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Scaffolding Repetition: Gertrude Stein, Language Writing, Electronic Dance Music

Abstract: This essay takes up the critique of repetition in Gertrude Stein, her claim to have written a “continuous present” that “begins again and again” and “includes everything” versus her later qualification that repetition is always shifting in terms of “insistence” and “emphasis”. Even so, Stein focuses on the unfolding of the verbal material primarily in a linear fashion, though resonances and overtones abound. In Electronic Dance Music, from Detroit to Berlin techno, one finds more vertical layerings and “scaffolding”—a term taken from Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky—as a way of building up sonic elements in pleasurable and meaning-bearing ways. Using these two contrasting models of repetition, I read three language-centered poets—Ron Silliman, Leslie Scalapino, and Marjorie Welish—in terms of their complex forms of temporality in poetic form, seen in terms of Stein’s often repeated framework of “beginnings, middles, and ends”. I conclude with a discussion of “vital movement” in the upbeat, real-time electronic dance music of Berlin DJ Ellen Allien.

Keywords: Modernism, avant-garde, repetition, language writing, poetry, electronic music, American, Berlin

Resumo: Este ensaio aborda a crítica da repetição em Gertrude Stein, nomeadamente a sua pretensão de ter escrito um “presente contínuo” que “começa de novo e de novo” e “inclui tudo” versus o seu posicionamento posterior de que a repetição está sempre a mudar em termos de “insistência” e “ênfase”. Não obstante isto, Stein centra-se no desenrolar da matéria verbal principalmente de uma forma linear, ainda que as ressonâncias e as sobreposições sejam abundantes. Na música de dança eletrónica, de Detroit ao techno de Berlim, encontramos mais camadas verticais e “scaffolding” – um termo tomado de empréstimo do psicólogo soviético Lev Vygotsky – como forma de construir elementos sonoros de forma agradável e portadora de significado. Usando estes dois modelos contrastantes de repetição, leio três poetas *language* – Ron Silliman, Leslie Scalapino e Marjorie Welish – em termos das suas formas complexas de temporalidade na forma poética, lidas de acordo com a estrutura frequentemente repetida de Stein de “inícios, meios e fins”. Concluo com uma discussão sobre o “movimento vital” na música de dança eletrónica animada e em tempo real da DJ berlinense Ellen Allien.

Palavras-chave: Modernismo, vanguarda, repetição, escrita language, poesia, música eletrónica, americano, Berlim

Can
The design
Of the fugue Detroit techno
Be transferred
To poetry Language writing?
 —remixing Louis Zukofsky, “A”-6¹

In this essay, I frame two well-known practices of repetition in experimental writing, Gertrude Stein and Language writing, in relation to techniques of sampling, looping, sequencing, and “scaffolding” in Electronic Dance Music (both Detroit and Berlin techno) and visual media production. Of these several distinct modes of repetition, the best known, of course, is Stein for her signature style of “beginning again and again” and “repeating being” from *The Making of Americans*. To begin with, there exists a naïve view that Stein’s use of repetition is simply the repeating of lexical items, from word to phrase to sentence: “a rose is a rose is a rose.” Steinian repetition, however, is not just linguistic but determines how she represents temporality in a new and modern way, as with her notion of the “continuous present”, and the ways in which she interprets the past in her later work, for example *Wars I Have Seen*, by mediating it through repetitive forms.² Regardless of her late-career hedging on “repetition” *per se*, as we will see, Stein’s signature style and simplified diction as distinguishing features of the continuous present were taken up by many postwar American experimental writers, including John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, John Giorno, Hannah Wiener, Clark Coolidge, Ted Berrigan, Ted Greenwald, and Kathy Acker. A kind of “period style” of Stein’s influence emerged through the 1960s and 70s, perhaps most visible in Bernadette Mayer and Vito Acconci’s definitive journal *0–9* (2006), along with the widespread republication of her experimental works in non-mainstream presses such as Something Else Press and Black Sparrow Press.³ Such a period style extends from the simple reiteration of lexical units, from word to phrase to sentence, in Coolidge and Mac Low, to the use of repeating phrases as a device in Ted Berrigan and Kathy Acker in complex poetic or prose forms such as Berrigan’s *The Sonnets* (1964) or Acker’s “I Dreamed I Was a Nymphomaniac (Imagining)” (1974).” This complex relation of repetition to form continues with Language writing, which breaks from Steinian repetition in its time-based, experiential, and even ontological sense of “beginning again and again” and “repeating being”, while being deeply informed by it, rejoining her work in a poetics that is as much historicist as presentist.⁴ To show how, I take up the use of sampling, looping, and sequencing in Detroit techno, an experimental electronic music developed primarily by African American DJs in Detroit from the 1980s that has resulted in a discography of hundreds of titles that are continuously resampled in the present.⁵ I will bring this notion of layered scaffolding as repetition to show how

Language writing mixes temporal overlays and strategies of erasure or subtraction to achieve its *discontinuous* present in three poets: Ron Silliman, Leslie Scalapino, and Marjorie Welish. I close by sampling an online track and YouTube mix video by Berlin DJ Ellen Allien as a composition of “lively movement” in the present.⁶

Repeating Stein

The time of the composition is the time of the composition. It has been at times a present thing it has been at times a past thing it has been at times a future thing it has been at times an endeavor at parts or all of these things. In my beginning it was a continuous present a beginning again and again and again and again, it was a series it was a list it was a similarity and everything different it was a distribution and an equilibrium. That is all of the time some of the time of the composition.

—Gertrude Stein, “Composition as Explanation” (1926; emphasis added)⁷

In a move to revise the general understanding of her work as making “a continuous present” using the device of “repeating being”, Gertrude Stein renounced repetition in *The Making of Americans* (1926) from the historical retrospection of *Lectures in America* (1935), writing: “I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition. And really how can there be” (*idem*: 166). If there is no such thing as repetition, there remain “insistence” and “emphasis” in ever shifting horizons, as she goes on to explain: “Expressing anything there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis” (*idem*: 167). In her 1926 essay, however, it is easy to see how the naïve view took hold: Stein equates the time of composition, the continuous present in the work, with the time in which the work was written, an equivalence that also takes place with the breakthrough moment of her development. A critical reading of the above, however, might begin with the pronoun shifter “it”, which could stand for both “time(s) of composition” as past, present, future, or an “endeavor at parts”, i.e., a sample. Note as well that the pronoun “it” is repeated nine times in the paragraph; “it” as an anaphoric shifter initiates a loop that generates new time frames that add up to the “continuous present” as it unfolds. The continuous present is thus a mix of times, both within and as writing. If the naïve form of “again and again and again and again”, an adverb for repetition repeated four times, could in fact be any of these times, what makes “composition” be what it is follows: “it was series it was a list it was a similarity and everything different.” An ordered row, a simple list, founded in similarity, could equally entail “everything different”; a negative that, after Michel Foucault’s “regularity in dispersion” that founds discourse, binds them together.⁸ What results is “it was a distribution and an equilibrium”, a steady state (a present?) in which all times are articulated. The insistence and emphasis of “again and again” is the

site of continual process of decision, but one that organizes heterogeneous materials and discontinuous times, not a monolithic present. Such a joining together of temporalities connects the earlier horizon of a “continuous present” with the “historical present” of her later work, even as the centrality of “being” persists.

