

6. stuplimity

Less best. No. Naught best. Best worse. No. Not best worse. Naught not best worse. Less best worse. No. Least. Least best worst. Least never to be naught. Never to naught be brought. Never by naught be nulled. Unnullable least. Say that best worst. With leasening words say least best worst. For want of worser worst.

— SAMUEL BECKETT, *Worstward Ho* (1983)

Sorry. Sorry. I'm sorry. I regret it. Please accept my apology. I'm extremely sorry. I regret my mistake. Pardon me. Pardon me. I hope you'll forgive me. I'm deeply apologetic. Do forgive me. Pardon me. Accept my apology. Do forgive me. I'm deeply apologetic. Excuse me. Excuse me. It was my own fault. Do forgive me. I'm so sorry.

— JANET ZWEIG, *Her Recursive Apology* (1993)

There is stupid being in every one. There is stupid being in every one in their living. Stupid being in one is often not

stupid thinking or stupid acting. It very often is hard to know it in knowing any one. Sometimes one has to know of some one the whole history in them, the whole history of their living to know the stupid being of them.

— GERTRUDE STEIN, *The Making of Americans*
(1906–1908)

Thick Language

“Gertrude and I are just the contrary,” writes Leo Stein in *Journey into the Self* (1950). “She’s basically stupid and I’m basically intelligent.”¹ What Leo finds “stupid” about Gertrude Stein and her writing, which he abhorred, is perhaps similar to what Tod finds “thick” about Homer Simpson’s use of words in Nathanael West’s *Day of the Locust* (1939).² When Tod coaxes the sluggish, almost comatose Homer to talk about the departure of Faye, Homer’s speech is at first incomprehensible to him. “Language leaped out of Homer in a muddy, twisting torrent. . . . The lake behind the dam replenished itself too fast. The more he talked the greater the pressure grew because the flood was circular and ran back behind the dam again” (*DL*, 143–144). Yet Homer’s “muddy, twisting torrent” has a logic of its own, eventually enabling Tod to understand his back-flowing discourse on its own terms: “A lot of it wasn’t jumbled so much as timeless. The words went behind each other instead of after. What [Tod] had taken for long strings were really one thick word and not a sentence. In the same way sentences were simultaneous and not a paragraph. Using this key he was able to arrange a part of what he had heard so that it made the usual kind of sense” (144). Homer’s dull stupor in the wake of unexpected loss produces its own “thick” language—one that initially suggests an inability to respond or speak at all—by eroding formal distinctions between word, sentence, and paragraph. To use terms Gilles Deleuze adapts from John Duns Scotus, the thirteenth-century phi-

losopher whose name gave rise to the word “dunce,” these formal differences of quality or kind are exchanged for modal differences based on variations in intensity or degree.³ Modal differences could thus be described as moody differences—unqualified, temperamental, and constantly shifting. Moreover, in West’s novel the encounter with thick language, which is based on modal and as yet unqualified differences rather than on formal ones, produces a mimetic effect: Tod finds himself temporarily stupefied by the language generated by Homer’s stupor. Which is to say he discovers that it challenges his own capacity to interpret or respond to it in conventional ways.

Radically altering the temporal order dictated by normative syntax (“the words went behind each other instead of after”) and blurring the distinction between syntactic units (words, sentences, paragraphs), the thick or grammatically moody language that West describes can also encompass the signifying logic at work in Stein’s dense *Making of Americans*, where words are deliberately presented in “long strings” rather than conventional sentences and where the repetition of particular words and clauses produces a layered or “simultaneous” effect.⁴ As Stein puts it in “Poetry and Grammar,”

Sentences and paragraphs. Sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are. . . . When I wrote *The Making of Americans* I tried to break down this essential combination by making enormously long sentences that would be as long as the longest paragraph and so to see if there was really and truly this essential difference between paragraphs and sentences, if one went far enough with this thing with making the sentences long enough to be as long as any paragraph and so producing in them the balance of a paragraph not a balance of a sentence, because of course the balance of a paragraph is not the same balance as the balance of a sentence.⁵

Stein’s attempt to erode the formal difference—referred to above as “essential” difference—between sentences and paragraphs (a dif-

ference in kind or quality) by bringing into play the modal difference between long and “enormously long” sentences (a difference in intensity or degree) poses a challenge to dominant systems of sense-making, a challenge that she would pursue throughout her career. In *The Making of Americans*, the strategy is also an agglutinative one, where the simple material buildup of language, turning already long sentences into longer ones, is invested with the potential for altering the “balance,” or equilibrium, of normative syntax and prose structure.

The sense of urgency that inflects Stein’s struggle to make sentences “simultaneous and not a paragraph” in *The Making of Americans* becomes amplified in *How to Write* (1928), whose opening piece, “Saving the Sentence,” bears a title suggesting that language, like an occupied territory in time of war, is in need of rescue.⁶ In another section from *How to Write*, called “Sentences,” Stein makes a similar effort to explore the relation between different units of sense: “*What* is the difference between words and a sentence and a sentence and sentences” (*HTW*, 181, emphasis added). At first glance, her statement seems to inquire about the element that enables us to distinguish one linguistic kind from another (words from sentence), as well as single instances from plural instances of a particular kind (sentence from sentences). It also seems to ask about the difference that lies *between* the two kinds of difference exemplified by two sets of paired terms: formal difference (words and a sentence) and modal difference (sentence and sentences). But, in addition, we can read it as a statement that names the term “what” as precisely this difference. What is “what”? Several things at once. It is an interrogative adjective, as well as a relative pronoun equally applicable to single and plural objects. As a word capable of standing alone to form its own sentence, “what” can also function as a demand for repetition, or an expletive conveying a negative emotion such as disbelief, stupefaction, or incomprehension. Thus, in locating “the difference between words and a sentence and a sentence and sentences” in “what,” Stein suggests that the difference is

at once interrogative, relative, affective, and one that oddly compels or solicits repetition. Like the relationship between sentences and paragraphs in *The Making of Americans*, or between “one thick word” and a sentence in Homer’s muddy discourse, difference as “what” could be described as difference without a determinate value or “difference without a concept”—which is one of the ways Deleuze defines repetition in *Difference and Repetition*.

The fact that “what” can become a demand for repetition also recalls Deleuze’s counterintuitive thesis that repetition is what lies between two differences. If configured as “what,” the “difference between words and sentences or a sentence and sentences” could be described as a demand for repetition that also poses a question: “What is a sentence. A sentence is something that is or is not followed” (*HTW*, 213). As Stein notes here, the word “what” is a sentence, or becomes its own free-standing sentence (“What?”) when it becomes a question that solicits but may or may not be followed by a reply. “Now the whole question of questions and not answer is very interesting” (*HTW*, 32). Hence, the response that difference in the form of “what” solicits, as when encountered by Tod in Homer’s thick speech, seems likely to take the form of a blocked or obstructed response—when the ability to “answer” the question posed by a specific kind of linguistic difference is frustrated or delayed. The negative experience of stupefaction arising from a relationship to language founded on a not-yet-qualified or -conceptualized difference (as in Tod’s relationship to Homer’s “muddy” discourse) raises the significant question of how we might respond to what we recognize as “the different” before a value has been assigned to it or before it becomes qualified—as “sexual” or “racial” difference, for instance. We are used to encountering and recognizing differences assigned concepts or values; Stein’s writing asks us to ask how we negotiate our encounters with difference when these qualifications have not yet been made. The explosion of modal differences in Beckett’s *Worstward Ho* poses a similar question: we may have a concept for the difference between “best” and “worst”—but what about the difference that Beckett insists lies be-

tween “worst” and “worser worst,” or between “Best worse” and “Least best worse”?⁷

Hence, in Stein’s effort to “break down the essential combination” of sentences and paragraphs and suggest that “what” is the difference between “words and a sentence and a sentence and sentences,” her agenda is not to be confused with an attempt to level or neutralize difference by repetition; rather, it is an effort to reconfigure one’s relationship *to* difference through repetition and grammatical play. If a specific emotional quality emerges through this new relationship to difference, it seems important to understand how the former might organize and inform strategies of reading made possible by the latter. Throughout Stein’s career—beginning around 1906, when she began developing what Marianne DeKoven calls her “insistent” style based on repetition⁸—fixed or “essential” distinctions are replaced with as yet unqualified ones to generate new frameworks of sense-making: standards of continuity, order, and “balance” alternative to the symbolic status quo. What this requires from the writer, Stein suggests, as well as from her readers, is an experiment in both duration and endurance, testing whether one can go “far enough with this thing.” As anyone who has read *The Making of Americans* in its entirety can attest, this astonishing 922-page narrative inevitably induces an exhaustion bound up with its taxonomic analysis and differentiation of human types. Stein’s interest in how astonishment and fatigue, when activated in tandem, come to organize and inform a particular kind of relationship between subjects and language (or between subjects and difference, via language) can be further explored by examining how this peculiar amalgam of seemingly antithetical affects comes to bear on our contemporary engagements with radically “different” forms in American poetry.

Poetic Fatigue and Hermeneutic Stupor

In *Journey into the Self*, what Leo Stein implicitly defines as “stupid” language, in his characterization of his sister the writer, is lan-

guage that threatens the limits of the self by challenging its ability to respond—temporarily immobilizing the addressee, as in situations of extreme shock or boredom. In the case of Homer’s muddy and twisting torrent of words, the subject no longer seems to be the agent producing or controlling his speech; rather, language “leaps out” with its own force and stupefies the listener. Yet as West’s scene of interpretation demonstrates, Homer’s emotional speech becomes intelligible once Tod recognizes that it constitutes its own system of sense-making and that it requires the addressee to readjust his sense of linguistic “balance.” Like the affectively charged, insistent language that Gertrude Stein uses in *The Making of Americans* to *unbalance* conventional syntax and create a vast combinatorial of “bottom natures,” Homer’s “thick” and “muddy” speech invites a critical journey not into the self, but into the more complex problem of the self’s relationship to a particular kind of linguistic difference that does not yet have a concept assigned to it.

