The Queer Temporality of Gertrude Stein's Continuous Present

By Daniela Miranda, Washington State University, Washington

Abstract:

As writers who embraced the Modernist maxim to "Make it New," one might think that Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound would want nothing to do with repetition. As critics Louis Menand and Michael North have shown, however, Pound's now iconic phrase was, ironically, anything but new. North convincingly shows that Pound, an avid reader of Chinese literature, borrowed the phrase from an anecdote about the first king of the Shang dynasty (1766–1753 BC) (n.p). Similarly, Menand draws our attention to the fact that "the 'It' in 'Make It New' is the Old—what is valuable in the culture of the past," a past that plays a central role in most of Pound's writing (n.p.). This complex relationship between the new and the old, the past, the present, and the future – rather than simply 'the new' – is what most contemporary critics see as the defining characteristic of Modernist American literature. Stein's work, like that of other Modernists, exhibits a powerful desire to innovate and to break with tradition. This essay argues, however, that Stein chose to do this not simply by exploiting or inventing 'new' poetic forms but by attempting to endow repetition, ordinariness, and habit with a certain disruptiveness.

Through a close reading of two of her most experimental texts, *Tender Buttons* (1913) and "Lifting Belly" (1915), and two of her best-known lectures, "Composition as Explanation" (1926) and "Portraits and Repetition" (1935), I attempt to show how Stein's reliance on techniques such as beginning again and again and using everything locate her compositions in a continuous present that eschews linear views of temporality predicated on a progression from past to present to future. Drawing on queer temporality theory, I further contend that Stein's commitment to re-imagining repetition as insistence (a repetition that does not repeat) in her compositions constitutes a decidedly queer endeavor. The recursiveness of her poetry, I argue, forces the reader to inhabit a queer time that opposes the regulatory, 'straight' temporality of chrononormativity in favor of an 'other' time. This 'other' time, in turn, defamiliarizes us with traditional modes of signification and closure, asking us to question not only the naturalization of hegemonic temporalities but also the fixity of ontological categories.

> History repeats itself anything repeats itself but all this had never happened before.
>
> - Gertrude Stein, "Lecture 1" (from *Narration*, 1934)

1 Having embraced the Modernist maxim to "Make it New", one might expect that Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound would want nothing to do with repetition. As both Louis Menand and Michael North have shown, Pound's iconic phrase was, ironically, anything but new. Through a detailed account of the phrase's genealogy, North convincingly shows that Pound, an avid reader of Chinese literature, borrowed the phrase from a "historical anecdote"

about Ch'eng T'ang, first king of the Shang dynasty (1766–1753 BC) (n.d.). In his review of Peter Gay's volume on Pound, Menand also draws our attention to the fact that "the 'It' in 'Make It New' is the Old—what is valuable in the culture of the past," a past that plays a central role in most of Pound's writing (n.d.). This complex relationship between the new and the old, the past, the present, and the future – rather than simply 'the new' – is what most contemporary critics see as the defining characteristic of Modernist American literature. Michael Trask, for instance, portrays writers' complex reactions to the drastic changes in American society between the Civil War and World War II as a "dialectical attitude" that was committed to both "redefinition" and "preservation of inherited assumptions" about class and sex (89) and, I would argue, progress, development, and fixed ontological categories in general. Stein's work, like that of other Modernists, exhibits a powerful desire to innovate and to break with tradition. Rather ambitiously, however, Stein chose to do this not simply by exploiting or inventing 'new' poetic forms but by attempting to re-envision repetition, ordinariness, and habit as ways to disrupt hegemonic temporalities and problematize essentialized identity categories.

2 Deciding how to approach Stein's work is a complicated endeavor, particularly in light of Stein's personal distaste for clarity. She famously stated that "clarity is of no importance because nobody listens and nobody knows what you mean no matter what you mean, nor how clearly you mean what you mean" (*Four in America* 127–8). Ironically, Stein would spend a large part of her career attempting to 'clarify' her work. The irony of this endeavor, however, was not lost on her. "Composition as Explanation", for instance, does not really explain Stein's composing style but rather shows the decentering potential of what would become one of her signature techniques – the "continuous present" – by describing it through purposefully obscure statements such as "[a] continuous present is a continuous present" (524).

