‘The limits of repetition, the limits of interpretation: Stein, Beckett and Burroughs.’

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PhD Thesis

2010

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Abstract

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This thesis analyses the outcomes of excessive repetition in literary texts from a relevance theoretic standpoint using the work of Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett and William Burroughs as source material. Repetition that is based on the resemblance of two or more linguistic units can be classified using Wilson’s (2000) categories *metalinguistic* and *interpretive*. The thesis first asks what types of repetitive texts it is possible to create, using Wilson’s categories as the basis of a typology of potential limit cases of repetitive and non-repetitive textual practice, and places actual literary texts into this pre-existent textual space. The outcomes of excessive repetition in actual texts are then analysed by using a Relevance Theory approach to cognitive and aesthetic effects based on the work of Sperber and Wilson (1995), Sperber (1985) and Fabb (1998). Excessive repetition in the work of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs is seen to be a cognitively and aesthetically affective device for two related reasons: repetition involves us in complex but highly rewarding inferencing processes related to what Sperber (1995) calls ‘semi-propositional representations’; repetition leads to intense aesthetic responses based on the experience of a superabundance of potential meaning and creation of impossible interpretive situations. In the areas of the greatest concentration of repetition in the work of these three authors, intense aesthetic effects akin to the sublime are achieved by creating the sublime ‘defective propositional attitude’ described by Fabb (1998) whereby readers experience an intense attitude of belief decoupled from any specific propositional content. By examining Genette’s (1980) distinction between ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ repetition and the Relevance theory notion of effort vs. reward, the concluding chapters of the thesis expand to a more general theoretical discussion regarding the nature of the aesthetic experience generated by literary texts.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1. Outline

This thesis can be broadly defined as answering the question, 'what are the outcomes of excessive repetition in literary texts?'. This question is better expressed in two separate stages:

1. What forms of repetition are possible in literature, and what kinds of literary text can be created by pursuing these forms to their limits?
2. In what ways is excessive repetition aesthetically productive in these texts?

Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett and William Burroughs have created some of the most repetitive works of literature in the English language, and their work is united by an important general outcome: in testing the limits of repetitive textual practice, it tests the limits of its readers' interpretive abilities.[1] The term 'excessive' is deployed throughout this thesis to highlight the key attribute on both sides of the economy of reading repetition in Stein, Beckett and Burroughs. The level of repetition in their texts seems to ask too much of readers, to require an excess of processing effort, and if these excessively repetitive texts are to be considered successful, then this large effort must be off-set by the creation of an equally large cognitive reward. This reward is provided when repetition generates sublime experience, a Kantian ‘moment of excess’, in which readers attempt to overreach their interpretive and imaginative abilities. The most difficult goal of this thesis will be the attempt to describe the ways in which repetition creates intense aesthetic experience such as the sublime. In chapter 2 I will outline a Relevance theory approach to cognitive and aesthetic effects based on the work of Sperber and Wilson (1995), Sperber (1985) and Fabb (1998). This approach will provide a pragmatic framework in which to describe aesthetic responses to highly repetitive texts.

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[1] Sontag (2002) links Stein, Beckett and Burroughs in their respective attempts to 'out-talk' language, claiming that that they display 'the impulse for a discourse that appears both irrepressible (and, in principle, interminable) and strangely inarticulate, painfully reduced' (Sontag, 2002:27).

A related outcome of this testing of the limits of interpretation is that, in the work of these authors, repetition creates texts which, to a greater or lesser extent, subordinate the creation of specific meanings to the process of the creation of ‘meaning’ in general. One aspect of this process is the non-propositional affectiveness of excessive repetition. Repetition will be seen to create a seeming abundance of meaning that cannot be given propositional form by the reader; repetition is felt to be ‘meaningful’ but this meaningfulness cannot be given specific form. In addition, these repetitive texts come to be ‘about’ the creation of meaning and the way that meaning is generated. That is to say, much of the aesthetic reward of excessively repetitive texts comes from the reader’s gradually unfolding awareness - on a meta-level - of the texts’ methods for producing meaning.

The contention that the aesthetic effects of repetition are often unrelated to particular meanings has been advanced in less technical terms by Bartlett (1994). Bartlett sees in the ‘tedious’ and ‘insistent’ work of Wilde, Genet, White and Goytisolo, a writing ‘not about saying what you mean, but about manipulating the pleasure of ‘saying’ itself.

Pleasure of saying, rather than saying what you mean'. He suggests that in a text such as *Dorian Gray* certain words are repeated so many times that 'they begin to acquire an energy beyond the value of words themselves' and claims that Wilde's sentences 'accumulate, rather than make a point' (Bartlett, 1994:10-12). Anyone who has read Stein's *Making of Americans* will recognise the pertinence of this statement to the type of repetitive literature that will be analysed in this thesis. The following chapters will use a Relevance theory framework to attempt to explain Bartlett's intuition that cumulative repetition can generate intense aesthetic responses. Bartlett also highlights a particularly important attribute of this cumulative effect of repetition when he argues that repetitive writing seeks to make us 'ecstatic… through the *effort*, the *labour* of monotony' (Bartlett, 1994:16). This effort and labour is the effort not only or primarily of the writer, but of the reader. We will see that the excessive repetition found in Stein, Beckett and Burroughs offers little in the way of propositional meanings; rather, it achieves its cumulative effects by engaging the reader in a continual effort to go beyond the limits of their interpretative abilities.

A further motivating factor in the choice of these particular authors is the fact that their repetitive practices have been theorised before, both by critics, and by the authors themselves. The choice of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs provides us with an existent set of theories of repetition which can be used as starting points for analysis. An important function of this thesis will be as a site in which various theories of repetition can be tested and compared, accepted, adapted or rejected. Theories of repetition related specifically to the work of my chosen authors are provided by Kawin (1972), Connor (1988), Russell (2001), and Miles (2002). Relevant theories of repetition, based on the texts of other twentieth century authors are provided by Miller (1982), Johnstone (1990), and Kumar (1991). Other General theoretical discussions of repetition in language and literature which will be considered are those of Genette (1980), Sperber and Wilson, (1995), Grice (1999) Jakobson (1987), Pomorska (1985), Pilkington (2000), and Derrida, (2004). A major point of difference between this thesis and the works listed is that my focus will be on the *limits* of repetitive writing. This thesis will focus on areas of greatest quantity and concentration of repetition in the work of my three authors, and on the points where repetition poses the most difficulty to interpretation.[2]

2. Typology of possible repetitive practice

The remainder of this introductory chapter will sketch an answer to the first stage of our initial question by defining the types of repetition that can exist in literature and outlining a typology of what types of repetitive text it is possible to produce. The complex answer to the second stage of our question will only really begin to emerge as we encounter actual context-specific repetition in subsequent chapters of the thesis.

To avoid a potentially cumbersome descriptive apparatus I will separate instances of repetition into two broad categories, according to the ways in which resemblance holds in language.[3] In 'Metarepresentation in Linguistic Communication,' Deirdre

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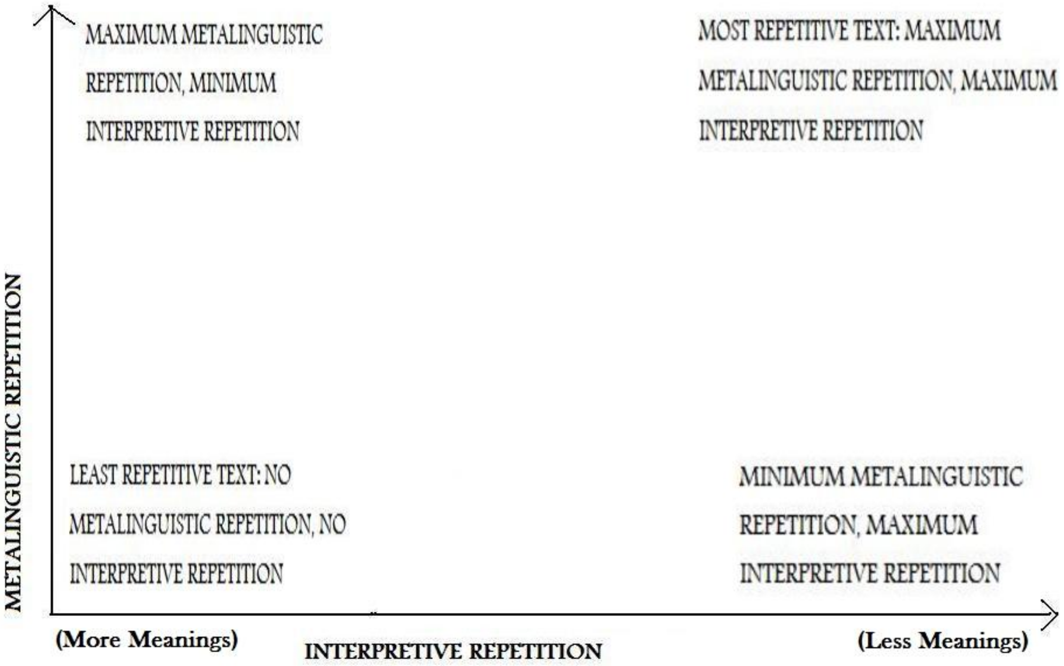
[2] Another set of texts that will be important to this thesis are the writings of the Oulipo group (for a general overview see Matthews and Brotchie 2005). Interest in limit case texts and in potential meaning inevitably leads to a consideration of the writings of the Oulipo (rough translation: 'workshop of potential literature'). It will be productive at points to compare the Oulipo's rigorously defined potential texts with the less predictively organised repetitive texts of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs. The Oulipo's theoretical models provide limit cases of particular repetitive textual practices and their infinitely recursive texts are highly relevant to the concern in this thesis with repetition and the unlimited.

[3] For a detailed account of the problems of defining repetition from a pragmatics/discourse analysis perspective, and a more detailed set of distinctions of linguistic repetition, see Johnstone et. al. (1994).

Wilson shows that resemblances involve shared properties and that these properties can be of any type: ‘perceptual, linguistic, logical, mathematical, conceptual, sociolinguistic, stylistic, typographic...’ (Wilson 2000:426). In the case of direct quotation there is an increase in the salience of formal or linguistic properties, indirect quotation increases the salience of semantic or logical properties. The first type of resemblance Wilson calls *metalinguistic,* the second, *interpretive*. I will adopt these terms to refer to the two main types of repetition under discussion in this thesis. These will be *metalinguistic repetition* and *interpretive repetition*. All forms of repetition that are based on resemblance between two or more linguistic units can be placed in these categories.

The interaction of metalinguistic repetition and interpretive repetition within a text gives rise to three potential limit cases of repetitive textual practice and one limit case of non-repetition, as illustrated in the following chart.