“The words went behind each other instead of after. What he had taken for long strings were really one thick word and not a sentence. In the same way sentences were simultaneous and not a paragraph” (West, *DL*, 144). Deviating from conventional syntax and its standard way of organizing signs, Homer’s gush, like Stein’s prose, produces a simultaneousness or thickness that recalls the cause of the cryptanalyst Legrand’s stupefaction in Poe’s tale “The Gold-Bug” (1843). Trying to analyze the image of a scarabaeus he has sketched on a piece of parchment, Legrand is surprised to discover a skull on the reverse side, superimposed immediately beneath his drawing: “I say the singularity of this coincidence absolutely stupified me for a time. This is the usual effect of such coincidences. The mind struggles to establish a connection—a sequence of cause and effect—and, being unable to do so, suffers a species of temporary paralysis. But, when I recovered from the stupor, there dawned upon me gradually a conviction which startled me even far more than the coincidence.”⁹ In the scenes of analytical stupor staged by both West and Poe, the obstacle posed to the inter-

preter involves a superimposition of forms. Homer's words are placed "behind each other instead of after," and so are Legrand's glyphs, creating a layered simultaneity of signs. In West's narrative, the thickening of Homer's language is explicitly figured as an effect of this behindness—that of discursive flow "[running] back behind the dam again" (*DL*, 144). The backward slippage dramatized in Tod's description of Homer's language is likewise a feature of Stein's prose in *The Making of Americans*, where narration is repeatedly forced to "begin again," and it is an aspect of the style that dominates Beckett's later prose and poetry. In "Stirrings Still" (1988), a prose poem that deals specifically with a subject's experience of stupefying loss, the overlapping accretion of phrases and clauses within the boundaries of a severely limited diction results in a language that is paradoxically both ascetic and congested, "thickening" even as it progresses into a narrative of not-progressing:

One night or day then as he sat at his table head on hands he saw himself rise and go. First rise and stand clinging to the table. Then sit again. Then rise again and stand clinging to the table again. Then go. Start to go. On unseen feet start to go. So slow that only change of place to show he went. As when he disappeared only to reappear later at another place. Then disappeared again only to reappear again later at another place again. So again and again disappeared again only to reappear again later at another place again. Another place in the place where he sat at his table head on hands.¹⁰

The theme of survival and endurance in the wake of a traumatic loss is conveyed here through a drastic slowdown of language, a rhetorical enactment of its fatigue—in which the duration of relatively simple actions is uncomfortably prolonged through a proliferation of precise inexactitudes. This process occurs not only through repetition but through a series of constative exhaustions staged through the corrective dynamics of retraction and restatement, of statements partially undoing the completion of preceding

statements by breaking the movements they describe into smaller intervals. The undoing paradoxically relies on a process of material buildup, where words are slowly added rather than subtracted. The finitude of a simple action such as “He saw himself rise and go” is disrupted by being made increasingly specific in degree. “He saw himself rise and go.” Not exactly: first he rises and stands, then sits again, then rises again. Then he goes. Not exactly: then he *started* to go. No again: then *on unseen feet* he started to go. The interstitial *no*'s that are unstated but implied in “Stirrings Still” are actually filled in for us in *Worstward Ho*, which attempts to exhaust all combinations of the values we assign to difference: “Less best. No. Naught best. Best worse. No. Not best worse. Naught not best worse. Less best worse. No. Least. Least best worst” (106). In both cases, the logic of progression from statement to statement is paradoxically propelled by a series of implicit or explicit objections continually jerking us backward, resulting in writing that continually calls attention to itself as lacking, even as it steadily accumulates. Because units of meaning are constantly shifting behind one another, Beckett’s use of language performs a stacking of multiple temporalities, an overlapping of instantaneities and durations rather than a linear progression in time.

Like Stein’s style in the period of *Making of Americans*, “Stirrings Still” becomes syntactically dense and complex while remaining minimalist in diction. As in the case of Homer’s “simultaneous” or “timeless” language (West, *DL*, 144), its language is marked by the same absence of a “sequence of cause and effect” that stupefies Legrand, producing the effect of delay, fatigue, or “temporary paralysis” (Poe, “*GB*,” 305). This discontinuity is generated within the speech or text itself, as well as experienced by its interpreter as an interruption of understanding. What Poe, West, and Beckett suggest in different ways is that when language thickens, it suffers a “retardation by weak links,” slowed down by the absence of causal connectives that would propel the work forward.¹¹ It is this change in temporal organization that in turn slows down the interpreter—as if the loss of strong links in the text paradoxically strengthens an

affective link between text and reader, transferring the text's "stupor" to him or her.

To acknowledge and attempt to understand one's experience of being stupefied by a "thick" or "muddy" text, as Legrand and Tod do—an effort which enables them to go on as interpreters in spite of their "temporary paralysis"—is not the same as projecting stupidity onto the text that instigates the experience of stupefaction, as Leo Stein does when he displaces his emotional response to Gertrude Stein's writing onto the writing itself. Attempting to pinpoint the linguistic attributes that inform their stupefaction, rather than dismissing the stupefying text as senseless, Tod and Legrand perceive a breakdown of formal differences and a proliferation of modal ones, as well as a thick or "simultaneous" layering of elements in place of linear sequencing. A similar logic prevails in Dan Farrell's prose poem *366, 1996*, which was published in 1997 and which bears some stylistic allegiance to the "thick" uses of language in Beckett and Stein:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, going into the woods, Sunday, Monday, typical trees, Tuesday, typical grass traces, Wednesday, Thursday, typical excitations, Friday, typical regional sounds, Saturday, Sunday, why slow rather than slowest, Monday, clouded height, Tuesday, some same ground, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, left and possible, Sunday, right and possible, Monday, Tuesday, could what there is not to be believed be asked, Wednesday, Thursday . . .¹²

Consider also this passage from Kenneth Goldsmith's *FIDGET*, a poem and conceptual-art piece transformed into a live performance at the Whitney Museum in 1997:

Tongue and saliva roll in mouth. Swallow. Tongue emerges through teeth and lips. Tongue lies on lower lip. Teeth click tongue. Lower jaw drops away from upper. Flesh folds be-

neath chin. Repeats. Upper lip sucks. Rubs against lower. Swallow. Saliva gathers under tongue. Teeth tuck inside jaw. Gather saliva. Swallow. Left hand, grasping with three fingers, moves toward mouth. Swallow. Arm drops. Arm lifts. Swallow. Arm drops. Swallow. Arm lifts. Arm drops. Eyes move to left. Left hand hits. Arm lifts. Swallow. Arm drops. Right leg crosses left . . .¹³

Just as Beckett's poem stylistically enacts a form of discursive exhaustion or fatigue, Farrell's and Goldsmith's poems relentlessly focus on the tedium of the ordinary: the monotony of routines ("typical excitations") organized by calendar headings, the movements of a body not doing anything in particular. Simultaneously astonishing and boring, the experiment in "duration" is pushed in each text to a structural extreme: Farrell's poem incorporates every single day of the week of the year named in its title (366 days in all); Goldsmith's documents the writer's impossible project of recording every single bodily movement made in a twenty-four-hour period (Bloomsday, June 16). Using a similar conceptual framework, Judith Goldman's poem "dicktée" (2001), described by the author as "a study in the logic of paranoia" and its strategies of negation, is composed of every single word in Melville's *Moby-Dick* that begins with the letters *un-*, in the exact order in which those words appear:

under, unite, unless, unpleasant, universal, uncomfortable, unaccountable, under, unbiased, undeliverable, under, underneath, universe, unequal, understanding, unaccountable, unwarranted, unimaginable, unnatural, unoccupied, undress, unobserved, unknown, unwarrantable, unknown, unaccountable, understand, uncomfortable, unsay, unaccountable, uncommonly, undressed, unearthly, undressing, unnatural, unceremoniously, uncomfortableness, unmethodically, undressed, unendurable, unimaginable, unlock, unbecomingness, understand, under, unusual, under, under, undergraduate, under,

unsheathes, undivided, unknown, unholy, unholy, unheeded, unrecorded, unceasing, unhealing, unbidden, universal, unstirring, unspeakable, unnecessary, unseen, unassuming, unheeded, unknown, until, uncheered, unreluctantly, unto, unwelcome, unto, unearthly, uncouthness, unbiddenly, unite, unite, unite, . . .¹⁴

In a dramatization of the way in which modal differences usurp formal ones, the poet converts *Moby-Dick* into Moby-dictation, producing a hyperbolic version of the collage of quotations compiled by the Sub-Sub-Librarian in Melville's novel. If for Melville the Sub-Sub is always already a small subject encompassed, like Ishmael, by an enormous system, Goldman comically positions herself as an even smaller one. This exaggeration of language's citability is similarly enacted in an encyclopedic work by Goldsmith entitled *No. 111 2.7.93–10.20.96*. Created in 1997, this is a collection of verbal materials that he compiled from February 7, 1993, to October 20, 1996—lists, phrases, conversations, found passages, and entire pieces of fiction, all ending on the sound of the letter *r* or schwa (his rhyme)—and that he laboriously ordered by syllable count, from a series of one-syllable entries to a piece containing precisely 7,228 (his meter).¹⁵ Taking a more traditional versifier's attention to prosodic constraints to an extreme, and persistently subordinating content to the ruthless demands of its self-imposed rhyming pattern and metrical structure, Goldsmith's Sub-Subish work also results in what Raphael Rubinstein calls "a weirdly constructed Baedeker to late Twentieth-Century American society."¹⁶ In chapter MDCLXXXVI (the titles of Goldsmith's chapters reflect the number of syllables they contain, which in turn determine their order in the volume), constative fatigue is hilariously performed through an overdetermined self-referentiality and the use of "literary devices" as clichés. That particular chapter, which self-referentially appropriates a text that could be described as prototypically postmodern in its own parody of postmodern appropri-

tion and self-referentiality, seems designed to exhaust the parodying of these devices, as well as the devices themselves:

This is the first sentence of the story. This is the second sentence. This is the title of the story which is also found several times in the story itself. This sentence is questioning the intrinsic value of the first two sentences. This sentence is to inform you in case you haven't already realized it that this is a self-referential story containing sentences that refer to their own structure and function. This is a sentence that provides an ending to the first paragraph. This is the first sentence of a new paragraph in a self-referential story. This sentence comments on the awkward nature of the self-narrative form while recognizing the strange and playful detachment it affords the writer. Introduces in this paragraph the device of sentence fragments. A sentence fragment. Another. Good device. Will be used more later. This is actually the last sentence of the story but has been placed here by mistake. This sentence overrides the preceding sentence by informing the reader . . . that this piece of literature is actually the Declaration of Independence but that the author in a show of extreme negligence (if not malicious sabotage) has so far failed to include even ONE SINGLE SENTENCE from that stirring document although he has condescended to use a small sentence FRAGMENT namely "When in the course of human events" embedded in quotation marks near the end of the sentence . . . (*No. 111, 565–566*)¹⁷

In extremely different ways, the conceptual work of Farrell, Goldsmith, and Goldman continues a tradition of poetic experimentalism grounded in the work of Stein—including her interest in affectively reorganizing the subject's relationship to language through stylistic innovation. Though such diverse texts should not be reduced to a common equation, each could be described as simultaneously astonishing and deliberately fatiguing—much like

Beckett's late fiction, or the experience of reading *The Making of Americans*. Through hyperbolic uses of repetition, reflexivity, citation, and cliché, the poems perform a doubling-over of language that actively interferes with the temporal organization dictated by conventional syntax. When words or glyphs are placed "behind" each other, instead of after, "the mind struggles to establish a connection—a sequence of cause and effect—and, being unable to do so, suffers a species of temporary paralysis" (Poe, "GB," 305). Yet "temporary paralysis" is not merely a state of passivity; rather, it bears some resemblance to what Stein calls "open feeling," a condition of utter receptivity in which difference is perceived (and perhaps even "felt") prior to its qualification or conceptualization. In what ways do contemporary artists engender this affective dynamic through their work?