3 To resist readings of Stein that try to erase the wonderfully disquieting ambiguity of her work in favor of a singular and definite interpretation, I will follow in the methodological footsteps of feminist critics such as Harriet Chessman. In *The Public is Invited to Dance,* she takes "an open-ended and speculative responsiveness to [Stein's] writing" that "[resists] traditional critical claims to objectivity and closure, and [allows] ample room for subjectivity" (8).[1] In light of the vastness of Stein's poetic production, I will focus on texts belonging to what

[1] Other feminist scholars such as Barbara Will and Lisa Ruddick take similar methodological approaches in their respective works.

Marianne Dekoven characterizes as Stein's most experimental period (1906–1932) (xiii), particularly *Tender Buttons* (1913) and "Lifting Belly" (1915), since Stein herself references the texts that she produced during this time when discussing how she developed the continuous present.[2] By examining how Stein uses language in these texts to reconceptualize repetition as insistence (a repetition predicated on difference rather than similarity), I hope to highlight Stein's desire to question established categories and hierarchies, including temporal ones. I further contend that there is something queer about Stein's continuous present and how she uses it to disrupt "modes of signification" that are "linear, orderly, closed, hierarchal, sensible, coherent, referential, and heavily focused on the signified" (Dekoven xiii). While Stein's life and work predate the emergence of 'queer' as a strategic political position and identity marker, I also see her quest to challenge temporal and ontological categories[3] as vital to current queer discussions about temporality, becoming, and being.

4 Unlike mainstream conceptions of time as a benign, democratic, and linear force, the field of queer studies unapologetically questions time's impartiality by examining its material effects on the lives and bodies of human beings, particularly of those relegated to the margins of society. Time, scholars like Elizabeth Freeman argue, is just another state mechanism used to produce "biopolitical status relations" ("Time Binds" 57) that bind the "naked flesh" through "temporal regulation" (*Time Binds* 3). Freeman refers to this temporal regulation as "chrononormativity" (3), while other queer scholars refer to it as "straight time" (see Muñoz, 2009) or as "heteronormative time" (see Halberstam, 2005). The field of queer temporality, then, studies not only how normative time turns "historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines" (Freeman, *Time Binds* 3) but also offers alternatives to this type of temporality by refusing to organize identities and political action around the normative concepts of heterosexual reproduction, the heterosexual family, and essentialized notions of progress, history, and the future.

5 Although the ultimate goal of many queer temporality scholars is to expose and dismantle the wheels and gears of normative temporality, recent scholarship has revealed two distinct, and often oppositional, approaches to the topic. On the one hand, scholars like José Esteban Muñoz

[2] See "Composition as Explanation" (1926), "Portraits and Repetition" and "Poetry and Grammar" (*Lectures in America*, 1935).

[3] Teresa de Lauretis (2011) views queer texts in a similar fashion. For her, a queer text "not only works against narrativity, the generic pressure of all narrative toward closure and the fulfillment of meaning, but also pointedly disrupts the referentiality of language and the referentiality of images…" (244).