MAXIMUM METALINGUISTIC REPETITION, MINIMUM INTERPRETIVE REPETITION
MOST REPETITIVE TEXT: MAXIMUM METALINGUISTIC REPETITION, MAXIMUM INTERPRETIVE REPETITION
LEAST REPETITIVE TEXT: NO METALINGUISTIC REPETITION, NO INTERPRETIVE REPETITION
MINIMUM METALINGUISTIC REPETITION, MAXIMUM INTERPRETIVE REPETITION
METALINGUISTIC REPETITION
(More Meanings)
INTERPRETIVE REPETITION
(Less Meanings)

This chart shows that at the extremes of the two varieties of repetition it is possible to imagine:

1. A text which is completely repetitive, both in metalinguistic resemblance and interpretive resemblance. This text would repeat the same linguistic units and these linguistic units would be interpreted as meaning exactly the same thing in each instance of use.
2. A text which is completely metalinguistically repetitive but non-repetitive in terms of interpretive resemblance between parts. This text would repeat the same linguistic units but each of these units would be interpreted as meaning something different in each instance of use. The decoded concepts that constitute each repetitive utterance may be the same, but the explicatures and implicatures generated will be different from repetition to repetition.

3. A text which is metalinguistically non-repetitive but completely interpretively repetitive. This text would contain no linguistic repetition but would still repeat the exact same meaning/s.
4. A text which is completely non-repetitive, both metalinguistically and interpretively.

These textual spaces or potentials exist prior to the creation of actual texts. Later it will be possible to place the actual texts analysed in this thesis into the space mapped out by this typology. An outcome of this method will be to find out if the work of any of my chosen authors approaches the limits of repetition, whether other texts could be imagined which would adequately stand as limit cases of repetitive practice, and whether any of the proposed limits could not be actualised in a real text.

It is important to note at this stage that the above typology does not include any indication of the quantity of repetition a text contains. Each text which will be included in this typology will be treated as a separate object in this respect: placement on the chart does not reflect quantity-of-repetition comparisons between texts. On this chart repetitiveness is measured by how exactly a text repeats, not by how many times it repeats. For this reason Gertrude Stein’s line ‘a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose’ is more repetitive, according to the rules of the above typology, than her novel *The Making of Americans*, because it is more exactly repetitive than the sprawling mass of less exact repetitions which exist in the larger text. A central claim of this thesis will be that repetition can be much more affective when it is encountered in large quantities; the above typology is completely unconnected to such issues of response.

Aside from quantity there is one other aspect of repetition that is not captured by the above chart. For repetition that is based on the resemblance between two linguistic units the distinction metalinguistic/interpretive is the only one necessary. However, repetition can hold in texts in one other way which does not necessarily involve more than one linguistic unit, and does not necessarily involve a resemblance relationship. That is, the repetition of fictional events represented by the text. I will use the terminology proposed by Genette (1980) and refer to repetition of components of the fictional world as ‘story repetition’, and repetition that exists in the language of the text as ‘narrative repetition’. This important distinction will be dealt with at length in chapter 7. For the moment however, it is important to note that I am assuming that narrative repetition must be based on resemblance to be objectively verifiable since it involves the repetition of two or more linguistic units.

3. A note on Deleuze

There exists however, a critical tradition which would view any conception of repetition based purely on resemblance as being too simplistic. Several previous studies of repetition in literature (e.g. Miller 1982, Connor 1988, Johnston 1990, Kumar 1991) distinguish and attempt to analyse two types of repetition: *naked* and *clothed* (or sometimes *complex*). This distinction is drawn from the work of Giles Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* (2004a, 2004b). It would take an entire thesis to attempt to explicate Deleuze’s radical and highly complex philosophy as encountered in these two books but in what follows I will try to provide a basic summary of his arguments regarding repetition while at the same time highlighting difficulties that previous studies of repetition in literature have encountered when trying to analyse instances of clothed repetition. I am indebted throughout this section to Williams' (2003) *Giles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition*.

One of the central tenets of Deleuze's thought is that reality consists of the relations between the *actual* and the *virtual*, and a very basic definition of Deleuze's two varieties of repetition is that naked repetition is repetition of two *actual* things which resemble each other, while clothed repetition is repetition which is not based on resemblance but rather is the repetition of pure differences which exist only in the *virtual* side of reality. This pure difference, or difference-in-itself, is not *actual*, but it does exist in a relationship of reciprocal determination with the actual.

The fact that clothed repetition is an attribute of the virtual side of reality which can only be, in Deleuze's terminology, 'expressed' in the actual, makes it very difficult to analyse. When we seek out examples of repetition in a literary text, the source of repetition is *actual*, it is a text which exists as a component of the actual world. Undoubtedly for Deleuze this actual textual object also consists of a virtual side, and this virtual side is expressed in the actual text. However, the actual text has an identity where the virtual 'Ideas' and 'intensities' it expresses do not, and this is because they consist of pure variations. The way in which virtual Ideas and intensities are expressed in the actual is difficult to identify because, as Williams shows, 'expression is not regular, each expression is one off and cannot be repeated or guaranteed to behave in the same way at another time'. Every expression of the virtual in the actual entails changes in the relations that hold between virtual Ideas and intensities, and this makes every new relation of actual to virtual unique. Description of these pure variations will then be 'open to the accusation that it has identified something unidentifiable'

(Williams, 2003:200-202). In contrast, instances of naked repetition, even though they may be thought of as ‘illusory’ from the point of view of Deleuze’s deductions, do exist in the actual text which we read and are identifiable and objectively verifiable because they are based on a relationship of resemblance.

Literary texts do, however, contain a special type of repetition which is objectively, *actually* present, but which can also be verified as an instance of repetition which is not based on resemblance. This is repetition which exists as a component of the fictional world. In the terminology employed above, repetition without resemblance can only exist actually and objectively in a text as an instance of ‘story’ repetition. For example, if a narrator or character experiences repetition which is not based on resemblance then this repetition still exists in the actual as a description given in an actual text, yet it is still undoubtedly an instance of repetition without resemblance. This special fictional variety of Deleuzian repetition is analysed in J. Hillis Miller’s *Repetition in Fiction* (1982) and John Johnston’s *Carnival of Repetition* (1990). Although it is not explicitly stated in their books, these authors do not attempt to discuss instances of clothed repetition which exist unmediated by a character or narrator in the texts they analyse. All the examples of Deleuzian repetition given in these texts are experienced by fictional characters or are components or events in the fictional world, and as such they are not available to be experienced unmediated, simply through the form of the texts, as components of the narrative, by the reader. This story version of clothed repetition is the only kind which is objectively, actually present in literary texts, and which is not subject to what Deleuze calls the ‘dice throw’ of interaction with the virtual (Deleuze, 2004a:250-251). Since I will be concerned in this thesis with narrative repetitions that exist as formal characteristics of texts rather than as fictional presentations within texts, I would necessarily encounter problems if I were to try to define any of the repetition I am analysing as 'clothed'.

Previous studies of clothed repetition in literature which do not confine themselves to the discussion of this special variety of story repetition must necessarily understate the complexity of the concept by avoiding Deleuze's clear statement that clothed repetition 'is virtual' (Deleuze, 2004a:106). Disregarding the virtual nature of clothed repetition means that it can be treated as simply another name for repetition with variation. In his description of Deleuzian repetition in *The Joycean Labyrinth* (1991), Udya Kumar begins by stating that 'Deleuze makes a distinction between naked and clothed repetition: the former signifies repetition of the same as the same, while the latter denotes repetition with variation, i.e. with difference' (Kumar, 1991:7). Stephen Connor (1988) also ends up with this definition of clothed repetition in his *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, Text,* where he describes the two forms of repetition he has analysed as: 'Deleuze's 'naked' repetition, repetition as faithful exact copy – which is to say repetition as the servant of presence – and 'clothed' repetition – repetition as reproduction, or repetition-with-difference, which tends to disrupt presence' (Connor, 1988:185). The correct short definition of clothed repetition is 'repetition *of* difference'. 'Repetition with difference' or 'repetition with variation', on the other hand, are highly significant simplifications of Deleuze's concept. To describe clothed repetition as repetition with variation is still to think of difference as secondary to conceptual identity, we are thinking of *actual* differences between two well defined things. In cases of repetition with variation we are still dealing with a resemblance relationship between two objects, the existence of a variation within the repetition just means that the resemblance will be looser. Repetition with variation is essentially repetition with differences that are based on predicates, and this is explicitly not what Deleuze would consider to be clothed repetition. In this study I will be talking about many instances of repetition with difference or repetition with variation, but I will not be claiming that these are examples of clothed repetition. This is not to say that Kumar and Connor do not produce insightful readings of Joyce and Beckett respectively. Both authors use Deleuze's ideas to gain important insights about literary texts, but at the cost of oversimplifying a crucial aspect of his philosophy.

Kumar, for example, discusses the recurrence of the word 'metempsychosis' and its variants in *Ulysses*, arguing that in most cases the word's meaning 'becomes secondary in relation to the series of discursive contexts it highlights.'

> The different ways in which the same verbal element is used in different discourses seem to be the primary object of attention here. In contrast to naked repetition where the use of names or other verbal elements with unvaried meaning aids the reader's retentive memory, here the reader's memory is used in the service of a textual strategy. Instead of reaffirming an identity which unites all acts of repetition, here repetition creates a series of differences and dislocations. (Kumar, 1991:25)

The problem here is not with the conclusions that Kumar draws about the effects of repetition in *Ulysses*, but with the fact that he is defining naked repetition as repetition of a verbal element with unvaried meaning and clothed repetition as repetition of the same verbal element which produces dislocation of meaning. This repetition of verbal elements is based on resemblance in both cases, and regardless of the effects produced, both cases are still instances of naked repetition.

Similarly, Connor at times treats naked repetition as a kind of post hoc concept that can be applied to repetition based on resemblance, dependent on the interpretation of its outcomes. Connor criticises previous studies of Beckett which stress the unifying effect of repetition in his work. He suggests that previous critics have conceived of Beckett's repetitions as naked, subordinating repetition to the return of the same, and the essential unity of Beckett's oeuvre. Connor, on the other hand, sees Beckett's repetitions as presenting a challenge 'to notions of essential unity' (Connor, 1988:13). In chapter 4 I will provide a pragmatic account of Beckett's repetition which supports Connor's general claim here, but regardless of the truth or falsity of Connor's analysis, his interpretation of Beckett's repetitions does not make them instances of clothed repetition. To admit this would be to reduce the difference between naked and clothed repetition to one of interpretation of effects. Regardless of how we choose to view the effects of repetition in Beckett's work, it will still be the case that the repetition is recognised because it is naked repetition and based on resemblance.

Connor's engagement with Deleuze in his introduction can help us highlight some other important notions about repetition and difference, and it will be worth discussing these a little further here, (and especially so since Connor analyses many of the same texts that will be discussed in chapter 4). For Connor, naked repetition is repetition of the same, an undistorted reproduction that has identity of concept or representation. Clothed or disguised repetition, on the other hand, 'adds something to its original and seems to impart a difference to it'. Connor suggests that in repetition ‘we confront the form of invisible but irreducible difference, the form, perhaps of ‘pure’ difference, ungoverned by pre-existing categories of representation…’ before glossing Deleuze’s ‘*repetition complexe*’ as ‘repetition which resists its subordination to the function of mechanical reproduction of the same.’ Connor further explains that, ‘in order to be recognisable as such repetition must, in however small a degree, be different from its original, this “difference” is invisible except in the fact of its pure differentiality’ (Connor, 1988:6-7).