From Stupefaction to Stuplime Aesthetics

Modern art, according to Susan Sontag, "raises two complaints about language. Words are too crude. And words are also too busy—inviting a hyperactivity of consciousness that is not only dysfunctional, in terms of human capacities of feeling and acting, but actively deadens the mind and blunts the senses."¹⁸

Though Sontag's conjunction of "hyperactivity" with what "deadens" already hints otherwise, the excessive, if abrupt and fleeting excitation of shock, and the prolonged *lack* of excitement we associate with boredom, would seem to give rise to mutually exclusive aesthetics. As Silvan Tomkins might put it, the two affects have diametrically opposite "profile[s] of activation, maintenance, and decay." Sudden in onset, brief in duration, and disappearing quickly, astonishment involves high levels and steep gradients of neural firing; whereas boredom, slow or gradual in onset and long in duration, involves low and continuous levels of neural firing.¹⁹ Yet even as the temporalities of shock and boredom are inarguably antithetical, both are responses that confront us with the limitations

of our capacity for responding in general. As Ernst Bloch notes, in classic taxonomies of feeling both tend to be placed in the category of “asthenic” versus “sthenic” emotions, “i.e. those which paralyze [rather than strengthen] heart innervation.”²⁰ Both “paralyzing” affects consequently inform aesthetic responses that tend to be written off as unsophisticated: from this point of view, only a philistine would be bored by the later Beckett’s fatiguing repetitions; only a naïf would be shocked by Jeff Koons’s pornographic sculptures. By pointing to what obstructs aesthetic or critical response, however, astonishment and boredom ask us to ask what ways of responding our culture makes available to us, and under what conditions. The shocking and the boring prompt us to look for new strategies of affective engagement and to extend the circumstances under which engagement becomes possible. Here we will explore the peculiar phenomenon of the *intersection* of these affects, in innovative artistic and literary production, as a way of expanding our concept of aesthetic experience in general.

As Stein acknowledges in *The Making of Americans*, “Listening to repeating is often irritating, listening to repeating can be dulling” (302). Yet in that book, which presents a taxonomy or system for the making of human “kinds,” repeating is also the dynamic force by which new beginnings, histories, and genres are produced and organized. As Lacan similarly suggests, “repetition demands the new,” including new ways of understanding its dulling and irritating effects.²¹ It thus comes as no surprise that many of the most “shocking,” innovative, and transformative cultural productions in history have also been deliberately tedious ones. In the twentieth century, systematically recursive works by Andy Warhol, Robert Ryman, Jasper Johns, John Cage, and Philip Glass bear witness to the prominence of tedium as an aesthetic strategy in avant-garde practices; one also thinks of the “fatiguing repetitiveness of Sade’s books”²² and the permutative logics at work in the writings of Beckett, Raymond Roussel, Georges Perec, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jackson Mac Low, and of course Stein. This strange partnership

between enervation and shock in the invention of new genres is not limited to the avant-garde. It can likewise be found in the contemporary slasher film, which by continually using a limited number of trademark motifs replicates the serial logic of the serial killer (while also, of course, producing thrills), and in the pulsating, highly energized, yet exhaustively durational electronic music known as techno, which generated new musical subcultures in the 1980s.

Though repetition, permutation, and seriality figure prominently as devices in aesthetic uses of tedium, practitioners have achieved the same effect through a strategy of agglutination—the mass adhesion or coagulation of data particles or signifying units. Here tedium resides not so much in the syntactic overdetermination of a minimalist lexicon, as in Robert Ryman's white paintings, but in the stupendous proliferation of discrete quanta held together by a fairly simple syntax or organizing principle. This logic, less mosaic than congealic, is frequently emphasized by sculptor Ann Hamilton in her installations, which have included 16,000 teeth arranged on an examination table, 750,000 pennies immobilized in honey, 800 men's shirts pressed into a thick wedge, and floors covered by vast spreads of linotype pieces and animal hair.²³ A similar effect is achieved by Gerhard Richter's installation *Atlas* (1997), which confronts the spectator with 643 sheets displaying more than 7,000 items—snapshots, newspaper cuttings, sketches, color fields—arranged on white rectangular panels.²⁴ While here the organization of material is primarily taxonomic rather than compressive, like Hamilton's, the accumulation of visual "data" induces a similar strain on the observer's capacities for conceptually synthesizing or metabolizing information. The fatigue of the viewer's responsivity approaches the kind of exhaustion involved in the attempt to read a dictionary.

This mode of tedium is specifically foregrounded in Janet Zweig's computer/printer installations, where rhetorical bits and scraps are automatically produced in enormous quantities, then

stacked, piled, enumerated, weighed on scales, or otherwise quantified. To make *Her Recursive Apology* (1993), for example, four computers, each hooked up to a dot-matrix printer, were programmed to randomly generate apologies “in the smallest possible type” on continuously fed paper. As Zweig notes, “The printer apologized for two weeks, day and night. Whenever a box of paper ran out, the computer displayed the number of times it had apologized. Because the apologies were randomly chosen by the computer, no two sheets of paper are alike. I arranged the pages in a recursive spiral structure, each stack one sheet larger than the next.”²⁵ Pushing the boundary between the emotive and the mechanical, and ironically commenting on the feminization of apologetic speech acts, *Her Recursive Apology* stages the convergence of gendered subject and machine not via a fashionable cyborg figure but through a surprisingly “flat” or boring display of text, its materiality and iterability foregrounded by the piles of its consolidation. Zweig’s work calls attention to language as the site where subject and system intersect, as Stein similarly demonstrates through her own vast combinatoriality of human types—a text in which new “kinds” or models of humans are made through the rhetorically staged acts of enumerating, “grouping,” “mixing,” and above all repeating. For both Stein and Zweig, where system and subject converge is more specifically where language piles up and becomes “dense.”

Like the massive *Making of Americans*, the large-scale installations of Zweig, Hamilton, and Richter register as at once exciting and enervating, astonishing yet tedious. Inviting further comparison with Stein’s human taxonomy is the fact that each of these installations functions as an information-processing system—a way of classifying and ordering seemingly banal bits of stuff: newspaper clippings, snapshots, teeth, words and phrases, repetitions. To encounter the vastness of Stein’s system is to encounter the vast combinatoriality of language, where particulars “thicken” to produce new individualities. As an ordering of visual data on a similar scale, what Richter’s *Atlas* suggests through its staggering agglomeration

of material is not so much the sublimity of information, but the sublimity of its ability to thicken and heap up.

But sublimity does not really seem the right concept to use here, despite its early role in making emotion—negative emotion, in particular—central to aesthetic experience. As noted in this book’s introduction, the sublime might be thought of as the first “ugly feeling,” in the sense of being explicitly contrasted with the feelings or qualities associated with the beautiful. It thus comes as no surprise that the sublime, conscripted to theorize an observer’s response to things in nature of great or infinite magnitude (what Kant calls the mathematically sublime) or of terrifying might (Kant’s dynamical sublime),²⁶ has had a revitalized cachet in what Arthur C. Danto describes as the twentieth-century avant-garde’s attempt to separate the concepts of art and beauty.²⁷ Though the dynamical sublime is characterized in particular by “astonishment that borders upon terror” or by a kind of “holy awe” coupled with “dread” (Kant, *CJ*, 109), both sublimes involve an initial experience of being overwhelmed in a confrontation with totality that makes the observer painfully aware of her limitations—or at least at first. There is a sense in which astonishingly massive and totalizing works like Goldsmith’s *No. 111 2.7.93–10.20.96* and Richter’s *Atlas*, which reveal the limited reach of our perceptual and cognitive faculties, would seem to do the same. But Kantian sublimity remains the wrong aesthetic concept, as well as the wrong concept of feeling, to appeal to in describing the effects of works like *No. 111*, *Atlas*, and *The Making of Americans* on the reader or viewer. And its *interesting* failure to account for the affects summoned by works like these stems from reasons more complex than the ones detailed explicitly within the *Critique of Judgement* (1790), such as the fact that Kant limits his concept of the sublime to “rude nature,” and explicitly bars it from being applied to products of art “where human purpose determines the form and the size” (*CJ*, 91).

Although the sublime encounter with the infinitely vast or powerful object—mathematical infinity, raging oceans, massive moun-

tains, or hurricanes (to draw from Kant's own examples)—is at the outset negative, involving a failure of the imagination that threatens the mind's sense of its own capabilities (as in the case of the mathematical sublime) or precipitates a sense of physical inferiority to nature that induces fear and pain in the observer (as in the case of the dynamical sublime), both encounters end by reversing these initial challenges to the self's autonomy, culminating in "inspiring satisfaction" rather than unpleasure (*CJ*, 101). This happens to the extent that the original revelations of subjective limitation and inadequacy, whether in the form of "the inadequacy of the imagination for presenting the ideas of a whole" or in that of the impotence the self feels when confronted with natural power and magnificence, ultimately refer the self back to its capacity for reason as a *superior* faculty—one capable of grasping the totality or infinity that the imagination could not in the form of a noumenal or supersensible idea, and also of revealing the self's final superiority to nature, inasmuch as its rational faculty is revealed as lying outside nature and in fact encompassing it (*CJ*, 91, 108–109). Hence, one surprise for the contemporary reader of Kant's analysis, given the numerous popularizations and recirculations of his sublime in the two hundred years following the third *Critique*, is that for Kant sublimity applies only to a quality or state of the subject's mind, and not to the object that excites that state of mind. Though we continue, colloquially, to describe things like "the boundless ocean in a state of tumult" as sublime, what is properly sublime for Kant is not the object of great magnitude or power that awes the self, but rather the self's pleasurable and emotionally satisfying estimation of *itself*—its "inspiring" feeling of being able to transcend the deficiencies of its own imagination through the faculty of reason ("whose superiority can be made intuitively evident only by the inadequacy of that [other] faculty"; *CJ*, 97), and its feeling of autonomy from nature (*CJ*, 101). The paradoxical way in which a dysphoric feeling of subjective inadequacy culminates in a euphoric confirmation of what Kant calls "subjective purposiveness" and

self-sufficiency involves an uplifting transcendence: intimidating objects that initially “exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might” ultimately “raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature” (*CJ*, 100–101). And just as the observer is “raised above the fear of such operations of nature” in the dynamical sublime, aesthetic judgment, when referred to reason, is itself “rais[ed] . . . out of empirical psychology, in which otherwise [it] would remain buried among the feelings of gratification and grief” (*CJ*, 106). This is why, in the end, as Alan Isaacs stresses, the Kantian sublime is emotionally disinterested as well as transcendent and universally valid, forsaking the realm of negative emotion from which it initially proceeds.²⁸

Hence, in spite of popularized, more contemporary versions of the Kantian sublime (as filtered through and disseminated by Romanticism, in particular), which tend to emphasize the self’s initial feeling of limitation or disempowerment and thus to formulate the sublime primarily as an experience of being astonished and overwhelmed by a vast or intimidating object, the term “sublime” remains an inapt characterization of astonishing works like Richter’s *Atlas* or Stein’s *Americans*, as well as of our affective response to them. For one thing, works like *Americans*, with its thick language, muddy and twisting repetitions, and obsessive taxonomy of what Stein calls “bottom natures,” tend to draw us *down* into the sensual and material domain of language and its dulling and irritating iterability, rather than elevating us to a transcendent, supersensible, or spiritual plane. The same could be said for both the “quaqua” and scatological sludge in Beckett’s *How It Is* (of which I will say more shortly), in which the subject is literally pulled face down. In a similar vein, the vast spreads of human hair or typographic rubble that the observer is forced to interact with in Ann Hamilton’s installations seem deliberately to invite, yet ultimately veer away

from, being characterized as “sublime.” For in contrast to the inspiring uplift of sublimity, this immersive, downward pull into what Ben Watson calls the “common muck” of language (or, in the case of Hamilton, linotype pieces and hair) not only preserves the initial sense of subjective limitation that Kantian sublimity ultimately reverses (as well as its accompanying dysphoria), but eliminates the distance that is essential to the Kantian sublime.²⁹ The precondition for experiencing the sublime, and the dynamical sublime in particular, is that the observer feel safely removed from the object that inspires this emotion. Thus, while “the boundless ocean in a state of tumult, the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like . . . exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might,” they can be said to excite the feeling of sublimity “*provided only that we are in security*” (*CJ*, 100, italics added).³⁰ But most of all, while both Kantian and popularized versions of the sublime might be conscripted to account for the astonishment, awe, or “respect” that a massive, even stupefying text like *Americans* solicits from its reader, no theory of sublimity seems adequately equipped to account for its concomitantly solicited effect of boredom. As a state of emotional deficiency paradoxically invoked in tandem with the emotional excess of shock or intense astonishment, this boredom is absolutely central to Stein’s quasi-scientific experiment with sentences and paragraphs in *Americans*, in conjunction with her endless acts of enumerating, classifying, and recombining human types, as well as to Beckett’s effort to “exhaust the possible” by running through, and asking the reader to follow, every single permutation of variables in a relatively humdrum situation—from putting on socks and shoes (*Watt*), to eating biscuits (*Murphy*), to sucking on stones (*Molloy*), to sitting, standing, and leaving a house (“Stirrings Still”).³¹ Yet the passivity, duration, and ignoble status of boredom would seem to contradict nearly all aspects of the sublime, not only in its initial effect of shocked surprise bordering on terror, an emotion that is sharp and fleeting, but also in the subsequent transformation of this terror “into a feeling of

tranquil superiority”—the serene, self-ennobling admiration for the colossal object in which Kant’s sublime culminates.³²