see queerness as a "utopian formation" (26) grounded in the hope of a different future. Muñoz's position, furthermore, can be characterized as decidedly socially driven in its insistence "on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity" (11). Scholars like Lee Edelman and Judith Halberstam, on the other hand, focus on what Robert L. Caserio, in the 2005 MLA panel by the same name, calls "the antisocial thesis" (819). According to Halberstam, this thesis involves an acceptance of, rather than resistance to, the historical association of queer subjects "to negativity, to nonsense, to antireproduction, [and] to unintelligibility" (823). Central to the antisocial thesis is a rejection of the figure of the Child as the emblem of the future and of "the absolute value of reproductive futurism" (Edelman 3). Queer negativity, then, not only challenges the social value ascribed to reproduction but also "the very value of the social itself" (6). While Edelman and Halberstam are often portrayed as the main proponents of the antisocial turn in queer studies, it is important to note that they take slightly different approaches to issues of negativity. Edelman, for instance, has often questioned Halberstam's brand of negativity, calling it "a pose" ("The Antisocial Thesis" 822). Halberstam, on the other hand, has strongly criticized Edelman for basing his approach on "a narrow vision of an archive of negativity" and for downplaying the important role of "material political concerns" ("The Antisocial Thesis" 824).

6 Closely related to the ideas of queer utopias and queer negativity are the notions of being and becoming, often presented as polar opposites. Becoming, in the Deleuzian sense, is crucial to the project of queer studies since, as scholar Tim Dean explains in the "Antisocial Thesis" forum, it proposes "a ceaseless movement of being that is not coordinated by teleology and that never results in anything resembling an identity" (827). Being, on the other hand, is associated with stasis, passivity, and death (Colebrook 2011). In "Queer Aesthetics," Claire Colebrook argues that this binary, which privileges becoming over being, reinforces, rather than subverts, normalizing discourses related to temporality and identity (25). Like Colebrook, I see this opposition as troublesome for the project of queer studies in general and for the field of queer temporality in particular, and view Stein's ideas on temporality as an alternative to this binary. I therefore propose an analysis of Stein's work that focuses on how her unique concept of the continuous present can inform and complicate current queer scholarship on the topic of temporality and move us beyond the false dichotomy of being versus becoming.

7 To fully understand Stein's unique take on repetition, or what she calls in "insistence," we must turn to two of her best-known lectures, "Portraits and Repetition" and "Composition as Explanation". Although seemingly concerned with different topics, insistence in the first case and the continuous present in the latter, both lectures deal with one of Stein's primary obsessions: repetition and difference. In Stein's view, the relationship between these concepts is better explored through the art of portraiture. In "Composition as Explanation", Stein presents the continuous present as characterized by two main aspects: "beginning again and again" and "using everything" (524). She, in turn, links both of these concepts to her foray into writing portraits: using everything (the people and things she encountered in her daily life) forced her to find the difference between these things by beginning again and again (525-26). Portraiture, then, does not simply imply description ("Portraits and Repetition" 288). This is a key distinction since, for Stein, description involves repetition rather than insistence: when we describe things or people, she argues, we are remembering them as they *were* rather than depicting them "when the things themselves are actually existing" (290). Not making this distinction will locate the act of creation in the past, thus preventing the composition from existing in the continuous present. From this perspective, the present time – the time of living and seeing – becomes both the time *of* the composition and the time *in* the composition ("Composition as Explanation" 523, emphasis added). It is the time of the composition since, for Stein, artists must strive to capture "that at which they are looking at" (520) at the moment that they are looking at it. If done properly, the time in the composition should mirror this temporality. As such, Stein's compositions are not characterized by a progression from past to present to future, but rather by a recursiveness that eschews this linear view of temporality. This radical redefinition of what 'natural' temporality entails is, I will argue, one of Stein's most important contributions to "queer engagements in rethinking forms of time [and] life" (McCallum & Tuhkanen 4).

8 Stein suggests, however, that this different temporality is always complicated by what she calls "time-sense" ("Composition as Explanation" 521). Although at first glance the term seems to simply act as a stand in for the concept of 'time', a closer look at the wording that surrounds it reveals the dangers inherent in this type of temporality: according to Stein, in the time-sense of the composition, there is "always a fear a doubt and a judgment and a conviction" (528), a quality of expression that makes the composition "go dead" (529). This "most troublesome" time-sense requires a time that is "distributed and equilibrated" to be embedded within the

composition, thus robbing it of the "confusion" that the continuous present provides (529). Although the vagueness of Stein's terminology usually leaves it open to multiple interpretations, her word choice in this passage clearly aligns time-sense with regulatory and linear conceptions of temporality. The term time-sense itself speaks of a need for time to make sense, to be intelligible, and conform to the limits of normative temporality.