Here the claim is that if two things are almost identical but different ‘in however small a degree’ – they exhibit pure difference, which can be taken to mean one of two things. 1. *Two objects are identical but they display difference only by dint of being two separate objects, in other words two objects have identity of concept.* Although this idea of difference between two identical things, difference without a concept, is an interesting one, it is not the type of difference that Deleuze calls clothed. In fact, in the introduction to *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze explicitly states that he wants to go past the notion of repetition being simply difference without a concept, and at the same time to find the concept of difference (Deleuze 2004a:30). 2. *No two things are ever completely identical, they always differ in an infinitely small degree.* This is repetition with infinitely small difference or variation and still clearly results in thinking difference from within representation. For Deleuze, this is one of the central problems in the history of philosophy, and he sets out to revise this view in *Difference and Repetition*.

In either of these two cases Connor is undoubtedly describing naked repetition, repetition based on representation, but it seems that he means to be discussing clothed or complex repetition. In any case Connor claims that repetition like this gives us the idea of ‘pure difference’, difference ‘as such’ (Connor, 1988:5-7). However, according to Deleuze, difference as such, or difference-in-itself, is not actual, it only exists in the virtual and hence could not be an attribute of the type of repetition described by Connor here. At best, naked repetition, or repetition of difference, could be ‘expressed’ in actual repetition that Connor is discussing here. When Connor makes the statement about pure difference he seems to be talking about difference between two actual things, but Deleuze’s pure difference, or difference-in-itself is only found in the virtual side of reality, which cannot be fully known but only deduced (Williams, 2003:11).

I hope to have shown here the difficulties in attempting to identify and analyse in literary texts, true instances of clothed repetition as it is defined by Deleuze. At no point will this thesis attempt to challenge Deleuze’s philosophy. Rather, it challenges some of the uses it has been put to previously in literary studies. I do not argue against the existence of clothed repetition, rather I seek to confine my field of enquiry to naked repetition, based on resemblance. This repetition based on resemblance will range from instances of exact metalinguistic repetition to instances of interpretive repetition which hold much looser resemblance. For example, instances of repetition based on loose resemblance can be identified often across Burroughs’ novels because he regularly repeats subject matter from text to text. These repetitions may not contain any direct metalinguistic repetition, but still we recognise them as instances of repetition because interpretive resemblance holds between the texts in some loose way. At no point will I have claimed to have identified an instance of clothed repetition in these loose resemblances, for the simple fact that the repetitions I will analyse will be *actual* and *narrative*, i.e. they exist in the text and are based on the resemblance between two parts of the text. These repetitions of the same may be ‘illusory’ from the point of view of Deleuze’s deductions regarding the virtual; the instances of repetition based on resemblance discussed in the following chapters may be regarded as ‘hiding’ more profound instances of clothed repetition of pure difference. Nonetheless this thesis will analyse them as instances of brute repetition of *actual* things without attempting to make any deductions regarding the virtual based on this analysis. Put simply, the interest of this thesis does not lie with the deeper transcendental causes and structures of repetition, but with pragmatic analysis of the contextual effects and aesthetic outcomes of the employment of repetition that is based upon forms of resemblance.

4. Beyond the typology

This introduction has dealt with the different types of repetition that can be present in texts, and the hypothetical limits of repetitive textual practice. However, the formal description provided by the typology and distinctions outlined above does not explain the specific outcomes, the aesthetic functions, of excessive repetition. The online effects of processing repetition in real texts is context specific and cannot be captured by these descriptive tools alone. Defining a set of formal practices is relatively straightforward, but understanding our response to these practices can be a difficult matter. As Johnstone et. al. (1994) point out,

> there’s an emerging quality to many repetition phenomena: as an utterance is being spoken, its functionality is up for grabs in the subsequent discourse.

> Function is in principle indeterminate at the moment of occurrence. So we might take objection to the presupposition that we can identify and taxonomise functions. We’re in danger of objectification; function is always a hypothesis. What’s really interesting about repetition is that the function is always open. We can identify a range of functions, but it’s context, after the fact, which really determines what’s happening. (Johnstone et al., 1994:10-11)

The following chapter will outline a pragmatic approach to repetition, based on Relevance theory, that will allow us to move from descriptions of repetition to descriptions of its context specific cognitive effects. Although not all of the arguments presented in this thesis are based on pragmatic analysis, Relevance theory will inform every chapter and will be significant to all the general claims made about the aesthetic effects of excessive repetition.

CHAPTER 2. RESPONSE TO REPETITION: RELEVANCE THEORY AND AESTHETIC EFFECTS

1. Introduction to Relevance Theory[4]

Relevance theory is an inferential model of communication. Its central claim is that human cognitive processes ‘are geared towards achieving the greatest possible cognitive effect for the smallest possible processing effort’ (Sperber and Wilson: 1995:vii). Relevance theory assumes that a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which will be inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided. It views the decoded linguistic meaning of any utterance as just one among several ‘inputs’ to the audience’s overall inferencing process, that is, the process which will yield an interpretation of the speaker’s meaning. Relevance theory defines as relevant any input which yields a positive cognitive effect when processed in the context of the audience’s available assumptions. The most important type of such positive cognitive effects is the ‘contextual assumption’, deducible from the input and context together, but from neither separately.

The relevance of an input is determined on the basis of a system of effort and reward on the part of the audience, as expressed in the following formulation:

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[4] My account here is based mainly on Sperber and Wilson (1995) and Wilson and Sperber (2002).

Relevance of an input to an individual

(a) Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individuals at that time.

(b) Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

(Wilson and Sperber 2002:252)

Relevance theory assumes that ostensive inferential communication involves two layers of intention on the part of the communicator, these are: the ‘informative intention’, the intention to inform the audience of something; and the ‘communicative intention’, the intention to inform the audience of the informative intention. By producing an ostensive stimulus the communicator will encourage the audience to presume that the stimulus is relevant enough to be worth processing. This leads to the definition of the communicative principle of relevance and the notion of optimal relevance:

Communicative principle of relevance

Every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

Optimal relevance

An ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to the audience if:

(a) It is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s processing effort;

(b) It is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator’s abilities and preferences.

(Wilson and Sperber 2002:256)

The communicative principle of relevance and the previously stated formulation regarding effort and reward are particularly important to this thesis because the experimental, repetitive nature of the texts I will be analysing often demands a high degree of processing effort from readers. If these texts obey the communicative principle of relevance then, accordingly, the greater demands in processing effort must be balanced by the creation of large cognitive rewards in order for relevance to be met. Importantly, we will also see that the type of effort that poetic texts ask us to make is often cognitively rewarding in itself (see discussion of Sperber 1985 and Fabb 1998 later in this chapter).

We can now turn our attention to the specifics of the relevance-theoretic account of verbal comprehension. Wilson and Sperber argue that ‘verbal comprehension starts with the recovery of a linguistically encoded sentence meaning, which must be contextually enriched in a variety of ways to yield a full-fledged speaker’s meaning’ (Wilson and Sperber, 2002:258). This contextual enrichment may consist of such tasks as the interpretation of irony, metaphor, ambiguity, ellipses, underdeterminations, and so forth. Relevance theory provides, in the form of the communicative principle and the definition of optimal relevance, the suggestion of a practical procedure for performing the task of contextual enrichment:

Relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure

(a) Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects; test interpretive hypotheses [...] in order of accessibility.

(b) Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.

(Wilson and Sperber, 2002:259)

As mentioned above, linguistic decoding is just one input to the overall comprehension process. Relevance theory sees the semantic representations produced by linguistic decoding as useful ‘only as a source of hypotheses and evidence for... inferential communication’ (Sperber and Wilson 1995:176). In order to achieve comprehension, the hearer of an utterance must perform certain inferential subtasks. The utterance must be assigned a propositional form by selecting, completing and enriching one of its possible semantic representations. Any assumptions that are explicitly communicated by the development of the logical form of the utterance are labelled ‘explicatures’. Explicatures are ‘a combination of linguistically encoded and contextually inferred conceptual features’, and can be seen as more or less explicit depending on the contribution of the contextual features towards its recovery (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:182). Any assumption that is not explicitly communicated by an utterance is an ‘implicature’. There are two types of implicature, implicated premises (supplied by the hearer) and implicated conclusions (deduced from the explicatures of the utterance and the context). Implicatures may also vary in strength. The weaker the encouragement from the speaker, and the wider the range of possibilities among which the hearer must choose, the weaker the implicatures recovered.

The hearer’s process of recovery of explicatures and implicatures from utterances are seen in the following formulation of sub-tasks which together comprise the overall comprehension process (it should be noted that these sub-tasks are not seen as being sequentially ordered, their relationship is often reciprocal and they only cease to affect one another once relevance has been met).

Sub-tasks in the overall comprehension process

(a) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content (explicatures) via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes.

(b) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions (implicated premises)

(c) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications (implicated conclusions)

(Wilson and Sperber, 2002:261)

As will be clear from the above summary, Sperber and Wilson are mainly concerned with tracing this comprehension process in instances of spontaneous inferencing, but the authors do suggest that Relevance theory can be also be applied to the lengthier process of textual interpretation (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:75). The applicability of Relevance to literary texts is assumed in works such as Blakemore (1992, 1993, 2008, 2009) and Pilkington (1991, 2000). The next section will discuss the application of Relevance theory (and to a lesser extent pragmatic analysis more generally) to the interpretation of repetition in literature.

2. Repetition and aesthetic effects

In a discussion of implicature and style, Sperber and Wilson focus on the emphatic effects of repetitive utterances. They suggest that when faced with a repetitive utterance, a hearer working with the assumption of optimal relevance must assume that the extra effort of processing the repetition will be outweighed ‘by some increase in contextual effects triggered by the repetition itself’ (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:220). They analyse the following examples of epizeuxis (immediate repetition of word or phrase).

(1) Here’s a red sock, here’s a red sock, here’s a blue sock.
(2) He went for a long, long walk.
(3) There were houses, houses everywhere.
(4) I shall never, never smoke again.
(5) There’s a fox, a fox in the garden.
(6) My childhood days are gone, gone.

Examples (1) (2) and (3) are seen to modify the propositional form and explicatures of the utterance (there are *two* red socks, the walk was *very* long, there were *many* houses). In (4) the speaker attaches a higher confirmation value to the assumption expressed (she will *definitely* never smoke again). This higher confirmation value strengthens the explicature and its contextual implications and thereby increases the contextual effects. The last two examples are different however. These utterances increase contextual effects by encouraging the hearer to expand the context and thereby add further implicatures. The outcome of repetition in example (5) is seen to be quite straightforward, triggering ‘strong and predictable contextual implications, such as ‘The chickens are in danger’’ (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:220-1).