Boredom’s antithetical relation to both shock and serenity, the two *competing* affects of the Kantian sublime, actually underscores the oddly discrepant status of affective lack throughout Kant’s writings on sublimity. As Paul de Man notes, whereas Kant in his *Observations on the Sentiment of the Beautiful and Sublime* (published in 1764, nearly thirty years before the third *Critique*) states that “the phlegmatic as loss or absence of affect [*Affektlosigkeit*]” has nothing whatsoever to do with the sublime, in the *Critique* this absence of emotion *does* qualify as aesthetically sublime, though Kant immediately acknowledges that the characterization may seem “strange.” After describing the energetic, spirited state of enthusiasm as aesthetically sublime, he argues that enthusiasm’s opposite is not only sublime, but sublime in a superior way: “But (which seems strange) the absence of affection (*apatheia*, *phlegma in significatu bono*) in a mind that vigorously follows its own principles is sublime, and in a far preferable way, because it has also on its side the satisfaction of pure reason. A mental state of this kind is alone called noble” (*CJ*, 113). Yet the *apatheia* that Kant finds ennobling involves a calmness and neutrality that ultimately distinguishes it from the dissatisfied (and often restless) mood of boredom. We could say that Kant’s sublime *apatheia* involves a lack of affect that is itself reflexively felt by the subject as neither pleasurable nor unpleasurable (that is, an absence of affect that is approached apathetically in turn, a lack about which the subject *feels nothing*), whereas boredom involves a deficiency of affect that is reflexively felt to be dysphoric—stultifying, tedious, irritating, fatiguing, or dulling. Ultimately only a bit different in affective value from the “serenity,” “tranquil satisfaction of superiority” (de Man, *AI*, 85), or “disinterested *pleasure*” in which the sublime ordinarily culminates (*CJ*, 92), Kant’s *apatheia* is a more neutral state, reflexively yielding neither pleasure or discomfort, that “frees” the subject for other mental activities and thus finds an ally in reason. In contrast to

freeing the subject from the realm of affect in its entirety, boredom immobilizes and stupefies—and indicates the *inability* of other mental activities, including reason, to overcome an affective state. Given the *sluggishness* associated with boredom, the difference between the two kinds of affective deficiency becomes clearer when Kant subsequently contrasts “affection[s] of the strenuous kind,” which merit characterization as aesthetically sublime, with “affections of the languid kind,” which are barred from the sublime and, as Kant notes, “have nothing noble in themselves” (*CJ*, 113).

Hence, to return to Sontag’s comment about language, though words may induce a “hyperactivity of consciousness” that might be conceived, like Kant’s alert and energetic state of “enthusiasm,” as aesthetically sublime, sublimity still remains unable to account for this hyperactivity’s secondary effect of “deaden[ing] the mind and senses,” as the sluggishness of boredom (but *not* Kant’s *apatheia* or emotional disinterestedness) is wont to do. (Despite its more radical neutrality, the special case of emotional disinterestedness produces virtually the same effect as disinterested pleasure—both end in “the satisfaction of pure reason.”) More specifically, the sublime cannot be properly mobilized to account for the affective response elicited by enormous, agglutinative works like *Atlas* or *Americans*, since here the initial experience of being aesthetically overwhelmed involves not terror or pain (eventually superseded by tranquility), but *something much closer to an ordinary fatigue*—and one that cannot be neutralized, like the sublime’s terror, by a competing affect. In the case of Stein’s colossal novel, a dysphoric affect is similarly summoned in which the reader’s or observer’s faculties become strained to their limits in the effort to comprehend the work as a whole, but the revelation of this failure is conspicuously less dramatic—and does not, in the end, confirm the self’s sense of superiority over the overwhelming or intimidating object.

Our encounters with astonishing but also fatiguing works like *Americans* thus call for a different way of thinking what it means to be aesthetically overpowered—a new way of characterizing an affective relationship to enormous, stupefying objects that may seem

similar to, but ultimately does not fall within the scope of, either the Kantian or the popular sublime. One strategy for calling attention to the difference between the mixture of shock and exhaustion produced and sustained by a text like *Americans*, and the “dread” and “holy awe” eventually superseded by disinterested pleasure that are particular to the sublime, is to refer to the aesthetic experience in which astonishment is paradoxically united with boredom as *stuplimity*. This term allows us to invoke the sublime—albeit negatively, since we infuse it with thickness or even stupidity—while detaching it from its spiritual and transcendent connotations and its close affiliation with Romanticism. For whereas contemporary criticism depends on and repeatedly returns to make use of older aesthetic categories, even in its engagement with radically different forms of cultural production, these different forms call for new modes of critical response and thus for new terms designating our ways of responding to them. What constitutes stuplimity will become increasingly clear below, but for now I will briefly describe it as a concatenation of boredom and astonishment—a bringing together of what “dulls” and what “irritates” or agitates; of sharp, sudden excitation and prolonged desensitization, exhaustion, or fatigue. While the Kantian sublime stages a competition between opposing affects, in which one eventually supersedes and *replaces* the other (as de Man notes, “The victory of the sublime over nature is the victory of one emotion [tranquillity] *over* another emotion, such as fear”; *AI*, 123), stuplimity is a tension that holds opposing affects together. And while the sublime traditionally finds a home in the serious modes of the lyrical, elegiac, or tragic, stuplimity could be said to belong more properly to the dirtier environments of what Stein calls “bottom humor.”

Stuplimity reveals the limits of our ability to comprehend a vastly extended form as a totality, as does Kant’s mathematical sublime, yet not through an encounter with the infinite but with finite bits and scraps of material in repetition. And as Deleuze reminds us, one of the best examples of the finite and discrete in repetition is words: “Words possess a comprehension which is necessarily finite,

since they are by nature the objects of a merely nominal definition. We have here a reason why the comprehension of the concept *cannot* extend to infinity: we define a word by only a finite number of words. Nevertheless, speech and writing, from which words are inseparable, give them an existence *hic et nunc*; a genus thereby passes into existence as such; and here again extension is made up for in dispersion, in discreteness, under the sign of a repetition which forms the real power of language in speech and writing” (*DR*, 13). In Beckett’s *How It Is*, this encounter with the finite but iterable seems no less daunting than the effort by the imagination to comprehend the infinitely extended object—but unlike Kant’s mathematic sublime, the effort is also tedious and exhausting: “quaqua on all sides then in me bits and scraps try and hear a few scraps two or three each time per day and night string them together make phrases more phrases . . .”³³ Here “bits and scraps” that surround the narrator on all sides are “quaqua,” the material stuff of a larger signifying system. As such, these repeated finite elements express what Deleuze describes as “a power peculiar to the existent, a stubbornness of the existent in intuition, which resists every specification by concepts no matter how far this is taken” (*DR*, 13–14). This power of the finite and iterable to resist formal concepts and categories recalls a similar claim Kierkegaard makes in *Repetition*: “Every general esthetic category runs aground on farce.”³⁴ And there is often a comical and even farcical element to stuplimity. Inducing a series of fatigues or minor exhaustions, rather than a single, major blow to the imagination, stuplimity paradoxically forces the reader to *go on* in spite of its equal enticement to readers give up (as many readers of *The Making of Americans* inevitably do), pushing us to reformulate new tactics for reading. Confrontations with the sublime thus bear more of a resemblance to the repetitive, minor exhaustions performed by Kierkegaard’s Beckmann, Buster Keaton, or Pee-Wee Herman than to the instantaneous breakdown dramatized in the imagination’s encounter with infinitude or natural grandeur. In the stuplimity of slapstick comedy, which frequently stages the confrontation of small subjects with the big systems that

circumscribe them, one is made to fall down—often, as in the case of Keaton, with an exaggerated expression of inexpressiveness—only so as to get up again, counteracting the seriousness of one-time failure with an accumulation of comic fatigues.

In this manner, stuplimity drags us downward into the realm of words rather than transporting us upward toward an unrepresentable divine. Or to use terms from *How It Is*, which agglutinates bits and scraps of language transmitted through a narrator who is merely quoting what he receives from an external source (“I say it as I hear it”), the affect submerges us in quaqua rather than sending us “ABOVE . . . IN THE LIGHT.” This quaqua resembles the mud in *How It Is*, the thick medium in which the arrivals and separations that are the main events of the novel’s story take place, yet whose viscosity produces an inertial drag or resistance that renders each arrival and separation exhaustingly difficult or slow. To understand how this scenario works, let us look at Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit’s synopsis of Beckett’s novel.

Imagine two old men lying still, face down in the mud, separated from one another by, say, a quarter of a mile. Now imagine two other old men, also face down in the mud, each one approaching one of the other two. The former, mysteriously silent, but intent on communicating with their new companions, devise an elaborate semiotic system in two stages. In [the first stage] the men toward whom the others have crawled are taught to respond to a series of signals [which are also forms of physical torture] administered by their silent partner’s right hand. . . . At the [second stage] the former traveler imprints questions, with his fingernails, on his companion’s back. In responding to his tormentor’s written injunctions to tell something about his life “ABOVE . . . IN THE LIGHT,” the victimized partner recites scraps of “that life then said to have been his invented remembered a little of each no knowing.” . . . Our two couples, however, are not fixed in their positions or roles. Imagine that the victim of each couple leaves his tor-

mentor and crawls towards the tormentor of the other couple. The mobile and immobile roles are now reversed: the two who had previously crawled toward an immobile partner are waiting for the arrival of the two others who had, in an earlier time, lain still awaiting *their* arrival. Except, of course, that the first time around B had awaited A, and D had awaited C; now A awaits D, and C awaits B. When the new couples are formed, the same exchanges are repeated, with the roles of tormentor and victim being determined not by the actor's individual identities but rather by their functions in this relational diagram.³⁵

Unlike Kant's dynamical sublime, there is no "safe place" in the world of *How It Is*—only a thick, dense mud in which everything is mired. Each old man's act of "journeying" and "abandoning" thus involves a laborious and "peristaltic" crawl,³⁶ leading us through "vast tracts of time" (Beckett, *HIII*, 39). While Beckett's mud obstructs or slows the physical movements of individual characters toward and away from one another, it also seems to enable a process of cohesion, by which the discrete extensions of Pims, Boms and Bems, "one and all from the unthinkable first to the no less unthinkable last," come to be "glued together in a vast imbrication of flesh without breach or fissure" (*HIII*, 140). The social community it creates is thus one of agglutination, as also suggested visually on the page through the absence of punctuation.