9 Stein expands on this questioning of time's sense through her disruption of grammatical and syntactical structures, particularly the sentence, in *Tender Buttons.* As various critics have noted, Stein's grammar is decidedly agrammatical in its refusal to follow conventional punctuation patterns and adjective-noun correspondences (Randall 119). As Mary Galvin has argued, Stein's agrammaticality acts as a direct attack on linear temporality since "temporal structure is usually maintained through the linear sequence of grammar" (43). At the level of the sentence, linear temporality is enforced through the logical sequencing of subject, verb, and object, and through the stops and pauses achieved through the logical placement of commas and periods. Stein estranges the reader from this familiar temporality, from the 'sense' that is etymologically embedded in the word 'sentence',[4] by relying on fragments that are agrammatically punctuated. For instance, in the "Objects" section of the book, Stein offers a distinctly unfamiliar rendition of a dog:

> A little monkey goes like a donkey that means to say that means to say that more sighs last goes. Leave with it. A little monkey goes like a donkey. (14)

The fragmented nature and unfamiliar punctuation of this prose poem prevent the reader from reading it in a linear fashion. The lack of punctuation in the first line, in particular, forces the reader to start over and over again in a futile attempt to impose some type of order and meaning on the sentence. To further complicate matters, Stein embeds the notion of "beginning again and again" into the structure of the first line through the repetition of "that means to say," encouraging the reader to forgo any attempt at a single interpretation and instead engage in multiple re-readings that will, in turn, produce a multiplicity of meanings. Much like the time sense in "Composition as Explanation", a sentence, when left undisturbed, will act, in Stein's words, as a "prison". Stein's use of the term "prison" seems to make a pun on the meaning of

[4] According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the word "sentence" possesses distinctly hierarchical connotations: in the late 13th century, for instance, it was used to refer to a "doctrine" or "authoritative teaching", while its common usage after the 15th century as "a grammatically complete statement" stems from the notion of "meaning expressed in words".

'sentence' as a legal conviction or, in more colloquial terms, on the idea of 'doing time'. When juxtaposed to her description of the time sense of the composition as a "conviction" ("Composition as Explanation" 528), this pun further reinforces the link between the prescriptive linearity of the time sense and of the sentence. This linearity, however, can be disturbed. According to Stein, when endowed with a certain violent "vagueness", a sentence can become a "mission", a wonderfully productive "stumbling" (*Tender Buttons* 20) that renders singular meanings unnecessary.

10 *Tender Buttons* provides us with a plethora of examples of how agrammaticality can be used to challenge the linear flow of time at the level of the sentence, but Stein's insistence and the way she uses it to disrupt chrononormativity and, by extension, fixed ontological categories is perhaps best exemplified in her poem "Lifting Belly". While scholars like Galvin acknowledge that the repetition of the title phrase throughout the poem makes it "constantly shift roles" (45), she fails to address the disruption that this repetition causes in linear temporality and, instead, interprets it as merely an expression of Stein and Toklas' "lesbian consciousness" (45). From my perspective, Stein's insistence acts as the frames in a film[5] by juxtaposing minute variations of the same object (the lifting belly in this case) next to each other to create an image that, although distinctly located in the present, is never static:

> There was an instant of lifting belly
> Lifting belly is an occasion. An occasion to please me. O
> yes. Mention it.
> Lifting belly is courteous.
> Lifting belly is hilariously gay and favorable.
> Oh yes it is.
> Indeed it is not a disappointment.
> Not to me.
> Lifting belly is such an incident. In one's life.
> Lifting belly is such an incident in one's life. (416)