Such a continuous process of decision making alters the nature and uses of repetition, employing all four of our models of reading (close, distance, surface, and sampled) we find everywhere in Stein’s *oeuvre*.⁹ In unpacking the underpinnings of Steinian repetition, I will begin by reading closely, following two critical accounts of Stein and intellectual history by Claudia Franken (*Gertrude Stein: Writer and Thinker*, 2000) and Sarah Posman (*Vital Stein: Gertrude Stein and Modern Life*, 2022). I am equally intrigued by Holly Melgard’s distancing “deformance” of *The Making of Americans*, where she makes a sampled work composed of only the first instance of any given word in Stein’s 925-pp. masterpiece, thus canceling out its repetition.¹⁰ Turning to an “immanent” (but also contextual) reading of Steinian repetition, Franken begins by seeing her embrace of a variable “emphasis” as motivated against modernity’s “steady pounding of repeating”—a pounding that could be put to use in Detroit techno—as a “mechanical repetitiousness which could inhibit cognitive processes”, as any Ford assembly line worker would know. Bracketing the noise of modernity, Stein’s internalized “insistence” has a psychological function of mediating primary and secondary memory, where “periodical returns to original points of attention with a symbolical function could create, like single images of a movie, an ‘echoic storage’” (Franken 2000: 119). Such focus words in Stein’s text might be “father”, “Hersland”, “living”, “being”, “importance”, or “dead”, which with variations of insistence could develop associations going forward that also, importantly, would erase them; the shifter “it” tracked above shows this effect. The new meaning created is both present and differential, a site of continuous decision. In a psychoanalytic reading, this negative element could be the site of “remembering, repeating, and working through” after Freud’s 1914 essay “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through,” where the troubling issues of family life, sexual singularity, and Stein’s brother could be distributed and equilibrated.¹¹ Freud’s later account of repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), as an endless and automatic loop that ultimately aims at the homeostasis and dissolution of the organism, is also available.¹² Both Freudian accounts of repetition, I note, work with Stein and Detroit techno, which build up pleasurable sensations while risking sameness or homeostasis.

As Malgorzata Myk (2022) notes, however, there are many other positive gains possible in psychological accounts of repetition: developing identity through mirroring or similarity; distributing relationality to others; a childlike obsession with recognition; or elevation of infantile desires to representability. For William James, multiple psychological factors may be assembled into a positivity through a kind of internalized compilation performed through what Stein would come to see as “repeating being”: “*Resemblance among the parts of a continuum of feelings* (especially bodily feelings)

experienced along with things widely different in all other regards, *thus constitutes the real and verifiable 'personal identity' which we feel*. There is no other identity than this in the 'stream' of subjective consciousness" (James 1983 quoted in Franken 2000: 127). For Franken, the crucial point is that Stein's variable "insistence" refuses a foundational positivity of "likeness" or resemblance and thus dissociates as much as binds together the stream of consciousness. Stein "did not state a sameness of appearance and art, but deleted the *mimetic* or the representation of 'likeness'" (2000: 124), suspending James's crucial mediating function of "resemblance" between aspects of feelings. Such a release from likeness permitted Stein to exploit the difference between "echoic" overtones of repeated elements varying by insistence, leading to a word-to-word decision procedure: "Modified repetitions tend to establish categorial differences between repeated patterns of words and phrases. Stein's descriptions of a structure of appearance are constantly modified by 'letting it be **not** what it is like'" (idem: 125). The *not* of repetition is as important as the positive element of likeness, a "difference in a likeness" that turns into a metaphor for *poiesis* itself—in turn making its continuous process of decision in the present into a difference engine: "all birds look as if they looked" (*ibidem*). The crucial turn from Jamesian positivism to Steinian repetition places Stein firmly in the camp of "constructed" identity, a "regularity in dispersion" after Foucault.

In *Vital Stein*, Sarah Posman goes a step further in historicizing Stein's psychological debt to James, in a reading of her work against the nineteenth-century tradition of vitalism as it encountered twentieth-century modernity. "Composition as Explanation", written to explain Stein's literary innovations after the rupture of World War I, frames Stein's development of her abstract style as a problem of "generation"—combining aesthetic innovation and lived experience after the catastrophe. The abstract temporality Stein constructs, thus, is her generation's response to the destruction of war. While Stein is often read in purely present-tense terms, particularly in her middle period, her later statement "I had always wanted to be historical" is equally true of her defense of "repeating being" in the 1926 lecture. In a twist, it is war itself that makes recognizable the "contemporary composition" of modernist art (like Stein's and Picasso's): "And so there was the natural phenomenon that was war, which had been, before war came, several generations behind the contemporary composition, because it became war and so completely needed to be contemporary became completely contemporary and so created the completed recognition of the contemporary composition" (1946: 461). Such overlay of generation and composition risks being misread as a de-periodizing move that insists on her experiments as "compositions" in and of a continuous present.¹³ Posman contrasts this presentism to Stein's historicist shift in her 1934 lecture "Portraits and Repetition" (1935/1985), where, following her earlier discussion, "It is true that generations are not of necessity existing that is to say if the actual movement within a thing is alive enough. A motor goes inside of an automobile and the car goes" (*idem*: 166). This "movement lively enough to be a thing in itself moving" becomes Stein's goal of

composition, its formal entelechy, to make a portraiture lively: “Then we have insistence insistence that in its emphasis can never be repeating, because insistence is always alive and if it is alive it is never saying anything in the same way” (*idem*: 171). Where insistence is differential, and introduces a continuous scene of decision in writing for Franken, Posman sees insistence as a late form of vitalism, articulated both against and within the temporal forms of modernity. Difference, it turns out, is another form of insistence, which we can see in Stein’s shifts of emphasis and techno’s repeating loops.

Posman goes on to show how Stein’s account of “lively movement” as composition (spanning historical periods) substitutes for her earlier framework of “generation”, aligning with modernity itself as a period style: the cinema, the assembly line, newspapers, crime fiction, and automobiles.¹⁴ Explaining the making of *The Making of Americans*, Stein writes: “I was doing what the cinema was doing, I was making a *continuous succession of the statement* of what that person was [...]”, following this with: “I cannot repeat this too often any one is of one’s period and this our period was undoubtedly the period of the cinema and series production” (1935/1985: 177). Ford and Fordism make not only the car but the world in which cars are driven; the cinema likewise is a form of “series production” not only in its diegesis but in the studio system and the construction of mass audiences; and “war” certainly has to do with both. What if we stop right here and, for the concept “serial production”, substitute Fordism or Detroit, and for *cinema* substitute *techno*? The rationalized world of mere repetition then becomes a basis for lively movement through appropriated technology. We may follow this in Posman’s argument, which triangulates Stein and cinema with the Benjaminian notion of a “series of shocks and collisions” in modernity: “What links the *cinema techno* to the ~~conveyor belt~~ *Fordism* is not shock per se but ongoing movement. And she can be seen to distinguish between two types of ongoing movement: one made up of deadening repetition and one of lively differentiation” (2022: 102; my additions). What remains to be shown is how the differentiating structures of Detroit techno are anticipated by Stein’s “movement lively enough to be a thing in itself moving”—where Stein as author, listening and talking and writing at the same time, is the original DJ. And it is the serial form of ~~cinema~~ *Detroit techno* that accomplishes this: “It was like a ~~cinema picture~~ *DJ mix* made up of succession and each moment having its own difference and so there was the moving and the existence of each moment as it was in me” (Stein 1935/1985: 198; my additions). What needs to be further accounted for is the way Stein’s vitalism, her “lively movement”, and the differentiating structures of “insistence” and “emphasis” are perceptible in both.