Here, large but finite numbers take the place of the infinity we associate with Kant's mathematical sublime, yet the effect of these enumerations is similarly to call attention to representational or conceptual fatigue, if not collapse. Such tiredness results even when the narrator subdivides the enormity of what we are asked to imagine into more manageable increments: "a million then if a million strong a million Pims now motionless agglutinated two by two in the interests of torment too strong five hundred thousand little heaps color of mud and a thousand thousand nameless solitaries half abandoned half abandoning" (*HIII*, 115–116). Though the nar-

rator often resorts to calculations in attempts to comprehend the “natural order” or organizing principle of the total system he lives in—one presided over by its “justice” or by the disembodied “voice of us all,” from which he receives the words of his narration—these acts of enumerating, grouping, and subdividing only produce further fatigues; thus the wry double meaning of “I always loved arithmetic it has paid me back in full” (*HIII*, 37). Attempting to make sense of his situation by finding smaller, more easily manipulated methods of ordering within his larger “natural order,” the narrator finds these strategies of sense-making ultimately subsumed and thwarted by what encompasses them. We see this in his attempt to describe how information is exchanged in the world he inhabits. To understand the ordering principle behind this, we are asked to take twenty consecutive numbers, “no matter which no matter which it is irrelevant”:

814326 to 814345

number 814327 may speak misnomer the tormentors being mute as we have seen part two may speak of number 814326 to number 814328 who may speak of him to number 814329 who may speak of him to number 814330 and so on to number 814345 who in this way may know number 814326 by repute

similarly number 814326 may know by repute number 814345 number 814344 having spoken of him to number 814343 and this last to number 814342 and this last to number 814341 and so back to number 814326 who in this way may know number 814345 by repute

. . . but question to what purpose

for when number 814336 describes number 814337 to number 814335 and number 814335 to number 814337 for example he is merely in fact describing himself to two lifelong acquaintances so to what purpose (*HIII*, 119–120)

As in the case of the repeated pratfalls of the slapstick comedian, stuplimity emerges in the performance of such fatigue-inducing strategies, in which the gradual accumulation of errors often leads to the repetition of a refrain: “too strong” or “something wrong there.” In this manner, every attempt by the narrator to comprehend the “natural order” or “logic” of the encompassing system (and the patterns of movement and violently forced acts of communication organized by this larger logic) by means of a smaller, more graspable, and more concrete way of thinking further blocks understanding of the wider principle and culminates in a kind of collapse (“so to what purpose”). The narrator makes many such attempts to explain the way his world works—for example, the use of Euclidean geometry (based on a circle and its division into chords “AB” and “BA”) to map the trajectories of the travelers toward their destinations, and simple arithmetic to calculate the durations, distances, and velocities involved:

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

We are thus brought to a series of calculations which in this case lead to a finite solution—if our fatigue permits us to follow them. Despite its arithmetical precision, on the page the accumulation of figures visually suggests babble: “four by twenty eighty twelve and a half by twelve one hundred and fifty by twenty three thousand divided by eighty thirty-seven and a half thirty-seven to thirty-

eight say forty yards a year we advance" (*HII*, 125). The narrator's repeated arithmetical calculations suggest that whereas experiencing the sublime entails confronting the infinite and elemental (and from a safe distance), in stuplimity one confronts the mechanical operations of a finite system, whose taxonomy or combinatory incorporates oneself. *How It Is* also points to the temporal specificity of the stupleme text, as marked by extended cycles of exhaustion and recovery (in the effort to manipulate finite but repeated bits of material or information) rather than by an abrupt, instantaneous defeat of comprehension (in the face of a singularly vast or infinite object). If the temporality of stuplimity radically differs, in its slowness and duration, from the temporality of the sublime (as well as the temporality of other emotions or emotional states), this may have something to do with the laborious nature of processing the finite but iterated. One senses that the slowness of time in *How It Is* may also have something to do with the agglutinated landscape of the novel. Recalling Stein's fascination with "mushy masses" and "bottom natures" in *Americans* (a text which, according to Lisa Ruddick, operates through a similarly anal dynamic of "pressing" and "straining"),³⁷ the "agglutinated two by two" world of *How It Is* is a surprisingly cluttered and *dirty* world, marked by discarded "cultural" waste (torn sacks, empty food tins, dropped can openers) and by the mud in which all inhabitants find themselves partially submerged and limited in movement to a "peristaltic crawl" and in which all acts of socialization and communication take place. The only acts of sense-making allowed by this "thick" medium, the basis of all relationships and social organization, are exhausting ones that tend to culminate in gasps, pants, murmurs, or more quaqu: enumeration, permutation, retraction and emendation, measurement and taxonomic classification, and rudimentary arithmetical and algebraic operations (grouping, subdividing, multiplying).

Since the forms of stupleme exhaustion described above are related to tedium in a highly specific way, Beckett's novel shows us

that there are different kinds and uses of tedium, and suggests the importance of distinguishing between them. What stuplimity does *not* seem to involve is the kind of mesmerizing, hypnotic tedium aimed at the achievement of higher states of consciousness or selfhood, as engendered by metaphysical plays of absence against presence in the work of, say, the painter Brice Marden. In this case, tedium assumes a seriousness and facilitates a transcendence more proper to the sublime than the stuplime, to an absorptive rather than anti-absorptive agenda. Stuplimity also evades the kind of wholly anti-absorptive, cynical tedium often used to reflect the flattening effects of cultural simulacra, as in the work of Andy Warhol or Jeff Koons—and I am thinking here of Koons’s vacuum cleaners and basketballs, rather than his sex sculptures. Whereas the first type of tedium is auratic or hypnotic, the effect of works utilizing tedium in this manner could be described as glossy and euphoric.

What stuplimity relies on is an anti-auratic, anti-cynical tedium that at times deliberately risks seeming obtuse, as opposed to making claims for spiritual transcendence or ironic distance. Instead of emerging from existential or phenomenological questions or acts of exaggerating the banality of consumer culture and its larger-than-life icons, this boredom resides in relentless attention to the finite and small, the bits and scraps floating in the “common muck” of language (Watson, *ACC*, 223). As Beckett writes in *Murphy*, “What more vigorous fillip could be given to the wallows of one bogged in the big world than the example of life to all appearances inalienably realised in the little?”³⁸ Stuplimity arises in the relationship between these little materials and the operations of repetition and agglutination. As *How It Is* shows in particular, absurdity and black humor play significant roles in this use of tedium to facilitate linguistic questioning, even when such inquiry leads to direct confrontations with questions of violence and suffering, as evinced in much post–World War II writing. The particular use of “obtuse” boredom as a means of engaging in linguistic inquiry is also dem-

onstrated in the following anecdote, told by Lacan in his 1959 seminar to introduce a definition of *das Ding* as “that which in the real suffers from the signifier”:

During that great period of penitence that our country went through under Pétain, in the time of “Work, Family, Homeland” and of belt-tightening, I once went to visit my friend Jacques Prévert in Saint-Paul-de-Vence. And I saw there a collection of match boxes. It was the kind of collection that it was easy to afford at that time; it was perhaps the only kind of collection possible. Only the match boxes appeared as follows: they were all the same and were laid out in an extremely agreeable way that involved each being so close to the one next to it that the little drawer was slightly displaced. As a result, they were all threaded together so as to form a continuous ribbon that ran along the mantelpiece, climbed the wall, extended to the molding, and climbed down again next to a door. I don’t say that it went on to infinity, but it was extremely satisfying from an ornamental point of view. Yet I don’t think that that was the be all and end all of what was surprising in this “collectionism,” nor the source of the satisfaction that the collector himself found there. I believe that the shock of novelty of the effect realized by this collection of empty match boxes—and this is the essential point—was to reveal something that we do not perhaps pay enough attention to, namely, that a box of matches is not simply an object, but that, in the form of an *Erscheinung*, as it appeared in its truly imposing multiplicity, it may be a Thing. In other words, this arrangement demonstrated that a match box isn’t simply something that has a certain utility, that it isn’t even a type in the Platonic sense, an abstract match box, that the match box all by itself is a thing with all its coherence of being. The wholly gratuitous, proliferating, superfluous, and quasi absurd character of this collection pointed to its thingness as match box. Thus the collector found

his motive in this form of apprehension that concerns less the match box than the Thing that subsists in a match box.³⁹

Lacan uses this “fable” to illustrate his formula for sublimation (“[the raising] of an object to the dignity of the Thing”), but it works equally well as an example of stuplimation, as the synthesis of awe (evoked by “the truly imposing”) with what *refuses* awe (the “wholly gratuitous, proliferating, superfluous, and quasi absurd”; *Seminar*, 112). The description of the array of matchboxes and their internal voids seems playfully meant to recall an earlier moment in the seminar, where Lacan claims that the Thing, *das Ding*, “has to be identified with the *Wieder zu finden*, the impulse to find again that for Freud establishes the orientation of the human subject to [a lost/absent] object” (*Seminar*, 58). The impulse to find again is an impulse toward repetition, one centered around and organized by negativity. In the fable above, the repetition which Lacan finds simultaneously imposing and ridiculous, threatening and nonthreatening, leads him straight to this Thing, enabling “the sudden elevation of the match box to a dignity that it did not possess before” (*Seminar*, 118). Yet this elevation is paradoxically achieved through a lowering or debasement—an emphasis on the undignified or “wholly gratuitous, . . . superfluous, and quasi absurd” status of the collection through the proliferation of bits and scraps. As the producer of “multiplicities,” repetition seems to do opposite things simultaneously in this anecdote: elevate *and* absurdify. In conjoining these divergent dynamics (trajectory upward and trajectory downward), the repetition in the fable recalls a similar conjunction of rising and falling in the stuplime, through its syncretism of excitation and enervation, its extreme “selected attentiveness,” and its equally conspicuous deficit of the same. Lacan’s stuplime array also recalls the structure of a typical sentence from *The Making of Americans*, in which the tension created by slightly overlapping phrases results in gap and disjunction (as figured in Lacan’s image of “the

little drawer . . . displaced”) as well as in what Peter Brooks calls the “binding” action of repetition (the agglutination expressed in Lacan’s “threaded together”).⁴⁰ And as in the case of Stein, its particular kind of tedium also seems willing to risk a certain degree of “shock value,” unlike metaphysical boredom, which risks none whatsoever, and cynical boredom, which often demands more than we are willing to give.