The final example is more complex. Sperber and Wilson suggest that in processing examples such as this last one, the hearer is asked to take responsibility for imagining a wide variety of further implicatures that the speaker may be intending to communicate. They discuss the differing pragmatic effects of the phrases (6) 'My childhood days are gone, gone' and (7) 'My childhood days are gone', concluding that, while both of these utterances share the same logical form,

> What [6] has is more *implicatures* than [7] that is, more contextual assumptions and implications which receive some degree of backing from the speaker. To justify the repetition of 'gone', the hearer must think of all the implicatures that the speaker could reasonably have expected him to derive from [7], and then assume that there is a whole range of still further premises and conclusions which the speaker wants to back. For this the hearer must expand the context. What look like non-propositional effects associated with the expression of attitudes, feelings and states of mind can be approached in terms of the notion of weak implicatures… (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:221-2)

Repetition used in this fashion creates what Sperber and Wilson call 'poetic effects' which 'marginally increase the manifestness of a great many weakly manifest assumptions.'[5] Poetic effects, then, are an outcome of making manifest more propositional content (weak implicatures), but this process is also seen to give rise to non-propositional, *affective* effects:

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[5] Blakemore argues that [2] may also produce such poetic effects: 'Sperber and Wilson suggest that in [2] it would be consistent with the principle of relevance to assume that the speaker wanted to indicate that the walk was longer than the hearer would have otherwise thought… According to this analysis, [2] is equivalent in import to [8]: I went for a very long walk. Perhaps there are contexts in which a speaker of [2] would intend nothing more than this. However, it seems to me that in most contexts the utterance of [2] would yield effects not produced by [8]…In contrast with [8], a hearer who is presented with the repetition in [2] is encouraged to dwell on what he or she knows or imagines about long walks - the physical discomfort perhaps, or, alternatively, the exhilaration derived from the freedom. Obviously, the exact direction will depend on clues such **as** the speaker's facial expression or

> Poetic effects create common impressions rather than common knowledge. Utterances with poetic effects can be used to create this sense of apparently affective rather than cognitive mutuality. What we are suggesting is that, if you look at these affective effects through the microscope of relevance theory, you see a wide array of minute cognitive effects (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:224).

The nature of the ‘wide array of minute cognitive effects’ is left unclear in Sperber and Wilson’s account. Pilkington (2000) is an attempt to expand this aspect of Sperber and Wilson’s theory of poetic effect, but before turning to his discussion of non-propositional effects, it will be useful to highlight the key points from Pilkington’s discussion of the effects of repetition.

Pilkington traces the specific outcomes of epizeuxis, reiterating the relevance theoretic claim that repetition which does not change the propositional form of an utterance may offset its greater processing demands through the range of implicatures it creates. Pilkington discusses examples (6) and (7) (provided above) and argues that in (6) ‘the effort involved in reconstructing the same propositional form leads to greater activation of assumptions stored in the encyclopaedic entries attached to the

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tone of voice. But the point is, it is only a direction. The extra relevance is achieved by a deeper exploration of the hearer’s contextual assumptions about long walks, and the result is a wide range of weak implicatures and closer understanding of the speaker’s attitude or emotions. In other words, I believe that the repetition in [2] achieves the same kind of non-propositional stylistic effects which Sperber and Wilson argue are yielded by [6].’ (Blakemore, 1993:115) constituent concepts,' in this case, the concept childhood.[6] He suggests that the following process is activated by poetic examples of epizeuxis:

> The accessing of a concept involves the activation of assumptions stored at the encyclopaedic entry attached to that concept. In the time available online only those assumptions receiving further activation from the accessing of other concepts will become salient… In the case of epizeuxis, an encyclopaedic entry is activated by the first occurrence of the word or phrase and the repetition and reactivation takes place before the initially activated assumptions have fully deactivated. This allows the assumptions stored in the encyclopaedic entry to become more salient in the processing time available. From another point of view, given the preparedness to expend a certain amount of processing effort, the repetition allows the extra effort to achieve more contextual effects. This view is consistent with relevance theory considerations of the importance of processing constraints in determining initial contexts for interpretation.[7] (Pilkington, 200:128-9)

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[6] Another interesting modification that Pilkington offers to the discussion of epizeuxis in *Relevance* is that certain concepts, unless they appear in particular contexts, will activate a stock response based on a metarepresented set of assumptions. Pilkington argues that example (6) is such a case. Here 'a genuine attempt to access and construct new assumptions is blocked by the presence of a metarepresented set of assumptions, equivalent to a cultural stereotype, about childhood'. The easily accessed social stereotype of the concept 'childhood' blocks the wide search through context that Sperber and Wilson suggest arises when we process this utterance, and 'yields [instead] a comparatively narrow range of relatively strong implicatures' (Pilkington, 2000:127). Pilkington argues that not enough contextual information is given in (6) for a genuine search of the encyclopaedic entry for 'childhood'. Such a search would require a 'great deal of time and energy' and there is no further context in (6) to direct such a search, hence the time and energy available dictates that the meta-represented set of beliefs will be accessed.
Pilkington highlights a Biblical passage which he considers a more poetic example of epizeuxis: 'Oh, Absalom, my son, my son.' He suggests that 'the wider context of the story in the Bible plays an important role in giving direction to the retrieval and construction of contextual assumptions'. The 'richness of the effects *follow from…*' various contextual information in the Bible (Pilkington, 2000:128). Pilkington's claim here is that contextual information makes more salient a range of further implicatures.

[7] This view is also found in Merritt (1994) although couched in less technical terms: 'the repetition of the same form, with no new information, automatically creates a longer time period in which the information being conveyed can be processed' (Merritt, 1994:28).

Pilkington claims that the concept involved in repetition of this sort must have 'a rich and complex' encyclopaedic entry in order to achieve poetic effects. A concept such as 'fox', from Sperber and Wilson's example (5), would not work in the same way as 'childhood' does in example (6), and neither would the concept 'teenage' if it was substituted for 'childhood' in (6) (Pilkington, 2000:126). He later reiterates this point and provides further examples:

> It should be noted that repetition can only be poetic if there is sufficient context to explore – if, in other words, there is a rich enough encyclopaedic entry to activate. Consider the following examples 'Oh Fred my colleague, my colleague' 'The pubs have closed, closed.' These appear ridiculous because a search is encouraged which has nowhere to go. (Pilkington 2000:129)

It will be necessary to modify Pilkington's view when discussing the large scale repetition encountered in many works by Beckett, Burroughs, and especially Stein. These authors activate intense aesthetic effects through repetition, but the repetition is not always, or even mainly, repetition of rich and complex concepts. Even if the concepts are rich, these authors make them secondary to the process of the search for meaning in general.[8] The repetition could mean any number of things, the inferencing process in some cases is potentially unlimited, but none of these meanings is particularly important. Stein in particular almost always repeats words and phrases involving pronouns and shifters which are just barely representational. On the small scale that he is discussing, Pilkington's argument seems to be correct; we need only consider our differing response to Stein's famous line 'a rose is a rose is a rose' if it were re-written as 'a carpet is a carpet is a carpet' or with any equally non-poetic noun. Obviously poetic effects cannot arise purely as a result of repetitive structures on a small scale. This point is also made by Sperber and Wilson in *Relevance*, where they suggest that the same stylistic structures will not always lead to the same contextual effects: 'a repetitive syntactic pattern does not invariably give rise to noticeable stylistic effects. The same is true of all the figures of style identified by classical rhetoric' (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:222). We saw at the end of the previous chapter that a similar view is also expressed by Johnstone et. al. (1994). In the following chapters however, it will become clear that as the quantity of repetition increases, particular content and particular concepts become less important to the creation of intense aesthetic experience.[9]

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[8] We must question, in any case, how much more meaning the repeated process of accessing a rich concept would generate after it has been repeated a large number of times (in contrast to the single repetition that Pilkington's cases contain).

In the latter stages of his book, Pilkington suggests that an account of aesthetic experience purely in terms of pragmatic processes, or as an array of minute cognitive effects, 'leaves a number of important questions unanswered' and he goes on to provide some speculative arguments regarding the nature of aesthetic qualia and the emotional aspects of aesthetic experience (Pilkington, 2000:169).[10] Poetic representations work, he suggests, not only by making a wide range of assumptions marginally more salient, but by evoking 'intense, subtly discriminated and precise qualitative states' (Pilkington, 2000:191). This conclusion arises from Pilkington's development of the idea that poets wish to express non-standard and non-stereotypical

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[9] Throughout this thesis I will use the broader term 'intense aesthetic experience' rather than 'poetic effect' because many of the effects I will trace in the work of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs are not strictly implicature based.

[10] 'Pragmatic theory allows us to discuss and analyse the propositional core of the poetic representation. Discussion of the qualitative states must remain largely speculative' (Pilkington, 2000:191)

‘phenomenal states’. Pilkington cites Shklovsky’s (1965) well known statement that ‘art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*’ (Quoted in Pilkington, 2000:18, I will return to Shklovsky’s argument later in this chapter, quoting this passage in full). Discussing Burns’ line ‘my love is like a red, red rose’ Pilkington suggests that:

> there is something that it is like to experience a rose – a red, red rose – that is similar to what it is like to experience ‘my love’. In working out what this is, of course, the reader has to use his experience (memories of the qualitative feel) of being in love: horticultural expertise would not be sufficient. These kind of comparisons force one to concentrate on what it is like to experience a red rose and to focus on how the experience of someone’s love might be a similar kind of experience. The extension of experience encouraged here involves making more salient (and enriching) not thoughts (as propositional forms, or sets of propositional forms), but phenomenal state attitudes. (Pilkington, 2000:157-8)

Pilkington argues that the indeterminacy of the propositional outcomes of poetic utterances (the array of assumptions that is ‘so wide that it clearly becomes impossible to say which ones actually are communicated’) ‘helps to sharpen’ the accurate and precise phenomenal tone of the experience that an author seeks to communicate (Pilkington, 2000:182). One slight weakness with Pilkington’s examples of this process in action is that he only seems to be able to exemplify the evocation of phenomenal state attitudes whenever the poetic text asks us to make a comparison of two things, i.e. in cases of metaphor or simile. He goes on to suggests however, that epizeuxis will work towards the same goal by encouraging a more thorough exploration of context, thus activating a ‘phenomenal store (containing memories of qualitative aspects of emotional states)’ (Pilkington, 2000:160).

Support for this argument can be found in Gertrude Stein’s discussion of the effects of her line ‘a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose’. Stein claims her repetition in this line works to ‘put some strangeness, as something unexpected, into the structure of the sentence in order to bring back vitality to the noun… I know in life we don’t go around saying “… is a… is a… is a…”…but I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years’(Stein, 1967:7). We must note however, that Stein’s line is an unusually poetic one in her work; ‘rose’ being a much richer concept than the usual content of her repetitions. Contrary to Stein’s claim that her work is motivated by ‘an intellectual passion for exactitude in the description of inner and outer reality’, I would suggest that in the vast majority of cases her employment of repetition does little to convey specific phenomenal tones or states (Stein, 1947:217).[11] For example, it would seem not to be the case that there is a specific phenomenal state being conveyed in the passage from *Useful Knowledge* in which Stein’s narrator counts to one hundred in ones, or in repetitions such as: ‘…they said they were. They said they were they said they were’, (from *A Novel of Thank You*) or for that matter in the thousands of close variant repetitions of similarly abstract statements in *The Making of Americans* (Stein, 1994:12). While it is not unfeasible that Stein is attempting to convey a particular phenomenal state with these repetitions, it would be extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to say just what these states are, or even how we would attempt to recover them from the text. Read in terms of phenomenal states, Stein’s repetitive passages would most likely be deemed communicative and aesthetic failures. Read in the fashioned proposed in this thesis however, they are extremely successful artistic statements.