In this passage, Stein's use of insistence ("lifting belly is") creates a tension between the seemingly essential and lasting qualities ascribed to the lifting belly — "courteous", "hilariously gay and favorable" — and its more finite temporal attributes: the lifting belly is, at the same

[5] Stein explicitly relates her portraits to the cinema in "Portraits and Repetition". She, in fact, presents the cinema as the way to avoid the problematic link between resemblance, a vital part of portraiture, and remembering: "Funnily enough the cinema has offered a solution of this thing. By a continuously moving picture of any one there is no memory of any other thing and there is that thing existing, it is in a way if you like one portrait of anything not a number of them" (293-94).

time, “an instant,” “an occasion,” and “an incident”. When closely examined, the slight variations in meaning of these seemingly synonymous terms reveal an image of the lifting belly that is to be appreciated from multiple temporal angles. “An occasion”, for example, can refer to both a particular and special event or, with a minimal play between ‘an’ and ‘on’, to something that happens only from time to time. Similarly, “an incident” denotes a certain temporal specificity, importance, and violence, or, in its variation as ‘incidental’, a chance occurrence. The “new formations of relationship” (Chessman 3) that Stein produces in these lines, then, force the reader to not only question the traditional relationship between the words themselves but also the temporal relationships that we so easily take for granted.

11 Stein seems to be profoundly aware of the destabilizing potential of the insistent image of the lifting belly. Later on in the poem, she states,

> Lifting belly is a language. It says island. Island a strata.
> Lifting belly is repetition.
> Lifting belly means me. (422)

In this passage, Stein explicitly draws our attention to the idea of repetition as language. However, as in most of her poetry, it is a distinctly alien language that forces the reader to question the relationship between signifier and signified. In these lines, for instance, lifting belly is a language that “says island”. The proximity of this sentence to the next, “Island a strata,” encourages the reader to break down both sentences into their component parts. Thus, the first part of the passage could be read as “lifting belly is a language that says is land”, with the second part of this first line forcing the reader to ask, “is land a strata?” As usual, when juxtaposed to each other, these two sentences reveal an interesting tension: Stein seems to suggest that land is both a grounding concept and a mere layer in a much bigger structure (culture, perhaps?). Both of these meanings, in turn, can be ascribed to language, thus exposing how it creates and grounds categories and how it acts as just another institutional power mechanism. In light of the multiplicity of meanings that these lines conjure, Stein’s assertion that “lifting belly means me”, rather than providing an essentialized definition of the self, highlights the futility of such an attempt, a futility that Stein stresses throughout “Lifting Belly” with questions such as “What is a man./What is a woman./What is a bird” (436).[6]

[6] Chessman explores Stein’s unique “act[s] of naming” (84) and her struggle to “avoid a form of representation binding her subjects to their familiar and conventional descriptions” (88) at length in *The Public is Invited to Dance* (1989).

12 Stein's idea of portraits as insistence is, from my perspective, her most radical in terms of proposing an alternative temporality. The very nature of portraiture, on the one hand, requires the artist to capture an object's essence: its being, so to speak. Stein, in fact, stresses the static quality of being through her constant repetition of the verb "to be" in her poetry. At the core level, the objects in Stein's poems, then, simply are: they exist in the present moment in which the writer is capturing them devoid of any ties to the past or to the future. Stein's reliance on insistence, on the other hand, immediately complicates this seemingly static conception of temporality by constantly changing the essence of these objects. This kaleidoscopic portraiture is perhaps better exemplified in one of Stein's most famous lines: "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" ("Lifting Belly" 439). While the insistence in this line prompts a "beginning again and again" that forces the reader to remain firmly grounded in the present, the meaning of the familiar object, the cliché rose that is the subject of so many poems, is never fixed; instead, it remains in a perpetual state of becoming. Thus, Rose (the person) is a rose or perhaps she has risen. When thinking of the object (the rose), the meaning of the line must immediately change to account for the switch from person to object in the sentence: to say that Rose is risen is not the same as to say that *a* rose has risen. This destabilization of meaning is only further complicated when the reader decides to fully immerse him/herself in the endless insistence that the line requires: when spoken continuously, the individual components of "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" blend into each other until they become unrecognizable. From this perspective, Stein's poetry succeeds not only at creating something new but also something distinctly alien to the reader.