Stein Techno

There are some when they are being living and when they are beginning being living are ones completely being living and are ones completely being living to themselves then and to mostly every one and are ones being completely being living doing many things and doing them, most

*of them, very often. There certainly are some being living who are ones certainly being ones completely being living and are such ones and any one can be completely certain of this thing being one knowing such a one, being one knowing any one knowing such a one. Certainly there are very many being completely living in being living and are such to any one and are ones doing some thing and another and another thing and doing one again and again and again and doing the other thing again and again and doing the other thing again and again and again. Certainly there are some being ones completely being living in being living and doing something and doing it again and again and doing another thing of the same kind of thing and doing it again and being one being completely living in being one being living. Certainly some are ones completely being living in being living and are such ones to any one, to every one and certainly there are ones being living **not** being ones completely living that is **not** to some knowing them knowing of them and some of such of them are ones certainly doing something and certainly doing another thing of the same kind and another one of the same kind and doing each one of them very much and very often and again and again and again and again. Certainly some are ones being ones completely being living to themselves in being living and some knowing them are certain that this is **not** being in them in some of such of them that they are ones being completely living in being living. There certainly are ones who are ones **not** being completely living in being living to themselves then and some are certainly certain that some of such of them are ones being completely being living in being living and some are certainly certain that some of such of them are **not** ones being completely living in being living. Certainly each one being living is beginning being living and some are then knowing this thing and some are **not** then knowing this thing, those being in being beginning being living. Some who are beginning being living are then knowing that thing. Some who are beginning being living are then **not** knowing that thing. Some beginning being living are almost then knowing that thing. Certainly some beginning being living are quite certainly **not** knowing anything at all of any such thing being in being living. Certainly there are many ways of being ones being completely living in being living, being ones **not** completely living in being living. There are certainly many ways of being ones completely being living in being young ones, there are certainly many ways of being ones **not** completely being living in being young ones.*

(Stein 1925/1966: 805-806; emphasis added)

This complete paragraph from *The Making of Americans*, to begin with, is a sample of the work as a whole that telegraphs its larger purposes—not only to be a history of “a family’s progress” but to extend that history to “every one who ever was or is or will be living”, an impossible but productive task. Repetition is the motor of being that drives this project from the level of “family history” on to that of “every one”, as Stein makes explicit in a paragraph:

Slowly every one in continuous repeating, to their minutest variation, comes to be clearer to some one. Every one who ever was or is or will be living sometimes will be clearly realised

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

As Stein later wrote, commenting on the rhythm of her dog Basket while drinking water, “paragraphs are emotional and sentences are not” (“Plays”, in 1935/1985: 93). In both these samples, paragraphs are equally cognitive and developmental, in addition to providing a bounded space filled with repetition and variation, insistence and emphasis, that serves as a “fractal” of the whole. In describing Stein’s two paragraphs in this way as bounded zone, I am inspired by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s concept of the “zone of proximal development” in child learning (1978: 84-91).¹⁵ Vygotsky formulated this “zone” as an area between processed comprehension or skill development and that which has not been fully achieved but is possible with the guidance of the teacher. Education should thus proceed in an awareness of a “stepwise construction” toward such a goal, using a term from Viktor Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* that suggests the concept of “scaffolding” in pedagogy and narrative construction coincides in Vygotsky’s “zone” (2021). Imagine, then, that Stein’s stepwise paragraphs are pedagogical, giving instructions on how one may understand the “history” of her family’s progress as having elements in common with “every one’s” development. Important as well is that her paragraphs are not only scenes of instruction but spaces of play, forms of reality testing that privilege variation and spontaneity, not just order. This relation between play and development is crucial for her entire *oeuvre*.

Repetition as “repeating being” is learned by virtue of its “subtle generalizations” until a form of “ordered recognition” results, which for Stein takes place in the “zone” of language. The longer, later paragraph then shows the result of this learning and development, in making a meaningful pattern of “insistence” and “emphasis” that is common to living in general. The movement of the passage—as a sample or fractal of the whole—is built up on the generative power of insistence and emphasis rather than mere repetition, as it varies key terms such as *beginning*, *being*, *living*, *certainly* through shifts of grammatical position and emphasis. The slight variations in grammatical position and semantic inflection of each term then becomes the means by which nuance and context are being summoned and “ordered”, made comprehensible, as an on-going process. The relation to embodied states, as well as preconscious associations, creates a form of “inner speech” that is at the same built out of “outer” being and activity, a world full of “ones completely being living to themselves then and to mostly every one and are ones being completely being living doing many things” (*supra*).¹⁶ But at the same time, note the emergence of the negative term *not* about halfway through, a movement of

differentiation and finally nonbeing that will qualify the lively movement of this passage with its opposite, a summoning of nonexistence that sets up the death of David Hersland over the 100 pages to come. Lively movement, thus, has a negative aspect even through “insistence” as a space being cleared for its opposite, homeostasis. What saves Stein from the repetitiveness of positive claims about representing “every one who was or is or will be living” is the undercutting of its imitative basis, keeping open a space of play in its developing horizon.

• **Theorem/THX, *Experiments in Synchronicity*, cut 6, “Unherluferlick”¹⁷**

Stein’s notion of “composition” as historical in “Composition as Explanation” applies perfectly to genres of Electronic Dance Music, including Detroit techno, that capture period intensities of the 1980s and 90s and developed new musical genres. I want to compare the two paragraphs from Stein, as themselves samples of “composition”, with a sample from the large discography of Detroit techno, which is itself built upon sampled material—either electronically produced or lifted and adapted from hand-made passages of vinyl recordings. In Detroit techno, and Electronic Dance Music and Hip Hop more generally, sampled materials are multi-sourced and layered, building rhythmic structures with the addition of new materials that continuously reinterpret prior sampling and sequencing. Following Vygotsky’s educational psychology, we may find a “zone of proximate development” in techno in its stepwise sequencing as a form of instruction, to arrive at the later concept of “scaffolding”, used both in pedagogy and media production. Vygotsky’s “zone” here could be, on the one hand, the individual “track” mixed in the auteur DJ’s studio where sampled sounds are sequenced, modified, and looped, or the space of the “mix” performed by a live DJ in front of a large audience, ecstatically responding to every built-up repetition and transition with bodily movements and vocal responses. Common to both the experimental track and the mass-mediated mix is the stepwise introduction and layering of one sample on top of another, along with the canceling or fading of samples as the rhythmic intensity and affective charge transition from moment to moment. I also connect this musical process of “scaffolding”, the serial introduction of multiple layers of new material (verbal, musical, educational, or mediated), to the generation of layered narratives in serial media production, as for example *The Wire* or *The Bridge*, deriving as well from Vygotsky’s pedagogy.¹⁸ In media scaffolding, the layering of narrative elements creates conditions of constraint as much as combinatorial possibilities, recalling the ways in which pedagogy cannot merely be built on sequential imitation but must create overarching interpretations that “order” the meanings that are being sequenced, as in the Stein example. In the case of techno music as produced, multiple rhythmic, melodic, and even verbal samples with perceptibly different sources and interpretive possibilities are “scaffolded” to build up to an engulfing whole, if not holistic, totality that is at once affectively intense and danceable. The result of “scaffolding” in Detroit techno is an architectonic, polyrhythmic, semantically complex

patterning that builds expectation and desire, culminating in intense pleasurable affects, a “generational” form of movement totality lived in the present.