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[11] Walker (1984) sees Stein aligning herself, throughout her portrait of Matisse, with a type of ‘revolutionary art’ that ‘does not work from a prior subject, an already constituted “something” which it proceeds to express. It is, itself, “something” which has an autonomous force that impels further discoveries’ (Walker, 1984:93). This seems somewhat to contradict Stein’s claim (also supported by Walker) that she is attempting to exactly describe inner and outer reality.

In the following chapters we will see that the employment of high levels of repetition in the texts of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs rarely aims at the transmission of any specific ‘meanings’ to readers, whether these be propositional (in the forms of explicatures or implicatures) or non-propositional (such as the precise phenomenal states Pilkington discusses). We will also see that this does not preclude these authors from generating intense aesthetic effects, and further that the lack of specific meaning is the main factor in the aesthetic ‘success’ of their repetitive textual practices. As previously stated, Pilkington’s arguments are of limited utility to the analysis of repetition in this thesis because he explicitly avoids moving beyond isolated instances of epizeuxis to analyse repetition on a larger scale. We must also bear in mind that, in comparison to the literature discussed by Pilkington, the textual practices of Stein Beckett and Burroughs are aberrant ones, which undoubtedly seek to elicit unusual responses from readers.

In contrast to Pilkington, Sherzer’s (1994) discourse analysis of ‘The Effects of Repetition in the French New Novel’ discusses texts with extremely high levels of repetition throughout. Contrary to the title of her paper however, after detailing the structures of repetition in three particular novels by Robbe-Grillet, Simon and Ricardou, Sherzer says very little with regards the *effects* of repetition beyond highlighting the fact that the repetitions ‘foreground forms, textures and movements, and by so doing they defamiliarise the familiar, and familiarise the unfamiliar, creating discourses which express an idiosyncratic reality and experience' and the further vague assertion that 'the point of these novels is to make language work differently, to construct a different kind of representation, and consequently to make readers read differently' (Sherzer, 1994:81-85). Vague as Sherzer's assertions are, they do return us to the claim, also found in Stein's analysis of her 'rose' line, that repetition is a means of effecting defamiliarisation in literary texts[12]

The notion of defamiliarisation is most often associated with Victor Shklovsky's (1965) essay 'Art as Technique' (quoted above in our discussion of Pilkington). In this essay Shklovsky argues that:

> 'art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged… A work is created 'artistically' so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of perception. (Shklovsky, 1965:20).

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[12] In the same volume Johnstone et. al. (1994) also echo Sherzer's point about repetition and defamiliarisation: 'When readers approach a work of art, it's marked as a work of art, and they may not expect natural language. They may expect artificial language… for those [authors] who try to create the illusion of everyday language, there will be a high correlation between how we interpret their repetition and how we interpret repetition in everyday language. But in the work of authors who heighten their language or stylise it in a way that removes it from everyday talk, readers may attend to other kinds of rhetorical devices… One of the effects of repetition in literature can be defamiliarisation, making strange' (Johnstone et. al., 1994:17-18).

Shklovsky's assertion that art must 'increase the difficulty and length of perception' thereby achieving 'the greatest possible effect' will prove highly significant in the analysis of excessive repetition. We will see that Stein, Beckett and Burroughs all use repetition to exploit the affective nature of the inferencing process. The key attributes of poetic effects in Sperber and Wilson's account are that they exist as a result of a large quantity of implicatures, and that the reader must take a large share of the responsibility for generating these implicatures. I would like to push the concept of poetic effects slightly further in this direction by suggesting - at least for the repetitions of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs, but perhaps in many more cases of intense aesthetic effect - that their importance lies in the reader's *process* of generating meaning and in the large *potential* for meaning rather than in the actualisation of specific implicatures which are given propositional form. Further I will argue that in some extreme cases the reader need not necessarily consider any of the meanings available, except perhaps in a very loose schematic form, in order to get intense aesthetic effects from a text. Many of the texts analysed in this thesis certainly suggest such an approach.

This view of poetic effect is derived from Sperber's (1985) account of 'semi-propositional representations' and Fabb's (1998) Relevance theory account of sublime experience. Sperber discusses the fact that many of the thoughts we entertain do not achieve full propositional form. If a conceptual representation 'fails to identify one and only one proposition' then it is semi-propositional. Such representations can be 'given as many propositional interpretations as there are ways of specifying the conceptual content of their elements' and they are valuable because they allow us to process information which exceeds our conceptual capacities. Much of the importance of such ideas also lies in their processing rather than their specific interpretations, as Sperber explains,

> Semi-propositional representations do not only serve as temporary steps towards or away from full propositional understanding. The range of interpretations and search through that range, as determined by a semi-propositional representation, may be of greater value than any one of these interpretations in particular… poetic texts are cases in point. Their content is semi-propositional from the start. The speaker's or author's intention is not to convey a specific proposition. It is to provide a range of possible interpretations, and to incite hearers or readers to search that range for the interpretations most relevant to them. The ideas that come as by-products of this search may suffice to make it worthwhile, particularly when no final interpretation is ever aimed at.[13] (Sperber, 1985:52)

Fabb also stresses the importance for aesthetic experience of the *process* of interpretation. He notes that 'weak implicature is a characteristic of inferencing rather than its specific contents, and is at the same time a source of experience beyond simply the experience of propositions: i.e. an 'aesthetic' experience with affective and psycho-physiological characteristics' (Fabb 1998). Sperber and Fabb offer a way of understanding the poetic effects generated by excessively repetitive texts. Such texts involve us in a kind of meaning game in which we expend effort on a complex inferencing process related to semi-propositional representations. The reward is largely dependent upon the *process* of attempting to find meaning and the fact that a large potential for meaning exists, rather than any final interpretations, explicatures or implicatures, we may arrive at.

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[13] When Sperber and Wilson say that poetic effects produce common 'impressions' rather than common 'knowledge' we may perhaps interpret them as meaning that they activate semi-propositional, 'impressionistic' representations.

Fabb is interested specifically in the description of sublime experience, suggesting that the sublime is a metarepresentational ‘blown fuse’ in the mind, activated when we confront an impossible interpretive situation. This ‘blown fuse’ is an intense attitude of belief held towards a content-less representation:

> The generation of a propositional attitude lacking a propositional content is the mind’s solution to a problem for inferencing; it solves the problem of ‘achieving relevance’ for the reader without compromising by throwing potential interpretations away. (Though it does so by a cognitive trick: offering an apparent resolution which is in fact an absence of propositional content, concealed by the strength of that attitude generated towards the absence.) Because our attitudes towards propositions are associated with emotions, the generation of propositional attitudes of this kind is at the same time the generation of strong emotion, which we would think of as specifically ‘aesthetic emotion’. (Fabb 1998)

An underlying goal in all the analysis in this thesis will be to show that two of the most significant ways in which repetition generates poetic effects, are the way it involves us in complex inferencing processes related to semi-propositional representations, and the way which it leads to intense aesthetic responses based on the experience of impossible interpretive situations. These two processes are related and complementary; as Fabb suggests, there seems to be ‘some inverse relation between the explicitness of content of a thought and the intensity of attitude held towards it' (Fabb 1998).[14] Each of the three writers analysed in this thesis use repetition in very different ways and in markedly different contexts, but a general characteristic of their work is that in reading it we begin with an inferencing process related to semi-propositional representations and end with an intensely affective experience that is de-coupled from specific propositional content. The most affective areas of their texts use repetition to involve readers in a difficult inferencing process without propositional outcomes and this represents the extremity of a certain way of thinking about poetic effect. Their texts demand lengthy inferencing de-coupled from specific meanings, but this lack is actually felt as an intense aesthetic pleasure. Our participation in the process of inferencing, allied with the feeling that so much meaning potentially exists, is where the pleasure of these texts lies, and we get this pleasure regardless of whether we decide to formulate specific propositional implicatures.

Of course, communication always takes place at a risk, and textual practice of this sort and with these aims constitutes an extremely risky communicative strategy, as evidenced by the amount of readers who will find Stein, Beckett, and Burroughs too 'difficult'. For many readers, extremely repetitive texts are just not relevant enough as inputs, the effort they require outdoes any possible reward. Of the three writers, Stein is the greatest risk taker in this respect, and she is also the writer who has been most often passed over as too difficult or too irrelevant to be worth reading. The next chapter will attempt to show that this difficulty is balanced by the unusual cognitive and aesthetic rewards her texts can generate.

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[14] Fabb's suggestion here is a rethinking of arguments found in Sperber (1996).

CHAPTER 3. GERTRUDE STEIN

1. Introduction: ‘I never repeat while I am writing’

Gertrude Stein is perhaps the most repetitive and certainly the most famously repetitive writer of the twentieth century. Her employment of high levels metalinguistic repetition as an essential attribute of her texts predates the repetitive practices of the other authors under consideration in this thesis by decades, and yet she herself claims that ‘I never repeat while I am writing’ (Stein, 167:105). This chapter challenges Stein’s claim that there is no repetition in her work (a claim based on assumptions about how her texts interact with reader memory), and instead seeks to evaluate this claim alongside a reading in which repetition is experienced and remembered by the reader and which seeks to describe the aesthetic effects of experienced and remembered repetition.

As will become apparent, the actual outcomes of repetition may not always correspond to the functions it fulfils for the author (and his or her idealised reader).[15] For this reason, it will be important to strike a balance between attempting to read Stein’s work in the fashion in which she claims to have written it and in which she seems to expect us to read it, and approaching it in the way we would any other literary text. For while it is true that Stein can force us into modes of reading to which we are unaccustomed, it is not true that when reading her texts we can completely abandon regular reading habits built around such notions as the retention of textual information in the memory. In this introduction I will assess Stein's own claims about repetition alongside some existing critical views of her repetitive works before outlining the main arguments that will follow in the chapter proper.

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[15] See also the introduction to chapter 5 for more on this point.

In the lecture entitled 'Portraits and Repetition,' Stein seeks to defend herself against the charge of writing repetitively. She claims that she never repeats in her writing, and she goes on to make a distinction between the terms 'repetition' and 'insistence':

> …there is the important question of repetition and is there any such thing. Is there repetition or is there insistence. I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition. And really how can there be…. Always having the same theme, that is, if you like, repetition, that is if you like the repeating that is the same thing, but once started expressing this thing, expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of repetition is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis. (Stein, 1967:99)[16]

Stein's claim here is that exact linguistic repetition is not possible, because with each new appearance of a linguistic unit there comes a change in emphasis.[17] Emphasis in speech is easy enough to interpret as it is based on the infinite degrees of stress available to every speaker. On the printed page, which is what Stein is referring to, emphasis must arise as result of an increase in contextual effects, as in Sperber and Wilson's analysis of the emphatic effects of epizeuxis (discussed in the previous chapter). A pragmatic translation of Stein's statement would thus read: if two linguistic units resemble each other and create emphatic effects, then our experience of the resemblance should not be labelled as repetition. This is essentially then, an argument about how we interpret and label linguistic phenomena that hold resemblance.