13 What I would describe as Stein's 'being in becoming', then, can be said to align itself with Edelman's and Halberstam's views in that it produces an uneasiness in the reader by defamiliarizing him/her with the idea of a rose, in the case of "Lifting Belly", or with household objects, rooms, and food in *Tender Buttons*. It embraces the unintelligibility and nonsensicalness ascribed to the queer (or the queer text) and, pushes it to the limit:

> SHOES.
> To be a wall with a damper a stream of pounding way and nearly enough choice makes a steady midnight. It is pus.
> A shallow hole rose on red, a shallow hole in and in this makes ale less. It shows shine. (*Tender Buttons* 14)

While the previous passage eventually references something that we, as readers, associate with shoes ("shine"), the rest of the poem counteracts any attempt at reaching closure by estranging us from traditional notions of what a shoe is supposed to be. From this perspective, Stein's poetry constitutes the type of "perverse refusal" that Edelman presents as a defining factor of queerness: queer theory, for Edelman, refuses "every substantiation of identity, which is always oppositionally defined, and by extension, of history as linear narrative (the poor man's teleology) in which the meaning succeeds in revealing itself—*as itself*—through time" (emphasis in the original 4). In Stein's poetry, the time of the continuous present never succeeds at revealing meaning, just at generating multiple and often contradictory possibilities.

14 Stein's use of everything and the stress that she places on the quotidian and on the act of existing, however, are also what set her ideas on temporality apart from those of Edelman and Muñoz. Although Muñoz contends that his aim is not to widen the divide between present and future but rather to envision a future in the present (49), his construction of "queerness as an utopian formation" does entail "a desire" for "a thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (26). Muñoz's desire for something that is "not yet here" does seem to displace the wonderfully disquieting potential of the everyday that Stein understands so well in favor of a future becoming. For Stein, queerness is not in the horizon (Muñoz 11) but in existing in the present:

> As I say, what one repeats is the scene in which one is acting, the days in which one is living, the coming and going which one is doing, anything one is remembering is a repetition, but *existing as a human being*, there is being listening and hearing is never repetition. It is not repetition if it is what which you are actually doing because naturally each time the emphasis is different. ("Portraits and Repetition," emphasis added 297)

Stein's idea of "existing as a human being", a life drive that is firmly attached to objects and people, is also what separates her from the unboundedness and "sheer negativity" of Edelman's death drive (de Laurentis 250). More importantly, as de Laurentis points out, the life drive does not only rely on attachments and social bonds but also on creativity (250) an intrinsic part of Stein's work, since she not only engages in aesthetic creation but, in essence, re-creates the objects that she portrays in her poetry ("Poetry and Grammar" 333).

15 The "re" in "re-creation" that Stein herself highlights in her discussion of the term, can be easily linked to the beginning again and again of the continuous present, but it also speaks, once

again, to her aversion to naming ("Portraits and Grammar" 333). This re-creation constitutes the essence of the portraits included in *Tender Buttons*, since the whole volume can be seen as an exercise in "avoiding names in re-creating something" (Stein, "Portraits and Grammar" 333). When taken together, all of the aspects that Stein uses to construct the continuous present—re-creation, using everything, insistence, and beginning again and again—ultimately lead to a destabilization of normative time by denying the reader the possibility of closure, progress, and intelligibility. From this perspective then, the continuous present of Stein's work does not necessarily negate the future in favor of a static being-in-the-present, nor does it privilege ideas of becoming, but rather evidences a preference for growing meaning sideways.