My example from Theorem/THX’s 2002 minimalist, collaborative CD *Experiments in Synchronicity* is from midway in its history, with the increasing aesthetic and technical sophistication of recorded electronics in the 1990s/2000s (while techno began as an auteur style of DJ mixing in the early 1980s, using the Roland 303 sequencer, personal computers to layer and sequence samples became available in the early 1990s).¹⁹ I see this track as almost pedagogical, a lesson in techno construction, with quite different aims than of a real-time mix with live DJ—hence my use of “scaffolding” after Vygotsky. The cut demonstrates how the contrastive elements of vinyl samples, synthesizer effects, digital sequencing, distortion, consonance and dissonance, pitch or noise, mechanical repetition or mutating fades, blurs, and distortion all contribute to their mutual motivation—achieving a “distribution and equivalence” as an all-over effect. This all-over effect succeeds not only by adding new elements but by canceling or subtracting them; the space of intensity that results is also one of negativity, clearing a space for movement. The track enacts a scaffolded construction of digital space for sonic insistence that, despite the elision of vocal elements, starts to take on qualities of speaking, singing, clapping, call and response, and even argument between and among its elements, in a pleasurable sociality. In Steinian terms, an “ordered recognition” emerges from a space of play.

1. Minimal synth chord/maracas
2. Hi hat on the back beat
3. Baseline pulse/drum kick
4. Hand clapping
5. Synth chord/higher register
6. Sequencing distortion and bleed
7. Bass riff/progressing distortion
8. Synth organ with variable emphasis
9. Metallic synth with improvisation
10. Sequencing echoes and reverb
11. Horn backups with reverbs
12. Theme introduction: high pitched synth
13. Mimetic vocalization/call and response
14. Baritone sax progression repeats
15. Maximum intensity/reverbs increasing
16. Breakdown/subtraction to original chord (my notation)

It is possible that all the sampled elements in Theorem’s track are digital, derived from synthesizer sounds and then digitally manipulated and sequenced, or that “real

world” inputs, either recorded or on vinyl, are brought into the mix. As both Alexander Weheliye (2005) and, later, Hannes Liechti (2022) discuss, “pure” electronic sampling does not exist apart from cultural content; in Weheliye’s case, the “raced” affect that is a signature of Detroit techno and Chicago house, or for Liechti, sonic elements from the real-time world that enable a political critique in the music. For Detroit, for instance, industrial processes, car sounds, and traffic noise alternate with collective hand clapping and call-and-response elements that signify Black culture, as above. Each of the sonic elements in Theorem’s composition are meaning-bearing and contrastive; an overarching dialectic is produced that rises to the level of social comprehension, where all the parts of industrial society seen as itself a factory with just-in-time delivery produce life as we know it. The pleasurable expectation of the buildup of sonic intensity in Theorem’s track goes along with a dawning comprehension of how it all works, and how it can be produced even by an individual DJ in the space-time of the here and now. An opposite effect occurs, as well, with the devolution of the track—the unlinking and separation of elements down to a long fade, and finally a pulling of the plug (while readying the next cycle of production). The negative element, as with Stein’s “not”, is thus produced in a sequence of additive affects, finally to become felt as a plêasurable effect, especially in performance—where a signature move is to cut the intensity of sound, create a momentary blank, and return with ecstatic beats. At such moments the crowd goes wild, renewing the call to dance again.²⁰

Language Repetition

• Ron Silliman, from *Ketjak* (1978)

Revolving door.

Revolving door. A sequence of objects which to him appears to be a caravan of fellaheen, a circus, begins a slow migration to the right vanishing point on the horizon line.

Revolving door. Fountains of the financial district. Houseboats beached at the point of low tide, only to float again when the sunset is reflected in the water. A sequence of objects which to him appears to be a caravan of fellaheen, a circus, camels pulling wagons of bear cages, tamed ostriches in toy hats, begins a slow migration to the right vanishing point on the horizon line.

Revolving door. First flies of summer. Fountains of the financial district spout. She was a unit in a bum space, she was a damaged child. Dark brown houseboats beached at the point of low tide—men atop their cabin roofs, idle, play a Dobro, a jaw’s harp, a 12-string guitar—only to float again when the sunset is reflected in the water. I want the grey-blue grain of western summer. A cardboard box of wool sweaters on top of the bookcase to indicate Home. A sequence of objects, silhouettes, which to him appears to be a caravan of fellaheen, a circus, dromedaries pulling wagons bearing tiger cages, tamed ostriches in toy hats, begins a slow migration to the right vanishing point on the horizon line. (Silliman 1978: 3-4)

The central instance of repetition for American Language writing—different in form and content from more Steinian uses of repetition among writers in the 1960s—is Ron Silliman’s *Ketjak*. There were a number of competing influences that inspired Silliman’s turn to long-form repetition at the time: the minimalism of Steve Reich and Philip Glass; Balinese gamelan music; appropriations of gamelan by John Cage, Lou Harrison, and others; in addition to the Stein tradition, especially the work of Bernadette Mayer and Clark Coolidge. Silliman’s use of repetition, at the intersection of all these influences, was also culturally “marked” as hybrid, even as he made a distinct formal innovation that is now read as “language-centered.”²¹ Timothy Yu discusses the vestigial orientalism informing Silliman’s imitation of the Balinese *ketjak*, or “monkey dance”, which was later revealed to be not an original product of Balinese culture but a spectacle of shirtless natives put on for Western audiences in the 1930s.²² Silliman’s move to an “other” cultural referent, not a major thematic concern of the work, underscores that the writing of *Ketjak* is based, referentially, on the culture and everyday life of an avant-garde poet in San Francisco in the 1970s. Each linguistic element points outward toward a commonly understood referent, while turning “inward” to a metalinguistic level. So the first two units, “Revolving door” and “A sequence of objects [...]”, are both referential and synecdoches of the work to come—a paradigmatic use of what Silliman will theorize as the “New Sentence” (1987). Silliman’s formal innovation was to begin with a single “sample” in stanza 1; then add a second in stanza 2; and continue by doubling the number of samples in each succeeding block or paragraph, until the work reached the length of about 100 pages. As samples are repeated, they often add elements or change wording or inflection, paralleling Stein’s argument against repetition per se in their variable contexts or meanings. But rather than focusing solely on the syntagmatic unfolding of repeated or varied elements, Silliman’s form “stacks” them paradigmatically, such that their “meaning effects” build up to an open-ended process of meaning-making. The form of *Ketjak*, in other words, performs scaffolding in the Vygotskyian sense, a developmental work that trains the reader in the act of making meaning through the introduction of a sequence of meaning-bearing units or samples. The automatic repetition in minimalist techno meets the pedagogical goal of an inquiry into the relation of word to world, finally a learning device for determining what a “world” is. In the development of Language writing, repetition or quasi-repetitive devices such as the New Sentence are often used to build up larger forms, where an effect of “equivalence” of myriad parts reorganizes the Steinian play of “emphasis” and “insistence” as a discursive formation.²³

