed. Louis Armand, *Hidden Agendas: Unreported Poetics* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2010) 198-209.

[43] See Belloï and Delville, "Understanding the Loop," 206-7.

[44] The first paragraphs of the excerpt, which are sung by Saint Ignatius, have a tentative, stuttering quality which climaxes in a final section (beginning with "Let Lucy Lily …") which is sung by a chorus of female saints and seems to emulate the trilling cadences of the songs of the white birds attached to the players' wrists at the February 6, 1934 premiere of the opera.

[45] Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible,* 18-19.

> Pigeons on the grass alas.
> Short longer grass short longer longer shorter yellow grass. Pigeons large pigeons on the shorter longer yellow grass alas pigeons on the grass.
> If they were not pigeons what were they.
> If they were not pigeons on the grass alas what were they. He had heard of a third and he asked about it it was a magpie in the sky. If a magpie in the sky on the sky can not cry if the pigeon on the grass alas can alas and to pass the pigeon on the grass alas and the magpie in the sky on the sky and to try and to try alas on the grass alas the pigeon on the grass the pigeon on the grass and alas. They might be very well they might be very well very well they might be.
> Let Lucy Lily Lily Lucy Lucy let Lucy Lucy Lily Lily Lily Lily Lily let Lily Lucy Lucy let Lily. Let Lucy Lily.[46]

As Kenneth Rexroth has written, "Gertrude Stein showed, among other things, that if you focus your attention on 'please pass the butter,' and put it through enough permutations and combinations, it begins to take on a kind of glow, the splendor of what is called 'an aesthetic object.'"[47] As Stein herself confesses, detailing her portraitist ambitions to fathom a person, she was "enormously interested in hearing how everybody said the same thing over and over again with infinite variations but over and over again until finally if you listened with great intensity you could hear it rise and fall and tell all that there was inside them."[48]

A book-length study of Stein's loops would have to include other examples which show affinities with other, more specific forms of generic repetition. Stein's explicit engagement with patriarchal culture in "Patriarchal Poetry," for example, contains the following litany-like list of culinary precepts:

> Patriarchal poetry and not meat on Monday patriarchal poetry and meat on Tuesday. Patriarchal poetry and venison on Wednesday Patriarchal poetry and fish on Friday Patriarchal poetry and birds on Sunday Patriarchal poetry and chickens on Tuesday patriarchal poetry and beef on Thursday. Patriarchal poetry and ham on Monday patriarchal poetry and pork on Thursday patriarchal poetry and beef on Tuesday patriarchal poetry and fish on Wednesday Patriarchal poetry and eggs on Thursday patriarchal poetry and carrots on Friday patriarchal poetry and extras on Saturday patriarchal poetry and venison on Sunday Patriarchal poetry and lamb on Tuesday patriarchal poetry and jellies on Friday patriarchal poetry and turkeys on Tuesday.[49]

The litany itself is of course a dominant mode in post WWII minimalist music, from John Cage's *Litany for the Whale* (which calls upon the traditional invocations-and-answers structure of Christian liturgy) to Steve Reich's psalmodic *Tehilim* (1981; the title comes from the Hebrew word for "psalm"). Poised between (religious/spiritual) petition and repetition, however, the musicality of Stein's poem is inextricably linked with the poem's political agenda which distinguishes her from her minimalist epigones in that, as Krzysztof Ziarek has suggested, "the repetitiveness of grammar, its insistence on following rules," may reflect for Stein "the cultural order which links stability with the figure of the father and with patriarchal power—the order of sameness, repetition, and predictability that erases difference."[50] For Ziarek, this would seem to indicate that one of Stein's concerns is to combat the "phallocratic complicity of traditional grammar with the grammar of culture,"[51] using the list as a means both to expose the arbitrary nature of hierarchical rules of representations and undermine it from within. "The end result," Peter Quartermain concludes in his own exegesis of the poem is that "the hierarchies are ironed out, and we read the language paratactically, nonpatriarchally."[52]

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[46] Gertrude Stein, "Four Saints in Three Acts," *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein,* ed. Carl van Vechten (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 604-5.
[47] Richard Kostelanetz, "Introduction" to *The Yale Gertrude Stein (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 15.
[48] Gertrude Stein, *Writings, 1932-1946,* eds. Catharine Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America, 1998) 272.
[49] Stein, *Writings, 1932-1946,* 572.
[50] Krzysztof Ziarek, *The Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde and the Event* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001) 166.
[51] Ziarek, *The Historicity of Experience,* 166.

Before we move further into an analysis of the technological, narratological and cultural specificities of the loop—to which the penultimate chapter of this study is devoted—I conclude, then, on the note that Stein's literary, "pre-technological" use of the loop paves the way for some of the most important attempts to integrate the lessons of serialism and post-tonal music into popular culture. The influence of Stein on post-WWII composers and its role in facilitating the establishment of new relationships between experimental and popular art is well-attested from Thomson to Cage (who composed a set of three songs to texts by Stein as early as 1933 and confessed that he "could only listen to music by Satie and Thomson"[53]); to computer-processed sound poetry (Charles Amirkhanian, Larry Wendt); to Soft Machinist Hugh Hopper's *1984* (1972); to Tony Bianco's "Freebeat" experiments; to Robert Wilson's 1996 multimedia stage adaptation of "Four Saints in Three Acts" (20 years after his collaboration with Philip Glass, another musician influenced by Stein, on *Einstein on the Beach*); and on to the recent looping complexities of electronic music with bands such as Autechre and drum'n'bass mavericks such as Thomas Jenkinson aka Squarepusher. By reversing the logic of temporal understanding and consumption of the artwork the loop reactivates the space where complex or elusive melodicity might have gone unnoticed. With each splicing of the textual tape, it is the ghost of melody which returns with a vengeance, allowing a new stylistic economy to delineate itself, building a narrative of tidal, post-serial and post-metrical complexities and perplexities.

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[52] Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe*.(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 36.

[53] Dickinson, "Stein Satie Cummings Thomson Berners Cage," 399.