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[16] Interestingly, Stein does concede that 'having always the same theme,' - a practice that she herself rarely participates in – can be considered as repetition. So in Stein's view the texts of Beckett and (especially) Burroughs would be much more repetitive than her own.

[17] In truth this is a relatively un-contentious and commonly held assumption, expressed more clearly in Johnstone et. al.'s (1994) statement that: 'it makes sense to suppose that when you say the same thing again, the referential meaning stays the same. But something other than the referential meaning has changed. As an element is repeated, a history for it is created; as the context within which elements are used changes, their meaning changes' (Johnstone et al, 1994:12).

Stein also claims that her writing contains no repetition because in it there is 'no remembering:'

> Each time I said the somebody whose portrait I was writing was something that something was just that much different from what I had just said that somebody was and little by little in this way a whole portrait came into being... each time there was a difference just a difference enough so that it could go on and be a present something… in order to do this there must be no remembering, remembering is repetition, remembering is also confusion… I say I never repeat while I am writing because while I am writing I am most completely…I am most entirely and completely listening and talking, the two in one and the one in two and that is having completely its own time and it has in it no element of remembering. Therefore there is in it no element of confusion, therefore there is in it no element of repetition. (Stein, 1967:105)

Stein’s claim here is that each statement she makes stands on its own, free of the context of the preceding statements which are no longer remembered. She believes that she is so intensely focused on the present moment of observation when she writes that she manages to disregard both the memory of what she has just written, and any previous memories which may obscure the current observation (Stein, 1967:105). Without remembering, repetition does not exist because ‘resemblance presupos[ses] remembering’ (Stein, 1967:103). Her writing creates what she calls in another lecture, a ‘continuous present’, which is allied with the technique of ‘beginning again and again and again’ (Stein, 1967:25). She compares these techniques to the operation of a cinema projector where ‘no two pictures are exactly alike each one is just that much different from the one before’ and states that in ‘a continuously moving picture… there is no memory of any other thing and there is that thing existing’ (Stein 1967:104-5).

Importantly though, the validity of Stein’s second claim seems to be based exclusively on her own experience of writing the text, with no indication being given as to how the subsequent reading experience will match up to her compositional approach. The lack of memory exists ‘while writing’, but it is not entirely clear how the reader will also come to operate without memory upon experiencing the form of the completed text. Problematically, Stein’s claim about insistence is not compatible with her claim about non-remembering if the latter is taken to include the reader. If the reader has no experience of repetition, nothing to compare the new unit of information to, then there will be no difference in emphasis or emphatic effects, and hence no distinction between insistence and repetition; it seems reasonable to assume that effects cannot arise as a result of repetition that we do not experience. Stein’s cinema projector analogy is also not entirely consistent with her claim about insistence because the film reel actually has microscopic but identifiable *formal* differences between its frames whereas Stein’s writing often contains exact repetitions on the page which she would claim are only non-repetitive in terms of their emphatic effects. The difference is one between non-repetition in the objective form of an artwork and non-repetition in terms of the outcomes of an exactly repetitive objective form.

These claims will be investigated at greater length in relation to specific examples in the following sections. To sum up for the moment however, Stein claims that repetition does not exist in her texts for two reasons: (1) what seems like repetition is actually ‘insistence’ with change in emphasis, (2) repetition with minute variation (either in the form or in the reader’s interpretation) leads to a continuous present in which repetition is no longer consciously experienced. Both of these claims seem to have as their basis the idea that repetition cannot exist because there is always some experience of change when we read, however slight.

Kawin (1972) is the critic most sympathetic to Stein’s claims about the creation of a continuous present in which there is no experience of repetition. Kawin makes a distinction between two types of repetition: ‘destructive’ and ‘constructive’. Translated into pragmatic terms this distinction is between repetition that creates contextual effects (constructive) and repetition that does not (destructive). Kawin further distinguishes between two differing ‘aesthetics of constructive repetition’ which are ‘differentiated by their attitudes toward memory:’

> The first, involved with the concepts of past and future, and believing in the integrity of memory, builds repetitions one on the other toward some total effect; this “repetition with remembering” takes place in “building time.” The second, considering the present the only artistically approachable tense, deals with each instant and subject as a new thing, to such an extent that the sympathetic reader is aware less of repetition than of continuity; this “repetition without remembering” takes place in “continuing time.” (Kawin, 1972:33)

Kawin suggests that the second type of constructive repetition is what Stein is attempting to create with her ‘continuous present’ and ‘beginning again and again’. Kawin’s argument is twofold: (1) it explains Stein’s writing techniques as described in her lectures, and (2) it posits a reading process - that of the ‘sympathetic reader’ - which will to some extent mimic those techniques. Stein’s construction of her texts is described as follows:

> It appears to be the act of saying what something is that divides the perception into two instants: observe and record, then begin observing again without any memory of the earlier observation that might obscure or misdirect this observation. In a process not of emphasis but of beginning again and again, she describes what something is, and what it is now, and what it is now… Stein returns to the time of the beginning with each statement, so that there is never any accumulation of building time but an abstract, objective, and jerky continuing.[18] (Kawin, 1972:126-7)

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[18] McCabe (2005) puts forward a similar argument about Stein’s cinematic style, claiming that Stein’s writing mimics the way a cinema projector draws film before the lens in a jerking movement in order that the motion of the film occurs in periods when the shutter is closed. McCabe suggests that Stein’s

To take a short example of this method at work we can turn to Kawin's explanation of the famous line 'a rose is a rose is a rose'. What is happening with this strange sentence, Kawin claims, is that Stein is insisting on the rose's 'existence in advancing time'.[19] It should also be noted at this stage however, that one of the reasons that Stein gives for the non-existence of repetition is emphatic effect, something that Kawin has explicitly ruled out. Kawin also claims that Stein's method will not have the effect of creating the fluid movement that she sees in the operation of a cinema projection but will resemble instead the experience of concentrating intensely on each successive frame (Kawin, 1972:122-7). Kawin's model conflicts with Stein's here in that the 'jerky' fragmented nature of the experience obviously does not correspond to Stein's idea of continuous movement of film and it is hard to see just how this fragmentary experience translates into an experience of a continuous present for the reader.

The second part of Kawin's argument is that a type of reading is possible in which our experience of Stein's texts is also one of the continuous present.

> If we pay complete attention to the words in front of us, we will need not be thinking about words that existed in the past. What is important in the past will recur when it is important, in the surface of the text. An image does not acquire an increasing permanence, properly measured at the conclusion of the work, but has its own permanence or laxness at the moment of its occurrence only. That

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writing, like the experimental films of artists such as Man Ray, 'foregrounds this "jerking" mechanical movement, unnoticeable in conventional film' (McCabe, 2005:82).

[19] This opinion is an echo of that expressed by one of Stein's earliest critics, Donald Sutherland, who sees in this passage a 'moment by moment insistence on the rose, and each moment of insistence is a heightened and refreshed recognition of the rose, not merely a prolongation of the rose' (Sutherland, 1990:10).

> forcefulness is measured instantaneously. An image has presence but not duration. (Kawin, 1972:109)

This assertion is difficult to agree with. Whereas it is clear that Stein's texts are written in such a way as to *suggest* a continuous present, in effect creating a *symbolic* continuous present – for example the narrator of *The Making of Americans* re-begins descriptions many times, and uses non-finite verb forms almost exclusively – it is not feasible that the reader's consciousness is actually affected by these techniques to the extent that it also exists in a continuous present.[20] The most obvious problem with this claim is that for any utterance to be understood, memory must come into play. When we parse an utterance, the initial elements are retained to be related to subsequent elements in order that we can come to conclusions about the sense. Neither Stein nor Kawin give any indication of what the cut-off point is for memory in the continuous present. For example, are we allowed to retain words in the memory until we reach the end of a phrase or clause, and if not, how are we to even process the 'images' that Kawin speaks of? And for that matter what is the nature of these images; what images are we experiencing when Stein repeats a barely representational clause or counts to a hundred in ones?

What this chapter will show is that the experience of reading Stein cannot simply be reduced to the 'continuous present' described by Kawin. Kawin's central idea is that, '*In the continuous present there is no consciousness of repetition*' (Kawin, 1972:151, emphasis in original). This idea is theoretically interesting and is illuminating in terms of Stein's practice as a writer, and it can also be shown to be very loosely true of the act of reading particular cases of Stein's repetition. Realistically however, it is not possible to completely lose sight of the repetition in the text by reading only in the present moment. However much Stein and Kawin urge this type of reading, in most cases it is not true that in the act of concentrating on the present unit of information we manage to forget the highly similar units that have gone before. I would suggest that this claim, and its precursors in Stein's lectures, must be regarded simply as interesting theoretical models to help us interpret difficult texts and should not be considered an actual possibility for readers.

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[20] Dubnick provides a detailed account of Stein's stylistic choices in *The Making of Americans* and points out that: 'Participles prolong the time span to achieve a sense of duration and process. Moreover, the participle, and particularly the gerund, also help portray the pragmatic conception of the world as a constantly on-going event' (Dubnick, 1990:68) .

In any case, a much more important counter argument is that if it were possible to read them in a continuous present, Stein's texts would be extremely mundane. The content that would emerge from many of Stein's repetitive texts, without the richness and ambiguity created by the experience of repetition, would be so dull that the texts would not be worth reading and could not be seriously considered as examples of literature. Our experience of Stein's texts is far from dull however, and this is due to the difficulties she creates for readers through her use of repetition which is experienced and remembered.

What I will show in this chapter is that when reading Stein's texts our real and immediate experience is of repetition with remembering, leading to contextual effects such as an increase in propositional content and/or non-propositional affectiveness. On the other hand, as a *theory* of reading rather than an actual experience of reading, Stein's continuous present with no remembering can be illuminating, and it leads to aesthetic gains of its own, not the least of which is the complexity and rewards created when we try to investigate how a text can be repetitive and non-repetitive at the same time. This investigation is another rich basis of cognitive effects in Stein's work, but again, it is based on a reading in which repetition is experienced and remembered.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into seven further sections dealing with: **(2)** the contexts for Stein's repetition in contemporary philosophy and modernist art **(3)** repetition and sublime experience in *The Making of Americans* **(4)** the aesthetic outcomes of the co-presence of repetition and non-repetition **(5)** the affective nature of Stein's texts generally **(6)** the problem of memory and the experience of repetition **(7)** general conclusions.

2. Contexts

Stein's writing is radically experimental and her theoretical claims about her work and writing practices are difficult and seemingly counter intuitive. However, this section will show that by looking at contemporary trends in philosophy and art we can achieve a greater understanding of her goals and motives.