- **Leslie Scalapino, from “hoofer”, in *Way* (1988)**

the woman who’s not arrested—on
 the bus—from banging the seat—any
 change not occurring—and seen as irrelevant

in relation to her—and not just that—
in the world—

the woman—banging on
the seat as—not—in—a situation
manufacturing—continuing—the driver of
the bus—isn't able to do it that way
making the others get off

the flesh being
fragile—my falling down—on some stairs
to a sidewalk—again—from bad
heels of shoes—but this time more violently—than the
previous episode—in the soft flesh—of my back being
hurt

learning—it seems
silly—to accept the authority
—or want it—of some situation
of needed—and sought after
instruction—as destroying

not of the hurt—back—in my
falling—which had not been done
in that way—but
of fragile flesh—and not
in a situation of authority

when it is performance—not of
our culture—the flesh being fragile
—and not hurt—in the women being licked
between their legs—by the men, but who're
customers—or who're not that—but aren't
socially important—are ordinary
(Scalapino 1988: 137-138)²⁴

A strong connection between Leslie Scalapino's serial poem/cycle *way* and Steinian repetition is their mutual concern with, and suspension or canceling of, the conventional "beginning, middle, and end" of narrative. As Stein wrote, "I tried in *Making of Americans* to make any one one. How. / By having a beginning and middle and ending. / But is there

any such thing as a beginning. Be natural is there. / And a middle. / And an ending” (1973: 173-174). Stein’s magnum opus cancels the progressivism of family history in America with the steady state of “repeating being” in modernism, with no “end” in sight but its own variation of emphasis and intensity. Scalapino’s poetry reinterprets the steady state of the “middle” not by varying emphasis but by sampling and recontextualizing elements.²⁵ This “middle”, as well, may be seen as representing a midpoint in the development of Language writing in the 1980s, with its sense of a stable set of procedures adequate to a transitional period of neoliberal capitalism (contrasted with the inaugural gesture of Silliman’s *Ketjak*).²⁶ Scalapino’s samples thus range from the hypersubjective and erotic to the alienated and quotidian: in this passage a woman on a bus “who’s not arrested” but might be due to her lower-class or outcast status becomes a repeating motif that rhymes with “the women being licked / between their legs” in a Tenderloin strip club “by the men / who’re / customers” but are not “socially important.” As objective correlatives to internal psychic states of dispossession, these motifs contrast or rhyme with the poet’s “flesh being / fragile—my falling down—on some stairs” which then raises a question of “learning—it seems / silly—to accept the author / —or want it—of some situation”, namely of being injured. The serial form of the work plays with these repeated motifs of inside and outside, of middle-class witnessing and lower-class abjection, as a phenomenal testing of the limits of understanding experience. These limits of comprehension are both real-time and language-based (as with Silliman’s *New Sentence*), but they reverse the priority of world to word in focusing their interrogation on a gap or inadequacy of representation.²⁷ Thus, in the build-up of specific motifs (woman on bus, injury falling down, men licking women) a steady-state of dissociation is invoked—which may be psychological or religious in the tradition of Buddhism, an important influence for Scalapino. In a situation of being “in the middle” of social contradictions in the neoliberal 1980s, where public dispossession was experienced as a psychological reality even for those with middle-class lives, Scalapino’s text creates a space of meditation that subtracts reality from itself, invoking the inexpressible Real of Lacanian/Žižekian fantasy.²⁸ The analogy to Electronic Dance Music is the way in which the repetition of motifs creates an empty space of desire in their mutually canceling each other out and substituting for one another. This space of desire is the source of pleasurable effects that pushes the music forward and drives the audience wild. Scalapino’s hybrid writing mounts an anticipatory critique of this effect based in social reality.

• Marjorie Welish, from *Complex Sentence* (2021)

PROLEPSIS PHONEBOOK

In some world
the prologue has reprisal

most fully one, two, three nonpareil anticipation.
 And answering did I write that? Sparse then.
 Being ahistorical is a ways off
 replenished with each latency eternal
 statement we remember against which
 the next time will have come
 coming to term—renaming latency she always arrives
 minutes late meaning she herself
 is replenished nonpareil perennially
 unfazed out of phase in kind. Days
 later we remember that. She arrives, always late
 “always” said for emphasis or if for stamina needful
 sparsely. Sparse rather would be very small abundance
 page 66 excerpted from forever and a day.
 Being ahistorical myth is a way off
 replenished with each forever and is stamina.
 In some world one, two, three nonpareil
 agency and answering abundance.

One, two, three nonpareil.
 (2021: 47)

If there is a parallel between sampling in Electronic Dance Music and in Language writing, it may be the way the sample—as generated in a specific act of isolating a synthesizer effect or hand-selecting and digitizing a short passage from a vinyl recording (or sampling/imitating other kinds of sound such as machine noises or trucks backing up)—bears with itself, in its own quality of being sampled, its “date” as an inferred metadata.²⁹ Thus in Language writing in all three instances here, the linguistic fragment bears with it a time stamp of when and where it was sampled—even if the sample is entirely made up, as may occur in each author. The sample, when placed in the context of a temporal series, depends on its implied meta-data in order to make possible the sequence effects of the larger work. If Silliman and Scalapino’s contributions represent “beginnings” and “middles” of Language writing as a historical and literary phenomenon, Marjorie Welsh’s *A Complex Sentence* (2021) makes a determined effort to connect temporality in writing to an “end which is not one.”³⁰ In so doing, she deliberately foregrounds processes of sampling and repetition as textual dissociation and overwriting in an attempt to radicalize the present that comprehends an “end” and is not stuck in the romanticism of “beginnings” nor the “projective identification” of “middles.” Welsh’s determination to comprehend an “end which is not one” is thus a hermeneutics (or an attempt to interpretively verify) that both finalizes and undoes meaning as an endpoint.

Meaning in Welsh's work is thus precisely phenomenological, while the only ground of that inquiry is the making of the poem—often out of previously written or published texts but always reflecting on its own temporal fixity/indeterminacy as an “end.” This is a difficult act to follow, as has also been said of high intensity performance art—which may be a risk it takes. Many of the works *A Complex Sentence* are based on samples or extended quotes from classic modernists such as Pound or Williams, while many interrogate their own processes of writing as the textual original from which a sample may be made. What results is a “combined and uneven” effect of metatemporality, distributed across the work as creating a new affect. In “Prolepsis Phonebook”, the anticipation of what a given term or sample will mean (the “future anterior” effect of ideology critique or Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*, as “retrospective determination”) becomes its sense; in other words, anticipation and retrospection are latent in the term or sample, which becomes an index to its temporalization in sequence. With this metalevel of comprehension in mind, one can successfully process the sequence of terms that unfold in the poem as commenting on their own placement in a series of meaning making: “In some world / the prologue has reprisal / most fully one, two, three nonpareil anticipation. / And answering did I write that? Sparse then” (*supra*). At the end of time, the poem gauges the anticipation of earlier intentions as never identical to the effect of distance it has achieved: such is the literariness of the text that survives the author, a mainstay of modernist interpretation. Welsh, however, is not content with modernism as an interpretation “for all time”, as the world that produced it is itself temporal and unstable. The demand of the work, then, is to reprocess the beginning and middle of all romance and continuity as only comprehensible as an end “which is not one”: “Being ahistorical myth is a ways off / replenished with each forever and is stamina. / In some world one, two, three nonpareil / agency and answering abundance” (*supra*). Nothing less than an eschatology of hope at the crux of a date sampled in writing is the result.