In addition to highlighting the fact that not all boredoms are alike, the aesthetic differences between sublimity and stuplimity also call attention to the fact that not all *repetitions* are alike, which is a point Kierkegaard foregrounds in *Repetition*. When the young man on a quest for “real repetition” in Kierkegaard’s narrative euphorically believes he has found it in the final outcome of his unconsummated love, his “perhaps disturbing enthusiasm is expressed in terms that only a little earlier in aesthetic history were standard when describing the sublime: ‘spume with elemental fury,’ ‘waves that hide me in the abyss, . . . that fling me up above the stars.’”⁴¹ Significantly, these prototypical invocations of Kantian sublimity highlight the effect of elevation, situating the young man’s relationship to the ocean providing his “vortex of the infinite” as an experience of verticality and depth (Kierkegaard, *R*, 222). In contrast, having chosen to pursue repetition in a comic/materialist rather than tragic/Romantic arena, Constantin Constantius’ description of farce as a “frothing foam of words that sound without resonance” ironically references this sublime imagery only to flatten or deflate it, reconfiguring the experience of genuine repetition as one of a superficial and almost abject horizontality (*R*, 156). “Thus did I lie in my theater box, discarded like a swimmer’s clothing, stretched out by the stream of laughter and unrestraint and applause that ceaselessly foamed by me. I could see nothing but the expanse of theater, hear nothing but the noise in which I resided. Only at intervals did I rise up, look at Beckmann, and laugh so hard that I sank back again in exhaustion alongside

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

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

nature”—where “bottom” is literally “ground,” in the sense of “dirt”:

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

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

Since for Stein, as for Deleuze, all repetition is repetition with an internal difference—“a feeling for all changing” (*MA*, 301)—people intent on “getting completed understanding must have in them *an open feeling*, a sense for all the slightest variations in repeating, must never lose themselves so in the solid steadiness of all repeating that they do not hear the slightest variation” (*MA*, 294, emphasis added). “Open feeling,” which is a prerequisite for what Stein calls “loving repeating being” (*MA*, 295), could be described as a state of undifferentiated alertness or responsiveness—a kind of affective static, or noise, that Stein also finds particular to “that kind of being that has resisting as its natural way of fighting rather than . . . that kind of being that has attacking as its natural way of fighting” (*MA*, 296). In contrast to the sublime’s dramatic terrors and awes, the

paradox of open feeling is that the state of receptiveness fostered by it actually depends on slowing down other emotional reactions, much the way states of extreme excitation or enervation do:

Resisting being then as I was saying is to me a kind of being, one kind of men and women have it as being that emotion is not poignant in them as sensation. This is my meaning, this is resisting being. Generally speaking then resisting being is a kind of being where, taking bottom nature to be a substance like earth to some one's feeling, *this needs time for penetrating to get reaction*. . . . Generally speaking those having resisting being in them have a slow way of responding, they may be nervous and quick and all that but it is in them, nervousness is in them as the effect of slow-moving going too fast . . . (*MA* 347–348, emphasis added)

Though stuplimity begins with the dysphoria of shock and boredom, it might be said to culminate in something like the “open feeling” of “resisting being”—an indeterminate affective state that lacks the punctuating “point” of an individuated emotion. In other words, the negative affect of stuplimity might be said to produce another affective state in its wake, a secondary feeling that seems strangely neutral, unqualified, “open.” Though this new kind of unqualified feeling should not be confused with a lack of affect, the state remains difficult to imagine, since, as Greimas and Fontanille point out, our tendency to “reiterate uncritically the notion that living beings are structures of attractions and repulsions” limits how “phoria [might be] thought of prior to the euphoria/dysphoria split.”⁴² Yet in generating a form of “open feeling” in its wake, stuplimity leaves us precisely in a place to do so. Like difference without a concept, “open feeling” could be described as stupefying. Yet, as Stein suggests, this final outcome of stuplimity—the echo or afterimage produced by it, as it were—makes possible a kind of resistance.

Mushy Masses and Linguistic Heaps

Consider the following, oft-cited passage from Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

The liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings . . . are now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria, a matter to which we will want to return later on.⁴³

The loss of affect—negative affect, in particular—that Jameson attributes above to “the end of the bourgeois ego” signaled by postmodernism (*PM*, 15) is closely tied to his definition of the latter as an aesthetic situation engendered by a relentless spatialization that disables our capacity for temporal organization, and thus our relationship to “real history” (21). The “waning of affect” that accompanies “the disappearance of the individual subject”—to a degree that “concepts like anxiety or alienation (and the experiences to which they correspond . . .) are no longer appropriate in the world of the postmodern”—is thus characterized also as “the waning of the great high modernist thematics of time and temporality” (14, 16). Just as the “alienation of the subject is displaced by the former’s fragmentation” in postmodernism, categories of time are displaced by categories of space (14). Moreover, our sense of the here and now is replaced by the aura of the simulacrum, which “endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy image” (21). Jameson continues: “Yet this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our living possibility to experience history in some active way. It cannot therefore be said to pro-

duce this strange occultation of the present by its own formal power, but rather merely to demonstrate, through these inner contradictions, the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience” (21). Postmodernism seems to suggest a kind of sublimity here, insofar as it reveals a cognitive as well as emotional inadequacy on the part of the subject in the face of nothing less than history itself, revealing “the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience.” More specifically, the subject’s impotence in the face of this situation (an impotence which, as in the case of the Kantian sublime, ends not in dysphoria but in “a peculiar kind of euphoria”) is revealed in his or her inability to “organize . . . past and future into *coherent* experience” (16, 25, emphasis added).

Since this loss of coherence, like the waning of negative affect, is central to Jameson’s understanding of postmodernism (as an “aesthetic situation engendered by the absence of the historical referent”), we should take a closer look at how the breakdown in coherence is understood and described (*PM*, 25). A good place to do so is where Jameson begins to delineate a common feature of the “schizophrenic” writing he associates with Cage, Beckett, Ashbery, and language poetry. This is where he also, significantly, locates the “peculiar kind of euphoria” he introduces and promises to return to in the extract above:

If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, *it becomes difficult to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but “heaps of fragments” and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory.* These are, however, very precisely some of the privileged terms in which postmodernist cultural production has been

analyzed (and even defended, by its own apologists). They are, however, still privative features. (*PM*, 25, emphasis added)

The language of this passage clarifies Jameson's understanding of what a coherent representation of experience might be, by giving an example of what it is not: a heap of fragments. Jameson's essay rests rather heavily on this heap, as a seemingly formless form used to embody and exemplify nearly all of the privative features he ascribes to postmodernism: the loss of historicity, the loss of negative affect, the loss of coherence. And since so much depends on this heap of fragments, which strikingly *lacks* the slick and unifying glaze of most of Jameson's other examples, it is interesting to note that in the slippage from "heaps of fragments" to "the fragmentary" (a slippage in which Jameson shifts his emphasis from a specific form to the kind of aesthetic practice that gives rise to it), what gets eclipsed from the sentence—and eventually from the analysis—is the *heap*.

Though the hypothesis of a contemporary waning of negative affect is something my own book contests, my aim is not to defend the cultural logic of postmodernism against Jameson's compelling critique (which I think is more or less right). The much more modest point I want to make here is that while half of Jameson's examples of this hegemonic aesthetic—significantly the *visual* ones, from Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* and Duane Hanson's lifelike sculptures of tourists, to the monolithic "great free-standing wall" of the Wells Fargo Court in Los Angeles—do seem to illustrate a replacement of "the older affects of anxiety and alienation" with "the positive terms of euphoria, a high, an intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity" (*PM*, 28), resulting in what Jameson calls a "camp or 'hysterical' sublime" (34), these examples are not fragmentary or "heaps of fragments" at all. They are rather slick wholes, held tightly and *seamlessly* together, as Jameson himself notes, by a "glossy skin." These visual productions work perfectly,

moreover, as examples of euphoric postmodernism and of Jameson's camp sublime. But oddly, Jameson's *literary* examples—the only examples to which the description “heap of fragments” can really be said to apply—do not suggest this sublimity or exhilaration at all; in fact, nothing seems to run more counter to a glossy monolith than a pile of rubble or fragments. Moreover, when represented primarily by Beckett's dark prose and language poetry (works in which the evacuation of negative affect seems far more difficult to demonstrate than, say, in Warhol's work), these “heaps of fragments” would seem to be forms in which “the older affects of anxiety and alienation” are actually preserved.

So some of Jameson's examples seem to illustrate his argument better than others—but some also seem to generate aesthetic and affective effects that his larger argument, and his notion of the postmodern sublime in particular, cannot account for entirely. If there is a sense in which the heap of linguistic fragments functions differently from the high-gloss postmodernist object (which leads us either to a “camp” or “technological” sublime), we are still left with the task of understanding its exceptionality. We are also left with the fact that the “heap” in Jameson's “heap of fragments”—the form that emerges from an accumulation or accrual of fragments—vanishes from the prose, leaving us with just “the fragmentary,” or with the privative concept of *fragmentation*. Effaced perhaps in the desire to emphasize the process in which wholes break down into parts, rather than the ways in which parts might be made to cohere or agglutinate, this heap disappears from Jameson's critique of postmodernity, just as the historical referent is said to do within the aesthetic situation it engenders. If what postmodernism lacks is a capacity to “organize” elements into “coherent experience,” the heaping involved in making “heaps of fragments” does not appear to be a valid means of organization. Yet insofar as “to cohere” means “to hold together firmly as parts of the same mass; broadly: STICK, ADHERE,” a heap *does* seem to be a coherence of some sort.⁴⁴ The only difference would seem to be the

degree of “firmness” involved in the adhesion. Hence, even a less than firm sticking-together of parts would still be a form of coherence. We might think here of the “slowly wobbling,” “flabby mass of independent dependent being” that is Stein’s Martha Hersland, or the “slimy, gelatinous, gluey” substance that is “attacking being” disguised as “resisting being” (*MA*, 349). As Stein insists, “Some are always whole ones though the being in them is all a mushy mass.” Thus, Jameson seems to have a more specific definition of “coherence” in mind when he cites “heaps of fragments” as examples of an *incapacity* to organize discrete elements into a coherent form. Insofar as “coherence” does not seem to include methods of adhesion that result in loosely organized or unstable forms like heaps or “mushy masses,” what constitutes a legitimate form of coherence here would seem to be the process of making parts “fit or stick together in a suitable or orderly way,” implying “logical consistency” and systematic connection,” especially in “logical discourse.”⁴⁵ This more specific definition of the term would seem to disavow “wobbling” or “flabby” masses as equally viable organizations of matter.

Thus, if we follow the logic of Jameson’s passage, “coherence” refers primarily to a preexisting concept or idea of order, dictating in advance how particles might be shaped or molded, rather than the activity by which particles are brought together in the first place. Yet if “coherence” implies only a cultural standard of suitability and orderliness, and not the activity or process of adhesion, then what word can we use for the way “little lumps” of matter come to be “stuck together to make a whole one cemented together” in *The Making of Americans*, or the way “bits and scraps” of language are strung together into phrases in *How It Is?* In stressing coherence as an aesthetic or formal ideal, rather than the actual act of *making* things “stick together,” Jameson’s use of the term is in many ways the opposite of Stein’s. Stein’s notion of coherence is, perhaps, more sticky.

In this sense, Jameson’s and Stein’s approaches to the concept also seem to diverge around the question of “consistency”—a

key term in the standard definition of “coherence.” Whereas for Jameson “consistency” would seem to imply regularity or conformity to a particular ideal, consistency for Stein is primarily a matter of matter:

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

Comic in its stuplimity, Stein’s description approaches “coherence” as a *process* of creating form, rather than a value or ideal imposed on things made. As such, it involves possibility—pointing to the creation not just of new “kinds,” but of as yet unforeseen kinds in the future. Moreover, for Stein the work of coherence complexifies and diversifies—becoming as varied in its process as the forms that it generates. In other words, coherence operates as a vast combinator, in which new “consistencies” are produced through the “mixing” of others.