2.a. Bergson

Stein's claims that her writing contains no repetition because in it there is 'no remembering' and that she creates a continuous present analogous to a cinema projection bring her into contact with the ideas of French philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson, who was working in Paris contemporaneously with Stein, was hugely influential on modernist literature as a whole and so it is unsurprising to find parallels between his work and Stein's.[21] Bergson's ideas also hold many points of resemblance to those of Stein's one time teacher William James, further strengthening the links between their work.[22] However, while I propose to trace some important areas of convergence and disagreement between these two contemporaries, I will not attempt to provide any specific evidence of direct influence from Bergson to Stein. The purpose of this section lies in using a comparison with Bergson to help us formulate better questions and hopefully to find some clearer answers, regarding just what Stein is attempting to make repetition do in her texts.

To summarise, Bergson's most famous doctrine is that time, as it is lived, is a continuous whole that cannot not be broken into discrete units as space can. Bergson suggests however, that the intellect changes our perception of time away from real duration and into a spatialised fragmentation, in which our past is broken into externally related recollections (Bergson, 2008).

Stein is attempting to work against this intellectual process in her desire to create a continuous, moving present which eradicates any fragmentation, that is, in the case of writing, the awareness of separate units of a discourse such as a clause or a sentence. (Stein never actually specifies what units of her discourse are held in consciousness as 'the present moment', i.e. which units would correspond to the cinema frame. But when her cinematic effect is most in evidence it appears that she is working at the level of the sentence.) For Bergson the lived past is indivisible and it is our intellect which breaks it into discrete units. Stein believes her writing, and the reading of her writing, create a continuous present in which there is only the experience of ‘now’ and not of the fragments of the past (in this case our memories of previously encountered clauses or sentences). Like a cinema projector, Stein claims her writing can create a fluid moving whole out of the many discrete representations contained within it. A problem that Stein does not engage with however, is that at the ‘present moment’ of a reading without memory, the reader will only be aware of the current unit of language on which her attention is focused. In order to create a moving image on the model of the cinema, there would needs also be a merging of the previous sentence with the new one in the reader’s present perception and this requires consciousness (at whatever level) of previous fragments of the discourse.

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[21] The Bergsonian influence on writers such as Stein, Joyce and Pound was famously criticised by Wyndham Lewis in *Time and Western Man* (1993, originally 1927) .

[22] For accounts of Stein's work in relation to William James see (among many others), Sutherland (1951), Brinin (1959), Walker (1984), McCabe (2005) and Olson (2009). For the purposes of analysing repetition in Stein's work, Bergson is much more illuminating than James, although I will discuss James' ideas at a few relevant points. Mitrano (2005) goes so far as to suggest that repetition was Stein's way of freeing herself from the influence of James' pragmatism, which she rejected for its teleological bent (Mitrano, 2005:30, 164n.).

Theoretically then, the means by which Stein’s writing could best approach the model of cinema is the very attribute that she seeks to deny: the experience of repetition. We might imagine Stein’s cinematic model as working in the following way: the reader keeps a sentence in mind as long as it takes to get to the end and process the meaning, at which point the original sentence is superseded in consciousness by its near exact repetition in the following sentence. Because the sentence is replaced by its near double, we can imagine that the original sentence is discarded from memory. There would be no forgetting mid sentence and a sentence would operate like a film frame in this writing because there is such a small - almost unnoticeable – change from sentence to sentence. This is the way in which Stein’s writing could most readily adhere to Kawin’s claim that her texts ‘baffle’ the memory (Kawin, 1972:126). But in order for the representation to be a continuously moving one, we must actually retain the trace of the superseded sentence in 'memory' as we do in the cinema. As McCabe notes, 'while film perpetuates a continuous motion or present, its smoothness relies upon repetition and displacement' (McCabe, 2005:61).

Hypothetically, Stein could use the traces of repetition as a means of reuniting the discrete units or fragments (phrases, clauses, sentences) into a moving whole, a continuous present in the style of the cinema projector. Each sentence would be just that much different from the last so as to create motion in the representation, but still similar enough to the previous one that there would be no consciousness/memory of the discrete units. So repetition and the awareness of repetition (at whatever level of consciousness this awareness occurs) would be necessary for the cinematic technique to succeed. In theory at least, this process would use repetition to eradicate the conscious experience of repetition. In reality, however, fluid movement with no discrete memory of different units is obviously much more difficult to achieve in language than in the 25 frames per second of the cinema, and Stein seems to posit a type of reading that is impossible. This may be why Kawin has modified Stein's claim to the effect that we experience each unit of language the way we would if we looked at each frame of the motion picture separately, focusing intensely on each fragment of the film before moving on to the next. Kawin in this respect comes closer to Bergson's use of the cinema analogy, and to Stein's one time teacher William James' model of attention. As McCabe notes, 'when James admits that "[t]here is no such thing as voluntary attention sustained for more than a few seconds at a time" and that such attention is a "repetition of successive efforts", he is unwittingly adumbrating the conditions of film reception' (McCabe, 2005:80). In order that cinematic viewing be effective then, it requires a perception of the repetition in the film, and it requires a repeated effort of concentration from the viewer.

In *Creative Evolution* Bergson suggests the cinema as a model for the process whereby the intellect fragments the moving whole of time into discrete units. Stein, on the other hand, uses the model of cinema to attempt to rebuild in the present what the intellect has dismantled. Bergson concentrates on the process by which cinema fragments real duration into frames whereas Stein's focus is on the technique whereby cinema reconstructs a (perhaps false) model of real duration, a method of making discrete units or pictures into a continuous moving present.

Bergson and Stein are approaching the same problem from different angles. Bergson is describing experience and Stein is describing the representation of experience through language, which is necessarily in a fragmented state already, separated into sentences, clauses and so on. What the intellect does, says Bergson, is to represent experience as a series of discrete units, but the real lived experience was actually of a flowing whole, much like James' famous 'stream of consciousness'. Language, on the other hand, is a representation that exists in discrete units, but in Stein's hands (she would claim) it can simulate the actual experience of a flowing whole. Bergson says that the intellect fragments the unity of life, Stein writes in such a way as to reunite these fragments (which come in the form of language) into a moving image which resembles the original experience of life before the intellect fragmented it. An interesting question that is raised here is whether Stein has or imagines her experience as a flowing whole, then sets about reconstructing the flow through fragments of language, or whether she initially and necessarily represents the experience to herself as fragmented because the intellect is involved, and then turns the experience into a flowing whole through the manipulation of fragmentary language.

Bergson provides one answer to this question when he discusses what he calls the ‘concentrated unity of action’ which he relates explicitly to the experience of literature and the attention we must give to it. Bergson states, ‘when a poet reads me his phrases I can live over again the simple state he has put into phrases and words. I sympathise then with his inspiration, I follow it with a continuous movement which is, like the inspiration itself, an undivided act.’ He goes on to suggest however that it only requires him to relax his attention a little for this unity to fragment into a multiplicity: ‘in proportion as I let myself go, the successive sounds will become more individualised’ and he will then start to perceive the individual phrases, the phrases broken into words and the words into syllables. ‘Let me go farther still in the direction of dream’ he states, ‘and the letters themselves will become loose and be seen to dance along, hand in hand, on some fantastic sheet of paper’ (Bergson, 2008:228-9).

The inspiration of the poet then, is an ‘undivided act’ hence the intellect must not have been involved in the original representation. If we read or listen with enough concentration we can follow the poetry in a continuous movement which is also an undivided act. This means that proper writing and reading are not fragmentary and hence are not acts of the intellect. In this passage Bergson makes claims about literature that are very similar to those of Stein. Stein suggests that her writing contains no repetition because the concentrated unity of attention on the present moment eradicates all possibility of recollection, and hence of repetition. Bergson says we remember in fragments what was actually lived as a unity. If Stein manages to defeat recollection through concentrated attention then she can write in a continuous moving present. Then, according to both Bergson and Stein, if the reader gives her undivided attention to the text in another concentrated unity of action, she can recreate Stein's undivided act. Recall that Stein specifically discusses a unity, a 'two in one' 'completely' of listening and talking (writing) at the same time, and goes a stage further than Bergson by saying that in writing she is 'listening' completely to what he would call 'the inspiration' and uniting this completely in a real duration with the act of writing. Full attention on the 'broken' fragments can recreate a continuous whole. Relaxation of attention creates a multiplicity, and an experience of repetition; repetition is only experienced if attention is lax. For both Bergson and Stein the experience of the discrete units of language in a text is as a result of an incomplete unity of attention.[23]

But what Bergson also seems to suggest in this passage is that real duration can be achieved in language without the use of cinematic repetition. Bergson places the burden for this experience firmly on the reader. Stein on the other hand, talks more about the processes she as the writer must undertake in order for the cinematic effect to happen. Repetition with variation (whether Stein calls it this or not) is required to create a moving whole, just as it is in the cinema, otherwise there is no flow. If the units of language were too distinctive we would recognise them as discrete, just as too much change from one cinema image to the next would fail to create a smoothness of motion on the screen. In Stein's view it is only through near repetition that the cinematic effect can be achieved and this may actually signal that what Stein wants to create is a unity of past and present in the act of reading, a unity which creates a fluid, moving representation. Lloyd (1993) describes Bergson's idea of the unity of past and present thus

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[23] We saw in the introduction to this chapter that Kawin also makes a very similar claim about reading Stein.

> Bergson sees past and present as coexisting, not as a result of some intellectual feat, but as a result of their very nature. The past is 'preserved' not because mind is able to counter the flight of the present into non-existence but because it is only through an illusion that we think of the past as separate from the present at all… coexistence of past and present is not a matter of the holding together in unity of a succession of discrete states, but rather a coexistence of different elements within the one state. The past is not 'lost,'; for it is never really separated out from a present whose existence excludes it. (Lloyd, 1993:101)

Some version of the coexistence of the past and present is what is happening in any cinematic moving image. Stein's explicitly stated view is that there is no remembering in the act of writing, which is viewed as an act of complete undivided attention in the present. But her cinematic theory of writing requires that a trace of the past representations (memory, whether conscious or unconscious) must be present when the reader is constructing a cinematic flow from her writing. For Bergson on the other hand, there is no perception out-with memory because what we actually perceive is not the present but the 'immediate part of the past'. This is because the pure present is only the 'invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future' (Quoted in Lloyd, 1993:102-3).

Like Stein, Bergson uses his model of time to stress the impossibility of repetition, claiming that repetition is an intellectual creation, a result of the intellect breaking real time into discrete units that (only then) become available for repetition. Stein believes that repetition is not possible in the continuous present because just like Bergson, she believes there is no recollection of the discrete units that repeat each other as this would require the intrusion of the intellect in order to break the past reading into discrete units. If we are reading and writing properly then there can be no scope for repetition because there is never anything outside of the current moment which can resemble the current moment. There are no discrete units, nothing that can be ‘singled out’ of the continuous present (just as we cannot single out a frame of the cinema image as we watch it). If everything flows into everything else, in the movement of ‘real time’ which precludes any distinction of discrete units that could be seen as repetitions of each other, then there can be no repetitions. But this idea is at odds with the fact that in creating a new version or representation of continuous flow, Stein actually needs repetition, just as the cinema does. For Bergson the claim that there is no repetition is easier to make because he is modelling the actual experience of real duration, and not a reconstruction of it. For Stein, working in the opposite direction, against the fragmentation imposed by the intellect, traces of repetition are ultimately necessary in order to recreate flowing ‘real time’ or for that matter, to create any other contextual effects.