Vital Movement

- Ellen Allien, “Gender Fluid”, from *Marble Bar (Detroit) Pandemia Relief*³¹
- Ellen Allien, *Boiler Room x Dommune x Technics: A Celebration of 50 Years of the SL-1200*³²

The transition from Gertrude Stein to Ellen Allien encompasses two world-making women innovators of “beginning again and again” and “repeating being.” For Stein's composition in *The Making of Americans*, the source of repeating being is “what comes out of them”, after her observations of character types in their temporalized verbal output, as much rhythm and tone as content and expression, under the influence of William James and Otto Weininger. Berlin DJ Ellen Allien similarly responds to the voice of the Other in the form of the sample, which she combines in tracks and mixes that interpret and generalize their alterities on the way to collective identification, “every one who was or is

or will be living” as a global media event. In bringing Stein into conversation with Allien, I rely on Franken’s account of Stein’s shifting dynamic of “emphasis” and “insistence”, and Posman’s of her “lively movement”, both clearly visible in the cultural forms and venues of Berlin techno, with Allien as its representative.³³ While Stein’s vitalism inherits her foregoing philosophical tradition, Allien’s has a specific reference to Berlin history in the reunification of Germany in 1989 and the immediate role techno music had in creating a “third space” where East and West could redefine each other. In interviews, Allien speaks of the moment of reunification as “the happiest moment of her life”, and recalls the early days of clubs like Tresor and UFO as continuing that moment.³⁴ Three decades into her career as a leading techno DJ, Allien has become identified with Berlin to the point of becoming a brand representing its upbeat, positive, “life-is-good” horizons (while keeping in the rear-view mirror its catastrophic pasts), where a cosmopolitan outlook mediates everyday life in a globe-spanning availability online, touring to clubs everywhere.³⁵ Allien’s aesthetics of social reparation and collective responsibility, as extending an historical “era of good feelings” into our conflicted future, is evident in many and continuing projects: her BPitch and UFO labels and “Vinylism” events, promoting lesser-known artists and supporting local venues; the “We Are Not Alone” series of parties held in Berlin in the 2010s, resulting in a 3-record vinyl compilation: “33 tracks from artists that embody the ethos of the brand; club music with a rugged aesthetic and an unapologetic dance floor focus” (*Ellen Allien/News*). During the COVID period, Allien took a proactive role in broadcasting her life-affirming aesthetics, in the absence of live-event spaces: “Unable to tour in 2020, she conceived the Balcony Streaming sessions, hosted from her home in Berlin. The livestreams allowed her to continue DJing and engaging with her fanbase, while also supporting music from a wide range of artists” (*idem*). In the same period, Allien engaged with the Detroit scene in two gestures of solidarity that recalled the importance of Detroit techno in the early history of Berlin, particularly the club Tresor (located in a former bunker on the death strip of the Berlin Wall, near the present Potsdamer Platz).³⁶ In May 2020, she livestreamed an aggressive, beat-heavy DJ set from an empty industrial space in Berlin, surrounded by graffiti and loudspeakers, as part of Detroit’s annual Movement festival, which could not take place in real time and space. In December 2020, she contributed to a fund-raising effort to benefit workers at Detroit’s Marble Bar, creating a track for online fund-raising. Her dialogic relationship with Detroit is important for the aesthetics of alterity in techno generally and Allien’s in particular, where vinyl archive and recorded tracks by a vast range of artists, located virtually anywhere on the globe, are accessed and remixed as an individual/collective practice. As Stein wrote, the goal of her “history of every one” was to make “every one one.”

I want to sample and remix two of Allien’s works from the period during and after the pandemic: the single track “Gender Fluid”, donated to the Marble Bar relief project; seen in relation to her globally streamed DJ mix under the aegis of the Boiler Room,

London; the Dommune livestream site, Tokyo; and Hard Wax Records, Berlin. “Gender Fluid” is a composed work, recalling the minimalism of Theorem, Richie Hawtin, Kenny Larkin, and other Detroit artists; like those more abstract works, it is a kind of *Lehrstück* or “learning piece” that educates in its “zone of proximate development”, importing Berlin’s affirmative politics into the space of Detroit. In a breakdown of tracks, we see some differences in scaffolding in this musical zone, when compared with the progressive sequence of Theorem’s *Unherluferlick*:

1. 1-1-1-1 hard beats x 4
2. 1-2-1-2 alternation of buzz pattern x 4
3. + clattering cymbals / repeat one cycle
4. + muted voices / – clattering cymbals
5. “life is good” synth theme / + clattering sticks
6. sharpen synth theme / + high hat
7. + sharpen synth theme / – hard beat / + midrange pattern
8. “Gender” “Fluid” alternating / – synth theme / + pattern
9. + hard beats / + pattern
10. + scratch/hybrid voicelike
11. + high hat / repeat cycles
12. + “Gender” “Fluid” alternating / + synth theme / – hard beats
13. + synth theme / + hard beats / + pattern extended for cycles
14. – synth theme / phase out hard beats and buzz pattern (my notation)

The track is built on the steady iteration of a basic 4/4 cycle, announced by the hard beats in the opening iteration. Everything that follows is binary—either an addition or subtraction of elements to build up a rhythmic/sonic platform for the binary gender opposition the track wants to dismantle: “gender” and “fluid”, sampled from differently modulated voice sources. Before the payoff interpretation, the track introduces a signature Ellen Allien anthem, a high register minimal phrase, almost singable, seeming to say “life is good” in futurist Berlin. The anthem recalls Allien’s utopian pop tracks in *Berlinette* (2003), featuring vocal samples like “The past is a lighttrain to unknown trashscapes.” Here “life is good” in Berlin and undoing gender binaries in Detroit combine in a binary, hard-beat synthesis—a space created by the track, opening to the hybrid space of the mix, where everyone can be who they want to be. The piece educates through scaffolding (or plateau-ing) in a space of play where elements are added and subtracted, creating pleasurable effects of Freudian *fort/da* while insisting on the hard beat under all. If we hear the hard beat as the “drive” itself, we have a perfect complement to Detroit techno’s aesthetic that adds a gender critique to its largely male order. Ellen Allien’s synthesis of Berlin and Detroit is politically canny, timely, generous, and danceable.

Allien’s 2022 globally streamed mix, from the nearly empty store space of Hard Wax

Records, is at once an extension of her Balcony Streaming project, an essay on the uses of the Technics turntable in sampling, and a linking of global online venues. While the form of the track “educates” in its combinatorial structuring, the livestream mix extends that logic in real time and space, adding the art of the DJ in pulling, modifying, sequencing, and subtracting samples from vinyl and electronics. The video set as well incorporates the direct response of at least one embodied dancer, a tank-topped male model with whom Allien at times dances and flirts. Allien’s fashion statement includes some flirting as well, as she gradually removes the bulky overcoat with logo she begins with (Berlin spaces can be cold) to reveal a leather dirndl over deep-plunging white blouse and tattoos, as the space heats up. The mix begins with a canonical beat/synth wash framework that adds sequential elements of percussion and melodic riffs. Vocal elements are then sampled, layered in longer units; long-wave synths alternate with disappearing voices and the beat continues; the audience dances as the effects are produced. With rapid hand movements between turntables and mixer, Allien cues up a pattern of alternating phrases (“I will do my best to offer you good objects; I will do my very best to help you”) and sound effects of looped cellphone beeps. In a sudden cut, a mid-range buzz pattern alternates with minimal percussion, then overlaid with sampled voice and synth wash. As the samples cycle through, Allien augments them with more intense dancing and hand gestures. A sample reminiscent of Steve Reich’s “Come Up to Show Dem” introduces some tension and more rapid movement, alternating with birdcall pitches and driven percussion elements. Suddenly a Middle Eastern voice, possibly a muezzin’s call at sunset, overlays a machine rhythm track; cultural meanings are being channeled as semiotics of cultural appropriation work to redefine each other: the Black sample clip, rapidly repeating, alternates with the birdcall and muezzin call. What keeps them together are both the pulse of the rhythmic platform and the kick of negativity in each transition. Allien has defined a minimal vocabulary of elements (suddenly foregrounding the birdcall, then the Black sample) that she can recombine in the space of play. A snippet of a synth/harpsichord arpeggio repeats with the muezzins calls, while a male overvoice intones, “You want to the know the last time I went apeshit crazy?” rapping on someone’s gangster life story: “some low-life type talking about next-stage this and next-stage that.” As she shuffles through her record bin, we wait for the next sample in anticipation: this too is performative. A male overvoice speaks of the dissolution of identity when looking in the mirror. “You know out of the mix there are only two speeds in life, fast and slow.” DJ and model are laughing with pleasure as the vocal sample intones dire consequences. We return to rhythmic/sonic overlays that signify “transition” into the next phase. Ellen still has her coat on but it is going to come off soon. Minimal beat pulse and high hat. More samples come up: the inside of a cuckoo clock and someone creeping in the night. The coat is off. We have arrived at a space, duration of about one hour, where all this occurs.³⁷