We can also see that different kinds of material consistency are emphasized in Stein’s and Jameson’s notions of coherence: firmly held-together versus mushy or gelatinous; graspable versus slimy. Generally speaking, Jameson’s notion of coherence seems a lot less

messy than Stein's; it excludes heaps, masses, and lumps. The disappearance of the "heap" seems related to the fact that Jameson very much wants to see the heaping of fragments as indicative of privation rather than accrual—perhaps because the accrual implied is so, well, unsightly. Yet as anyone with agricultural, office, laundry, or postal experience can attest, a heap *is* an organization, though perhaps not a particularly organized-looking one. "This *coming together in them to be a whole* one is a strange thing in men and women. Sometimes some one is very interesting to some one, very, very interesting to some one and then that one comes together to be a whole one and then that one is not any more, at all, interesting to the one knowing that one" (Stein, *MA*, 382, italics added). This passage suggests that the process of *how* things cohere or come together is of interest to Stein, more so than the entities produced through this process. Following her lead, we might similarly ask: How do the fragments in Jameson's "heap of fragments" get heaped? "Practices of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory" would seem to account for the fragments themselves, but this leaves the method of their agglutination unexplained. To further elucidate this characterization of late twentieth-century experimental writing, Jameson refers to what he calls Lacan's "schizophrenic" theory of language; it is, he says, a "linguistic malfunction" or breakdown of the relationships between signifiers in the signifying chain that ultimately results in "the form of a rubble" (*PM*, 26). While this reference to Lacan seems to elaborate causes for the fragmentation discussed above, it nevertheless continues to evade deeper inquiry into the particular structure or organization these fragments assume. Just as the heap in "heap of fragments" disappears from critical scrutiny, so does the form in "form of rubble." Are there not, as Stein suggests, multiple and various ways of heaping and cohering? As well as different kinds of linguistic or semiotic rubble? An isolated fragment may be an "inert passivity," as Jameson notes (*PM*, 31), but a *heap* of fragments is perhaps better described as a *constituent* passivity or a "passive

synthesis”—a term Deleuze applies to the work of repetition for itself (*DR*, 72).

As noted above, Jameson finds the waning of historicity endemic to postmodernism (as reflected in its aesthetic productions), concomitant with a waning of negative affect, and of affects like anxiety and alienation in particular. Yet anxiety and alienation in their most hyperbolic manifestations—shock and boredom—converge in Beckett’s and Stein’s fairly explicit attempts to negotiate time and history—Beckett and Stein being writers Jameson considers “outright postmodernists” (*PM*, 4). *The Making of Americans* is, after all, nothing other than the fantasy that “sometime then there will be a complete history of every one who ever was or is or will be living” (*MA*, 283). For Stein, the work of “telling” or “making” history is inseparable from the labor of making subjects (“kinds of men and women”), which itself entails the tedious labor of enumerating, differentiating, describing, dividing and sorting, and mixing within the chosen limits of a particular system. Such making does have its moments of exhilaration, but more generally takes place as a painstakingly slow, tiring, and seemingly endless “puzzling” over differences and resemblances. Temporal and taxonomic “organization” becomes marked primarily by a series of minor exhaustions and fatigues, rather than by euphoric highs; hence, Stein makes history not transcendent or sublime, but *stuplime*. Stein accordingly acknowledges the number of failures occurring in this struggle for coherence (which she also describes as a process of “learning” or “studying”), as well as the alienation and anxiety it induces: “Mostly every one dislikes to hear it” (*MA*, 289). With this projection of a less than receptive audience, writing seems to become an isolating enterprise for the taxonomist-poet, who finds herself forced to announce: “I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way I can do it” (*MA*, 289). Yet this address can be read as an inclusive rather than exclusive formulation of audience if we understand Stein’s writing as an active process of “strangering” its readers.

According to her constructivist worldview, everyone for Stein is a type or “kind of,” and thus strangered by repetition. Yet the anxiety-producing and alienating effects of this subjection are themselves perceived as valuable subjects for study: “Mostly always then when any one tells it to any one there is much discussing often very much irritation. This is then very interesting” (*MA*, 338). The narrator thus finds herself able to continue even at moments where she finds herself “all unhappy in this writing . . . nervous and driving and unhappy” (*MA*, 348). For above all, the making of “completed history”—which is the self-consciously impossible (and thus unhappy) fantasy of *The Making of Americans* and which depends, even more impossibly, on the consolidation of the completed histories of every *single* subject—is absolutely synonymous with repeating: “Often as I was saying repeating is very irritating to listen to from them and then slowly it settles into a completed history of them. . . . Sometimes it takes many years of knowing some one before the repeating in that one comes to be a clear history of such a one. Sometimes many years of knowing some one pass before repeating of all being in such a one comes out clearly from them. . . . This is now more description of the way repeating slowly comes to make in each one a completed history of them” (*MA*, 292). Stein’s comment that “sometimes many years pass” before the act of repeating slowly comes to make a “completed history” finds contemporary realization in *One Million Years (Past)*, a work created by the Japanese artist On Kawara in 1970–1972. It comprises a series of ten black, official-looking ledgers, each containing 2,000 pages listing 500 years per page, from 998031 B.C. to 1969 A.D.⁴⁶ The sublimity of such a vast amount of time is trumped by its organization into bureaucratic blandness; our comprehension of a million years is rendered manageable, if also tedious, when consolidated in a set of ring binders bearing some resemblance to a completed report by the Senate Finance Committee. Yet this tedium turns back into astonishment when we come to realize the amount of time and labor it has taken (two years’ worth) to make such a severely minimal

product. Dedicated to “All those who have lived and died,” this piece records not so much a completed “history,” though it certainly speaks to the fantasy of or desire for this, but the time spent in the attempt to organize one even in the most stark and reductive way. The *hic et nunc* postmodernism of Kawara may be very different from Stein’s *avant la lettre* variety, yet the comparison points to how *The Making of Americans* deliberately stages its own failures by setting itself against an impossible fantasy of absolute historical coherence or explicitness, usually imagined as an incipient future: “Sometime there will be here every way there can be of seeing kinds of men and women. Sometime there will be then a complete history of each one”; “Sometime then there will be a complete history of every one who ever was or is or will be living” (MA, 290, 283). Or even more hyperbolically: “Sometime there will be a description of every kind of way any one can know anything, any one can know any one”; “sometime there will be a completed system of kinds of men and women, of kinds of men and kinds of women” (311, 334).

While stuplimity offers no transcendence, it does provide small subjects with what Stein calls “a little resistance” in their confrontations with larger systems. The fatigues generated by the system which is *The Making of Americans* may be “nervous and driving and unhappy,” but such fatigues can also be darkly funny, as Beckett’s Molloy, Buster Keaton, Harpo Marx, and Pee-Wee Herman remind us by their exhausting routines: running endless laps around a battleship, trying to come through a doorway, falling down and getting up again, collapsing in heaps. Significantly, the humor of these local situations usually occurs in the context of a confrontation staged between the small subject and powerful institutions or machines: thus, we have Chaplin versus the assembly line; Keaton versus military engines such as the *Navigator* (a supply ship) and the *General* (a locomotive); Lucille Ball versus domesticity. And here we might add: Stein versus her own vast human taxonomy. Critics have suggested that Stein’s refusal of linear time for

cyclical time signals a rejection of official history for an alternative temporality grounded in the body. Yet this preference for the cycle, an endless round of driving excitations and fatigues, could equally well suggest the temporality of slapstick, or Stein in Chaplin drag.

Just as in Kierkegaard's *Repetition*, where Constantin Constantius describes himself, while consumed by laughter at Beckmann's stuplimity, as a pile of discarded clothes, the "kinds" of subjects produced in *The Making of Americans* function like garments without bodies—heaplike outlines, as it were, waiting to be "filled up" with the repeating that makes them "whole ones." Whole, yes—but mushy as opposed to firm. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein similarly calls attention to Charlie Chaplin's use of misshapen clothes that "were all the delight of Picasso and all his friends"—and this is an allusion to Stein herself, well known for her loose and flapping garments.⁴⁷ We see here again the role of limpnesses or "flabby masses" in counteracting an oppressive system's fantasies of phallic virility: the clothes worn by Chaplin so admired by Stein are, of course, always falling down. Here, slackness is underscored by slacklessness. As if in anticipation of Oldenburg's soft and puffy typewriters and other machines, or Yayoi Kusama's squishy penis-shaped pillows covered with polka-dots, Stein's love of the wobbling heap or mushy mass similarly recalls the fascination with flabby substances in Chaplin's *Dough and Dynamite* (1914), where he shapes dough into handcuffs and missiles. Perhaps he's asking us to imagine: What might happen to a machine when the exaggeratedly obedient cog within it, while continuing to maintain its function, goes limp? As when the characters played by Chaplin or Keaton, continually in confrontation with the larger systems enclosing them, repeatedly fall into heaps? Here we might also imagine the incontinent Molloy, collapsed under his bicycle or defeated by his stuplime "combinatorial" of sucking stones, or Murphy, overcome by the "total permutability" of his assortment of five biscuits when no preference for a particular flavor limits the order in which they might be eaten—"a hundred and twenty

ways!” (Deleuze, “E,” 153). This astonishing figure, of course, leads Murphy to collapse in exhaustion: “Overcome by these perspectives Murphy fell forward with his face in the grass, besides those biscuits of which it could be said as truly of the stars, that one differed from another, but of which he could not partake in their fullness until he had learned not to prefer any one to any other.”⁴⁸

In the tradition of Beckett’s and Stein’s reliance on “exhaustive series” of objects which lack a privileged term or referent, formulating a materialist poetic response to the “total permutability” of language is perhaps what is most at stake for poets like Farrell, Goldman, and Goldsmith, as well as visual artists like Zweig (Deleuze, “E,” 154). For these contemporary practitioners, the staging of “accidental concretions” (Constantin Constantius’ term for the way comic characters are built in farce; *R*, 163) strategically enables us to find new forms of “coherence” in an incoherent world—such as the form we see in Alice Notley’s feminist epic *The Descent of Alette*: “‘When the train’ ‘goes under water’ ‘the close tunnel’ ‘is transparent’ ‘Murky water’ ‘full of papery’ ‘full of shapelessness’ ‘Some fish’ ‘but also things’ ‘Are they made by humans?’ ‘Have no shape,’ ‘like rags’ ‘like soggy papers’ ‘like frayed thrown-away wash cloths’ . . .”⁴⁹ Each phrase, presented as a citation, becomes “thick” and carries with it a contextual behindness—creating a series of halts or delays in the narrative produced through their accumulation. There’s clearly nothing accidental about this concretion of language, yet the poem seeks to look accidental. Like the massive accumulations of hair or type pieces in Hamilton’s installations, Stein’s mushy masses, and the lumps formed by comic actors in their continual collapses and falls, such concretions challenge existing notions of form and aesthetic order. We can see how unsightly heaping offers a strategy of what Stein might call a “little resistance” for the postmodern subject, always already a linguistic being, hence always a small subject enmeshed in large systems. As Deleuze suggests,

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

This “too-perfect attention to detail” is the main strategy used by Notley, Goldsmith, and Farrell, all of whom exaggeratedly submit to structural laws in their work: Farrell, to the days of the calendar (“Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday . . .”); Goldsmith, to the mechanisms of the body (“Swallow. Arm lifts. Arm drops . . .”). Exhausting as well as astonishing, this “too-perfect attention” is also the main strategy used by Stein’s endlessly classifying and subdividing narrator in *The Making of Americans*, and by nearly all of Beckett’s “combiners” or “exhausted persons [exhausting] the whole of the possible”: Pim, Molloy, Murphy, Watt (Deleuze, “E,” 152). For as Deleuze also notes, though one can oppose the law by trying to ascend above it, one can also do so by means of humor, “which is an art of consequences and descents, of suspensions and falls” (*DR*, 5, emphasis added). Like other “falsely submissive souls” before them, a significant group of contemporary American poets have followed this stuplime path in their confrontations with the systems encompassing them, formulating a resistant stance by going limp or falling down, among the bits and scraps of linguistic matter.