16 I have borrowed the notion of "growing sideways" from Katherine Bond Stockton's groundbreaking *The Queer Child* (2009). In the introduction to this volume, Bond Stockton presents the idea of growing sideways as a way to challenge heteronormative ideas about the inherent 'straightness' of children and about the 'verticality' of growing up. She contends that measuring development by these standards assumes that growth stops when we achieve certain heterosexual milestones such as reproduction and marriage. Growing sideways, on the other hand, "suggests that the width of a person's experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing 'adults' and 'children' into lateral contact of surprising sorts" (11). The notion of sideways growth, Bond Stockton argues, is better embodied through the figure of "the ghostly gay child". This figure, she suggests, serves two distinct purposes. On the one hand, through the narrative of coming out, it represents the belated recognition of one's homosexuality. Since no child is supposed to be sexual, Bond Stockton argues that gay adults are not allowed to embrace their homosexuality until they grow up. Thus, homosexuality is only recognized as a sort of "backward birth" (6). On the other hand, this figure also stands for the child who must not be allowed to exist and therefore can only grow "to the side" of heteronormative society (13). Both dimensions of this "protogay" child,[7] Bond Stockton contends, allow us to explore a multitude of alternative temporalities, temporalities that conjure metaphors of "moving suspensions" and "shadows of growth" (14). For Bond Stockton, Stein's poetry, particularly her use of syntax, is a perfect example of one of these "moving suspensions":

[7] Stockton borrows this notion from Sedgwick's 1991 essay "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War Against Effeminate Boys."

in her sentences, "meaning is moving and growing . . . even while time almost seems to hang suspended" (26).

17 The "almost" in the previous quote is particularly important, since it is difficult to argue that Stein's use of insistence freezes time. Even Bond Stockton acknowledges that it might be more accurate to describe the temporality of Stein's poetry as a struggle between "the advance of time" and "stages of lingering" (25). I would go a step further and argue that the temporality of the continuous present is not only horizontal but also vertical in nature. When Stein uses insistence in her poetry, she produces layers of meaning; in other words, she piles meaning after meaning on the same sentence. This vertical movement, in turn, opens up the possibility for multiple alternative meanings to grow "to the side" of the sentence's literal meaning. Thus, when we read "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," meanings grow upwards

Rose is a rose
Rose is arose
a rose is a rose
a rose is arose

allowing the reader to create new meanings on a horizontal, rather than simply a vertical, axis:

Rose is a rose/Rose is beautiful and young
Rose is arose/Rose has just woken up or she is blooming like a rose
a rose is a rose/ a rose is just a rose; we must enjoy it for what it is
a rose is arose/a rose is blooming.

From this perspective, vertical movements of meaning do not necessarily, as Bond Stockton suggests, always breed straightness or linearity; on the contrary, verticality can encourage meaning to grow sideways as well as upwards.

18 In "Queer Texts, Bad Habits," Teresa de Laurentis offers an insightful analysis of Edelman's perspective on the antisocial thesis. She concludes that, Edelman's book, while intelligent and thought-provoking, can still be described as a manifesto in its insistence on presenting queerness "as the figure for an ethical position against 'reproductive futurism"'(257). The problem with this position, de Laurentis argues, is that it turns Edelman's unique brand of queerness into just another "political mainstay, where rhetoric is primarily instrumental" rather than into a truly nonteleological project (258-59). Stein's work, as I have argued, avoids this pitfall by refusing to align itself with any temporal or ontological hierarchy, preferring instead to engage in a cycle of questioning that continuously asks readers to revisit and revise their conceptions of being, becoming, the past, present, and future. Stein's philosophy on temporality,

while reliant on the continuous present as a decentering tool, does not necessarily advocate for its supremacy, instead insisting on a form of dynamic existing that simply fattens the present, growing it both vertically and horizontally through the multiplicity of meanings generated by the beginning again and again of the composition. From this perspective, Stein's "patient time" (McCallum 244) succeeds at spreading the difference (Stein, *Tender Buttons* 4) that is so crucial to both Stein's work and the much larger project of queer studies.

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