The attempt to parallel the development of the set with written description must inevitably fail, returning on the one hand to the logic of sample, which can never fully

account for the whole. (While it is said that there can only be one sample per vinyl recording, empirical data is needed to find out if this is true.) On the other hand, the logic of the mix constructs the duration of the set itself, the extension of all aspects of its technique and content to the lifeworld of its participants—here, the DJ and her representative dancer. Beyond musical analysis, or cultural appropriation, is a claim about everyday life as both durational and discontinuous, both fundamental dimensions of the DJ mix, drawn from the pedagogy of the track. In the short form of the track, the logic of construction leading to temporality is worked out in detail, recorded for use at any future time—this is like literature, and how we normally process it. In the long form of the mix, it is enacted in a “continuous present” that moves across discontinuity in being streamed globally, as the lifeworld literature comes to be. The continuous present is both the variation of emphasis and intensity, repeating being and beginning again and again, that makes any one one. It is a revealing and concealing of an element common to all, the basic rhythmic platform and bps number that connects technology to body. Vitalism is “lively movement”, mediated by the Other, educated in a space of play.

NOTES

* Barrett Watten is a poet and critic, editor and publisher, the author of *Frame (1971-1990)*, *Bad History*, *Progress/Under Erasure*, and forthcoming *Zone (1973-2021)*. His writings in poetics includes *Total Syntax (1984)*, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics (2003)*, and *Questions of Poetics: Language Writing and Consequences (2016)*. He continues to teach literature and cultural studies at Wayne State University in Detroit.

¹ Zukofsky (1978: 38). Zukofsky’s compliment to Celia Zukofsky’s arrangement of his work in “A”-24 (“the gift / she hears / the work / in its recurrence”; *idem*: 804) impressed West Coast Language writers who performed the work in 1978/79. The form of the fugue involves repeated motifs in a contrapuntal argument in which repetition becomes the basis for complex development. In transferring the form of the fugue to poetry, Zukofsky primarily had in mind the contrapuntal form of early movements such as “A”-8 (*idem*), which responded to Ezra Pound’s call for “poem including history” with a Marxist dialectics. Oppositely, in the period in which Language writing emerged, repetitive form in minimalists like Steve Reich and Philip Glass was influential, as was the mid-period writing of Gertrude Stein. Numerous passages in Armantrout *et alii*, *The Grand Piano (2006-2010)* recall the Zukofsky performances, which are evidenced in its form as well. On performing “A”-24, see Bondroit (2022).

- ² In this essay, I am building on my previous and recent work on Stein: “An Epic of Subjectivation” (1998); “Stein’s Ford”, in *Constructivist Moment* (2003: chap. 3); and, most recently, “Liberation and the Historical Present” (2022).
- ³ See the reprint edition of Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer, *0 to 9* (2006). Beginning in the 1960s, Something Else Press published a series of Stein’s language-centered writings, including *Geography and Plays* ([1922] 1968); *The Making of Americans* ([1925/26] 1966); *How to Write* ([1931] 1973); and *Matisse Picasso and Gertrude Stein* ([1933] 1972). Also important for Stein’s reception in the 1970s were three titles from Black Sparrow Press, ed. Robert Bartlett Haas: *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein* (1971); *Reflection on the Atomic Bomb* (1973); and *How Writing Is Written* (1974).
- ⁴ Ron Silliman’s 1986 anthology *In the American Tree* is the most representative selection of early Language writing. For the large reception that follows, see Barrett Watten, “Late Capitalism and Language Writing”, in *Questions of Poetics* (2016: chap. 2; esp. 81-87). See n. 23 below on the scope of “Language writing” as still a contested term.
- ⁵ The best history of Detroit techno is Dan Sicko, *Techno Rebels* (2010). See also Barrett Watten, “The Constructivist Moment”, in *Constructivist Moment* (2003: chap. 4).
- ⁶ How present? I had the opportunity to attend Ellen Allien’s outdoor performance at Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin while working on revisions of this essay in June 2023.
- ⁷ Stein’s essay, originally published by Hogarth Press in 1926, appears in *Selected Writings*, ed. Van Vechten (1946: 451-461, p. 461); *A Stein Reader*, ed. Dydo (1993: 494-503, p. 502); and *Selections*, ed. Retallack (2008: 215-226, p. 226).
- ⁸ For “regularity in dispersion”, a key concept that connects Michel Foucault to Gertrude Stein (via the prose experiments of Raymond Roussel), see Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language* (1972).
- ⁹ Prompted by Rui Torres’s lecture “deep reading minimal texts” at the Expanded Poetry conference (2022), I summarize four current modes of reading that have been critically debated over the past decade: “close reading” after the American New Critics; “surface reading” after Steven Best and Sharon Marcus (2009); “distance reading” after Franco Moretti (2013); and “sampling”, combining N. Katherine Hayles’s notion of “hyper” and “machine” reading (2010). Stein’s use of repetition seen as a continuous and shifting act of decision could be approached through all four modes of reading.
- ¹⁰ Melgard, *The Making of Americans* (2012), in *Read Me* (2023). On “deformance” as reading, see Samuels, “If Meaning, Shaped Reading, and Leslie Scalapino’s way” (2001).
- ¹¹ I read closely the temporal construction of subjectivity as the work of repetition in *Making of Americans* in “Epic of Subjectivation” (1998); as in “Stein’s Ford” (*Constructivist Moment* 2003: chap. 3), however, I do not see this internalized subjectivity (or “inner speech” in Lev Vygotsky’s terms) as counter to modernity.
- ¹² Freud, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through,” in *Therapy and Technique* (1963), and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1961) offer two opposed theories of repetition, which could occur simultaneously.
- ¹³ A major thread of Stein’s American reception insists that “it must be abstract”, and that her middle period of abstract composition is proof that abstraction is the telos of her work, regardless her decades-spanning insistence on historicisms of one sort or another. In discussing Stein, Charles Altieri writes: “Any more narrative, less abstract mode of presentation would succumb to symbolism by prematurely fusing the potential of the language with the desires of the individual will” (1989: 242). This refusal informs Stein’s use of her hallmark

devices: repetition, “the play of semantic light and shadow”, and the emotional force of “phenomena set free from representational placement” (*ibidem*). For Stein to be Stein, she must be abstract.