- Mercer University Press, 1985), 174; and Gordon D. Marino, “Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*,” in Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 308–328.
37. Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, ed. William C. Spengeman (New York: Penguin, 1996). Hereafter designated *P*.
 38. Aside from the constant and deliberate blurring/reshifting of kinship relations that occurs early in the novel—crossing lines of exogamous and endogamous affiliation (mothers become sisters, sisters become wives, wives become nuns)—once Lucy moves to the city, the symbolic roles of Isabel and Lucy modulate and become increasingly difficult to fix. If one wants to read the novel as a sequence of generic shifts, Isabel as conventional Gothic figure (dark, nomadic, mysterious, a site of “unknown, foreign feminineness”) appears to neatly supplant Lucy as classic heroine of the sentimental novel (blonde, bourgeois, virginal). Yet these roles seem to dissolve in the second half of the novel; the previously sublime Isabel becomes increasingly flattened into a caricature of a jealous wife, and Lucy seems to acquire a mystique—“a brilliant, supernatural whiteness” and “inscrutableness”—of her own (Melville, *Pierre*, 328).
 39. See Rachman, “Melville’s *Pierre*,” for a more extensive analysis of this exhaustion vis-à-vis American neurasthenia, and “as an image in which disease and literary understanding converge” (227).
 40. Priscilla Wald, “Hearing Narrative Voices in Melville’s *Pierre*,” *boundary 2*, 17, no. 1 (1990): 105. Hereafter designated “HNV.”
 41. I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929), 337, 336.
 42. Greimas and Fontanille, *The Semiotics of Passions*, 6.
 43. *Ibid.*, 6.

6. *stuplimity*

1. Cited in Neil Schmitz, *Of Huck and Alice: Humorous Writing in American Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 100.
2. Nathanael West, “*Miss Lonelyhearts*” and “*The Day of the Locust*” (New York: New Directions, 1962), 169–247. Hereafter designated *DL*.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 39. Hereafter designated *DR*.
4. Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (Normal, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995; orig. pub. 1906–1908)). Hereafter designated *MA*.
5. Gertrude Stein, *Writings and Lectures, 1909–1945*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 142. Hereafter designated *WL*.

6. Gertrude Stein, *How to Write* (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1995; orig. pub. 1928), 7–32. Hereafter designated *HTW*.
7. Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (1983), in idem., *Nohow On*, introduction by S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove, 1996), 106.
8. Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 50. See all of ch. 3.
9. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Gold-Bug" (1843), in idem., *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 305. Hereafter designated "GB."
10. Samuel Beckett, "Stirrings Still," in idem., *The Complete Short Prose, 1929–1989*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove, 1995), 259–260.
11. See Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod (Venice, Calif.: Lapis Press, 1990), a study of Duchamp's *Large Glass*. Lyotard's analysis of Duchamp's aesthetics as underwritten by a logic of "inexact precision" and "intelligent stupidity" also pertains to and sheds light on the poetics of Stein.
12. Dan Farrell, *366, 1996* (New York: Iced Ink Press, 1997). Cited from Farrell's collection *Last Instance* (San Francisco: Krupskaya, 1998), 57.
13. Quotations are taken from the FIDGET website, which is sponsored by the Whitney Museum of American Art, Printed Matter, and Stadium, and is available at <http://stadiumweb.com/fidget>. FIDGET was originally commissioned by the Whitney Museum and was performed in collaboration with vocalist Theo Bleckmann on June 16, 1998, at the Whitney Museum in New York. A book and compact disc were issued by the Maryland Institute of Art in 1998.
14. Judith Goldman, *Vocoder* (New York: Roof Books, 2001), 50–54.
15. Kenneth Goldsmith, *No. 111 2.7.93–10.20.96* (Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures, 1997). As Raphael Rubinstein notes on the volume's jacket, "Goldsmith's epic litanies and lists bring to the textual tradition of conceptual art not only an exploded frame of reference, but a hitherto absent sense of hypnotic beat. Under its deceptively bland title, *No. 111 2.7.93–10.20.96* attempts no less than a complete reordering of the things of the world."
16. *Ibid.*
17. The "self-referential" text Goldsmith appropriates and edits for incorporation into his own conceptual project was written by mathematician David Moser and cited in Douglas Hofstadter, *Metamagical Themas: Questing for the Essence of Mind and Pattern* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 37–38. What ultimately determines this text's positioning between ch. MDCLXXXV and ch. MDCLXXXVII in Goldsmith's poem (encyclopedia? Baedeker?) is the fact that it contains the appropriate number of syllables, and, like the other rhymed "verses" in the volume, ends on the sound of the letter *r*: "Harder harder" (Goldsmith, *No. 111*, 568).

18. Susan Sontag, “The Aesthetics of Silence,” in idem, *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 22.
19. Silvan Tomkins, *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins*, ed. Virginia Demos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 88.
20. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Volume I*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 73.
21. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 61.
22. Susan Sontag, “The Pornographic Imagination,” in idem, *Styles of Radical Will*, 62.
23. Neville Wakefield, “Ann Hamilton: Between Words and Things,” *Ann Hamilton, Mneme* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1994), 10.
24. Gerhard Richter, *Atlas* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1997).
25. Janet Zweig, *Her Recursive Apology*, 1993 (a work consisting of 4,386,375 apologies), paper, 2 ft. × 9 ft. × 9 ft. Collection of the artist, Brooklyn, New York. Janet Zweig, note on *Her Recursive Apology*, in *Chain*, 2 (1995): 248–249 (issue entitled *Documentary*).
26. Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (1790), trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951). Hereafter designated *CJ*.
27. Arthur C. Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art* (Chicago: Open Court, 2003).
28. Alan J. Issacs, “The Ironic Sublime,” diss., Stanford University, 1993, 40.
29. Ben Watson, *Art, Class and Cleavage* (London: Quartet, 1998), 233. Hereafter designated *ACC*.
30. Kant claims, “This estimation of ourselves loses nothing through the fact that we must regard ourselves as safe in order to feel this inspiring satisfaction,” and is careful to defend the seriousness of the sublime against the argument that “as there is no seriousness in the danger, there might be also (as might seem to be the case) just as little seriousness in the sublimity of our spiritual faculty” (*Critique of Judgement*, 101). But as Philip Fisher notes, there is a certain “sophistry” in this argument. For while “never denying that a safe place is a precondition of the feeling of the sublime,” Kant “nonetheless requires us to believe that it is not this safe place but a subtle belief in our reason’s location outside nature and encompassing nature that generates the feeling of the sublime. Fascinating as this subtle possibility might be, it is important to notice that Kant never leaves out the words “provided we are in a safe place.” Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 148–149.
31. Gilles Deleuze, “The Exhausted,” in idem, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 152. Hereafter designated “E.”
32. Paul de Man, “Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant,” in idem, *Aesthetic*

- Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 84. Hereafter designated *AI*.
33. Samuel Beckett, *How It Is* (New York: Grove, 1964). Hereafter designated *HII*.
 34. Søren Kierkegaard, “*Fear and Trembling*” and “*Repetition*,” ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 159. Hereafter designated *R*.
 35. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, “Beckett’s Sociability,” *Raritan*, 12, no. 1 (Summer 1992): 1–2.
 36. William Hutchings, “‘Shat into Grace,’ or, A Tale of a Turd: Why It Is *How It Is* in Samuel Beckett’s *How It Is*,” *Papers on Language and Literature*, 21 (1985): 65.
 37. Lisa Ruddick, *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 81. Hereafter designated *RGS*. Ruddick’s account of Stein’s “anal voice” is developed in the chapter titled “*The Making of Americans: Modernism and Patricide*,” 55–136.
 38. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York: Grove, 1957), 181.
 39. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 7: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 113–114. Hereafter designated *Seminar*.
 40. Peter Brooks, “Freud’s Masterplot,” *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 101.
 41. Arne Melberg, “Repetition (in the Kierkegaardian Sense of the Term),” *Diacritics*, 20, no. 3 (1990): 76.
 42. Algirdas Julien Greimas and Jacques Fontanille, *The Semiotics of Passions: From States of Affairs to States of Feelings*, trans. Paul Perron and Frank Collins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.
 43. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 15–16. Hereafter designated *PM*.
 44. *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., 1995, s.v. “cohere,” “coherence.”
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. Displayed at the exhibition *Deep Storage*, P.S. 1, New York, 1998.
 47. Cited in Linda Wagner-Martin, *Favored Strangers: Gertrude Stein and Her Family* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 75.
 48. Beckett, *Murphy*, 97.
 49. Alice Notley, *The Descent of Alette* (New York: Penguin, 1992), 16. In the Author’s Note, Notley offers “a word about the quotation marks. People ask about them, in the beginning; in the process of reading the poem, they become comfortable with them, without necessarily thinking precisely about why they’re there. But they’re there, mostly, to measure the poem. The phrases they enclose are poetic feet. If I had simply left white spaces between the phrases, the phrases would be rushed by the reader—read too

fast for my musical intention. The quotation marks make the reader slow down and silently articulate—not slur over mentally—the phrases at the pace, and with the stresses, I intend. They also distance the narrative from myself, the author: I am not Alette. Finally they may remind the reader that each phrase is a thing said by a voice: this is not a thought, or a record of thought-process, this a story, told.”

7. *paranoia*

1. One of the liabilities in making references to television in academic writing is the speed with which changes in programming take place, outpacing the timing of writing and publishing. After this chapter was first drafted, the gendered positions of paranoiac and empiricist flip-flopped once again: Agent Scully (Gillian Anderson) became the paranoiac when Agent Mulder (David Duchovny) was replaced by Agent Doggett (Robert Patrick).
2. Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), in particular the opening section, “Totality as Conspiracy,” 9–84. Hereafter designated *GA*.
3. It is my hope that this definition of paranoia—as a specific subcategory of fear grounded in the apprehension of a “total system” encompassing the subject, and amenable to analysis from within despite the fact that its external boundaries cannot be securely delimited (a situation requiring that the system be “imagined” rather than “known”)—provides an affirmative response to the question, put to me by Paula Moya, of whether or not a paranoia whose causes are real is, in fact, “paranoia” at all. One useful outcome of this distinction is that it accounts for the seemingly contradictory (though very familiar) position of being paranoid and correct.
4. Fredric Jameson, “The Theoretical Hesitation: Benjamin’s Sociological Predecessor,” *Critical Inquiry*, 25 (Winter 1999): 267. Hereafter designated “TH.”
5. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, conversation with Ellen Rooney, quoted in Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 13. Cited in Alys Weinbaum, “Marx, Irigaray, and the Politics of Reproduction,” in Emanuela Bianchi, ed., *Is Feminist Philosophy Philosophy?* (Evanston: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 133–134. As Weinbaum notes, Spivak makes the point that while capital opens up the abstraction necessary for antiessentialist thinking, it also makes instrumental use of essences to sustain itself: “Capital,” says Spivak, “is antiessentializing because it is abstract as such, . . . [while essences] are deployed by capitalism for the political management of capital” (cited *ibid.*, 133). In more recent writing, Spivak emphasizes the “spectralizing global sweep” of “‘pure’ finance capital—the abstract as such,” while also pointing to the potential disruptions