¹⁴ Stein’s modernity is thus as important as her modernism, which is of a piece with the world that had to catch up with it through a gap of “thirty years.”

¹⁵ Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, conceived in the 1920s Soviet Union, was widely influential in education and composition theory in subsequent decades.

¹⁶ For the concept of “inner speech”, see Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (1962: 149).

¹⁷ In selecting Theorem (a.k.a. Dale Lawrence) as an example of Detroit techno, I am using a work that is more minimal and less funk-inflected than the acknowledged originators of the genre and regional style: Derrick May, Kevin Saunderson, Juan Atkins, or the second generation of Carl Craig, Robert Hood, Jeff Mills, or Stacy Pullen—all African American and from the Detroit Metro area. To my knowledge Lawrence is not African American; his project has more in common with the Windsor, Canada-based and more tech-oriented minimalism of Richie Hawtin. Theorem thus has as much in common with the machinic pulsing of Berlin techno as with Detroit’s identifiably racialized sound. However, this history is one of convergence, mutual influence, and acceptance, not genre categorization or divergence. To hear the track, go to Spotify and search for “Theorem”; for Detroit techno, see n. 5.

¹⁸ For scaffolding in media production, see Hochscherf and Philipsen (2017: chap. 2).

¹⁹ For sampling in Electronic Dance Music and hip hop, see Rose, *Black Noise* (1994); Schloss, *Making Beats* (2004); and Liechti, *This Track Contains Politics* (2022). For Electronic Dance Music, see Prendergast, *Ambient Century* (2003); and Miller, *Sound Unbound* (2008).

²⁰ For DJ and rave culture, see Poschardt, *DJ-Culture* (1995); Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy* (1999); and Mabilon-Bonfils, *La Fête techno* (2004).

²¹ In the lore of Language writing, as in the collective autobiography *The Grand Piano* (Armantrout et alii 2006-2010), *Ketjak* was begun after Silliman and the present author attended a concert of Steve Reich’s *Drumming* at the Asian Museum in 1974, on a weekend devoted to proofreading Bernadette Mayer and Clark Coolidge’s collaborative prose poem “Karstarts” for *This magazine* (1974: no 5), in a shared apartment where David Lewiston’s *Music from the Morning of the World* (1969), opening with a fragment of Balinese *ketjak* or “monkey dance”, was often heard. *Ketjak* is mentioned throughout *The Grand Piano*, esp. 4: 40-42.

²² See Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde* (2009: chap. 1); on the historical origins of Balinese *ketjak*, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Kecak.”

²³ Longer works of Language writing that are built up on the basis of repeating units, at the level of the phrase or sentence, include Lyn Hejinian’s *My Life* (1980); Bruce Andrews’s *I Don’t Have Any Paper So Shut Up! (Or, Social Romanticism)* (1982); and my own *Progress* and *Under Erasure* (2004). Unlike Stein or techno, repetition in Language writing is metalinguistic and builds up an effect of “equivalence” across all semantic units, much like the “regularity in dispersion” Foucault theorizes. In this way, Language writing bridges textuality and discourse. Note that “Language writing” is even now a contested term; I extend it here to authors like Scalapino and Welish who interrogate language, or who respond to the philosophical “turn to language”, without being part of the specific movement.

²⁴ The contents page notes that “way is one poem composed of / Later floating series / [and] way”, which in turn contains two parts, “no(h)-setting” and “hooper.”

- ²⁵ Women Language writers who explore a poetics of “the middle” include Rae Armantrout, Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Jean Day, Laura Moriarty, Harryette Mullen, and Renee Gladman, in either lyric or hybrid forms.
- ²⁶ On the relation of Language writing to neoliberal capitalism, see Barrett Watten, “Late Capitalism and Language Writing” (2016: chap. 2). Both Scalapino and Silliman are highly aware of, and responding to, the increase of income disparity and homelessness in San Francisco in the 1980s.
- ²⁷ The question of nonreferentiality in Language writing is another misunderstood and contested issue. While there are instances of complete nonreferentiality in authors like Silliman, David Melnick, Bruce Andrews, Lyn Hejinian, or Michael Gottlieb, there is a sliding scale of “the set toward the referent”, in Roman Jakobson’s sense of different linguistic functions in poetry.
- ²⁸ For Jacques Lacan, the “Real” is one of three psychic orders that make up subjectivity; it is opposed to the Symbolic and thus cannot “enter into language”; for Slavoj Žižek, the Real is a traumatic “hard kernel resisting symbolization” that can “only be known in its effects” of fantasy.
- ²⁹ While I am using “metadata” as an analogous to temporal aspects of given sample, there is of course no digital footprint that is readable in electronic samples that I am aware of. The “datedness” of a sample is its construction at a unique temporal moment, whether that date is recorded or not—as it might be. This datedness interacts with other temporal elements of a sequenced work and is never entirely lost in the new time of the work. On “metadata”, see Pomerantz (2015).
- ³⁰ See Edward Said, *On Late Style* (2006), esp. chap. 1: “For Adorno, *lateness* is the idea of surviving beyond what is acceptable and normal; in addition, *lateness* includes the idea that one cannot really go beyond *lateness* at all, cannot transcend or lift oneself out of *lateness*, but can only deepen the *lateness*” (*idem*: 13)—certainly true of Welsh’s late work. Compare Said on *Beginnings* (1985).
- ³¹ Ellen Allien, *Gender Fluid*, released 11 December 2020; <https://marblewax2max.bandcamp.com/track/gender-fluid> (last accessed 24/10/2023).
- ³² Ellen Allien, “Boiler Room x Dommune x Technics: A Celebration of 50 Years of the SL-1200”, live set from Hard Wax Records, Berlin, 8 April 2022; live streamed by Dommune, Tokyo, 7 April 2022. The livecast celebrates the Technics SL-1200 turntable but also responds to the war in Ukraine: “This month, Boiler Room was due to broadcast from Kyiv but we are instead now diverting our efforts to urgently raise funds to help refugees fleeing Ukraine”; <https://youtu.be/sJsBd8U73YE>; for the Dommune livecast: <https://www.dommune.com/streamings/20s22/040702> (last accessed 24/10/2023).
- ³³ On Berlin techno, see Lessour, *Sampling Berlin* (2012), esp. 354–356 on Allien.
- ³⁴ See Lee (2019), “How the Fall of the Berlin Wall Inspired Ellen Allien’s Marathon Career in Techno”; 909originals (2020), “‘Urban living sometimes provokes distortions...’: 909originals chats to Ellen Allien”; and two video interviews: “How Berlin Became Europe’s Techno Capital”, <https://youtu.be/HDhDhLi59m8>; and “Durch Berlin mit Techno-Ikone Ellen Allien”, <https://youtu.be/yGWG3MQ8ib4> (last accessed 24/10/2023).
- ³⁵ For Allien’s local projects and global impact, see *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Ellen Allien”; her personal web page, <https://www.ellenallien.de/news>; and the web page for her label “BPitch”: <https://www.bpitch.de/en/artist/ellen-allien> (last accessed 24/10/2023).
- ³⁶ The Detroit/Berlin techno connection, as much historically as musically significant, was celebrated in a three-day conference, *Detroit—Berlin: One Circle*, Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, 30 May–2 June 2018; <https://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de/en/detroit-berlin> (last accessed 24/10/2023).

³⁷ A sample list has been made for this mix (see Boiler Room site), but its substantial gaps point to the unlikelihood of ever fully describing the construction of her performance.

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