2.b Modernist Painting: repetition, abstraction and medium

Analysis of Stein’s work in the context of modernist painting is strongly supported by the numerous biographical links between the author and the artistic avant-garde of her day. Most critical accounts of Stein’s work discuss its relationship to contemporary painting (see for example, DeKoven 1983, Walker 1984, Dubnick 1990, Isaak 1990, Wilcox 1990a, Mitrano 2005) but not always in direct relation to her use of repetition. Stein's language experiments parallel the developments of the cubists, and this section will suggest that repetition is an essential attribute that helps situate Stein's texts within a cubist artistic context.

Stein allied herself closely with the Parisian avant-garde, particularly Cezanne and the cubist painters who explored Cezanne's aesthetic principles in their work. She was one of the earliest collectors of paintings by, amongst others, Cezanne, Matisse, Picasso and Braque. As detailed in her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* she was also close friends with many prominent Parisian painters, whom she would entertain in her famous salon. One of Picasso's most important early works is his portrait of Stein, and she wrote portraits of Picasso, Cezanne, Matisse and others. She explicitly compares her writing practices with the techniques of Cezanne and Picasso (see for example, Walker 1984), and her book on Picasso can also be read in parts as an explanation of her own work. It would be possible to go at some length detailing the biographical links between Stein and the Parisian avant-garde but as with the discussion of Bergson, the most important reason for comparing Stein and modernist art is that we can begin to ask better questions and attempt to formulate better answers regarding Stein's repetitive style by situating it within its artistic-historic context.

Stein clearly saw in her writing an analogue of cubist painting practice (and, as Walker shows, particularly when she identified the influence of Cezanne in their work). Her description of Picasso's technique also closely resembles her own creation of a writing 'completely in its own time'. She says that Picasso was unique in that 'no one had ever tried to express things seen not as one knows them but as they are when one sees them without remembering having looked at them'. Picasso was 'right', she says because 'one sees what one sees, the rest is a reconstruction from memory and painters have nothing to do with memory, they concern themselves only with visible things' (Stein, 1984:15). It is worth noting however, that Picasso is not in agreement with Stein on this matter, claiming to paint forms as he thought them, not as he saw them. What is more important is not that Stein and Picasso agree or disagree, but that we can see what Stein imagines Picasso to be doing, and that she allies herself with what she imagines is a cubist methodology.

Stein's description of Picasso's practice echoes her contention that in her own writing she would not allow previous memories of an object or person to affect present descriptions. What is left unclear is whether she believes that Picasso also forgets the previous brushstroke that he has made, or the previous mental image he has held, just as she separates off and forgets the previous linguistic unit she has used in describing the object of her portrait. Her claim for her own work is based on two types of forgetting, forgetting memories and forgetting the current representation that is being created, with Picasso it is not so clear that the second type of forgetting is taking place. In addition, it seems reasonable to assume the second type of forgetting would not take place for Picasso's audience as Stein seems to think it would for hers. For the reader, literature unfolds in time; a painting is to some extent an atemporal experience for its viewer and it is difficult to see how a painting could create a cinematic flowing present in the way that Stein claims her texts should. This difficulty aside, the specific outcomes that Stein's work shares with that of the cubists are a movement towards abstraction, and an emphasis in their work on the conditions of their respective mediums.

In his article on the avant-garde and kitsch Greenberg (1939) suggests that avant-garde art focuses its attention on the medium of its own craft and that in so doing it necessarily moves away from representation and towards abstraction. Similarly, Osborne (1979) argues that a major trend in twentieth century painting was its desire to repudiate artificial means of overcoming the semantic shortfalls of its medium (for example the problem of representing a three dimensional world on a two dimensional canvas). In place of such artifice, modernist painters displayed the desire ‘to present the artistic materials as they are in themselves with no artistic ‘image’’ (Osborne, 1979:29). As is signalled in the descriptions provided by Greenberg and Osborne, where the ‘image’ and ‘what is represented’ are seen to be secondary to the medium itself, the turn towards the medium in modern art often exists alongside some form of abstraction. If an artist does not represent in their work, then we are left with only the medium, or from the other side of the equation, if the artist wants us to be primarily aware of the conditions of their medium then representation comes to be a much less significant factor in their work. In Stein’s use of repetition we can clearly see this pairing of abstraction with an emphasis on the medium.

Several critics have noted the parallel goals of the cubists and Stein with regards emphasising the conditions of their respective mediums as an aesthetic end in itself. Wilcox (1990a) sees the common goal of Stein and the cubists as the attempt to ‘return to the pure conditions of their own medium’ (Wilcox, 1990a:196-209). Isaac also suggests that Stein’s ‘opaque prose… refuses to become a self-effacing medium’ and that, ‘it is on this level – the materiality of the medium itself – that Stein’s explorations have most in common with cubist artists’ (Isaac, 1990:26,31). Bernstein

(1990) suggests that in Stein's work 'one might say the words refer only to themselves, that there is no disjunction between what the prose refers to and the prose itself' (Bernstein, 1990:58). DeKoven (1983) links the emphasis on the linguistic medium with abstraction in Stein's work, discussing our heightened awareness of the linguistic 'surface' when we read Stein, and arguing that Stein considers 'anterior thematic content…irrelevant'. DeKoven suggests that Stein's writing

> not only undermines or fragments coherent meaning, it also subordinates meaning altogether to the linguistic surface, the signified to the signifier: we notice the strangeness or freshness of the verbal combinations themselves – the words "stand out" *as words* – before we register consciously their dedetermined, unresolved articulations of lexical meanings. (DeKoven, 1983:11)

DeKoven goes on to argue that Stein's critical and theoretical writings make it clear that '[She] considers communicated content irrelevant to value in art. Artistic merit is exclusively a matter of imagination and perfection within a particular medium' (DeKoven, 1983:24). Although DeKoven makes this argument in the context of a discussion of Stein's (less repetitive) *Tender Buttons*-style, her claim about the privileging of the medium, the signifier and the surface still holds for the works of what she calls 'insistence,' with repetition allowing Stein to shift the balance of her texts away from representation and towards an exploration of their medium.[24]

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[24] Not all critics are in agreement with regards abstraction in Stein's texts. Both Steiner (1978) and Walker (1984) emphasise Stein's desire, modelled after Cezanne, of 'realising her sensations' in her text. Both critics stress the need to 'decipher' Stein's texts (Walker, 1984:xvi).

Stephen Connor (1988) argues that ‘it is repetition more than any other trope which draws our attention to the medium of language’. Connor suggests that when we notice repetition, ‘language begins to bulk in our apprehension as arbitrary, systematic and material. To hear or read the same word twice or more is to catch ourselves in the act of reading. And, as many have believed, it is this self designation which characterises the literary, the ‘set towards the message’ as Jakobson expresses it’ (Connor, 1988:15).[25] Stein’s repetitive style often takes Jakobson’s poetic function to its limit in a maximum equivalence of linguistic units and hence takes this set towards the message (better understood as ‘set towards the medium’ or as ‘set towards the text’) to its highest possible degree.

Repetitive texts, as I will show in more detail in the next section, cannot go on creating more propositional content indefinitely, and this leads to an imbalance weighted on the side of language (medium) over what it represents. In a repetitive text, instead of developing a series of represented events or images, each successive clause or sentence reminds us of what has gone before (the previous linguistic units). The repetitive text does not allow us to focus on its representations or its referential meanings because often it does not actually create any new propositional content; the self-referentiality of repetitive texts is often formal but not content-full. In this way, instead of fulfilling any representational function, the repetitive text constantly confronts us with its own medium. The repetitive text is language and form without content, or at least without significant content. As Stein herself claims of her work:

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[25] Similarly, Sherzer (1994) discusses the fact that the in New French Novel of writers such as Robbe-Grillet, Simon and Ricardou, repetition replaces a plot with an intense focus on language itself. Here again we see repetition emphasising medium at the expense of representation.

‘all this time I was of course not interested… that anything happened’ (Stein 1967:113).[26]

If Picasso and Stein were working with differing ideas about how to represent images, the effects of their divergent methodologies are remarkably similar, particularly in the way we understand reference and representation in their work. Perloff (1981) traces the links between Stein and cubism through a comparison of Picasso’s *Ma Jolie* and Stein’s *Susie Asado*:

> It is impossible to “read” such a painting as a coherent image of reality. Whatever interpretation we advance is put into question by the appearance of contradictory clues. The ambiguity of the image is thus impossible to resolve. It is this tension between reference and compositional game, between a pointing system and a self ordering system that we find in *Susie Asado*…. (Perloff, 1981:72)

This tension between reference and compositional game is found throughout Stein’s work and is best seen in the way she arranges small representational units into repetitive structures that undo attempts by the reader to make any overall sense of her texts. The result of adopting this cubist compositional strategy is that Stein’s texts thwart our attempts to find a specific, unambiguous representation. Representation is scant in the first place due to the level of abstraction and underdetermination in Stein's language, and is finally undone by the way that she continually rearranges these barely representational linguistic units, leaving many possibilities for meaning in her texts but no way of definitively choosing one. It is in this impossibility of deciding between the many available meanings for her texts that Perloff sees Stein's work most closely paralleling the 'instability, indeterminacy, and acoherence of Cubism' (Perloff, 1981:77).

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[26] Stein’s use of repetition together with underdetermination creates a further form of abstraction in her work. Osborne describes abstraction as ‘equivalent to incomplete specification. Some of the details in which things differ are omitted or played down so that in the representation things appear more alike than in reality they are perceived to be’ (Osborne, 1979:26). Stein’s underdetermined texts, which incompletely specify the things they seem to be representing and which also incompletely specify their own formal properties, such as syntax, lead to this type of abstraction. We will see in the following sections that underdetermination means that two repetitive sentences which may only be superficially alike (which are made to be superficially alike by underdetermination) can be making two completely distinct statements about the world which collapse into much greater resemblance (often directly repeating) at the surface level of the text. The two sentences may also be distinct syntactically but this distinction will often be erased, again resemblance is created from difference and this equals abstraction.

Stein's engagement with the modernist avant-garde of her day provides us with some perspectives from which to better understand the motivating factors behind her strange repetitive style. Now we must move away from general theoretical discussion to look at some more specific outcomes of Stein's repetition.

3. Repetition and the sublime in *The Making of Americans*

In his *Critique of Judgement,* Immanuel Kant suggests that the mathematical sublime is experienced when 'our imagination strives to progress towards infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea'. When this occurs the imagination, in which resides our 'power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world or sense,' is found to be inadequate to the idea of absolute totality'. The imagination, in estimating the magnitude of objects, performs two acts: apprehension and comprehension. Whilst apprehension is able to progress to infinity, comprehension will at some point reach a maximum, and the imagination cannot exceed this maximum. Reason, however, ‘demands totality for all given magnitudes’, and hence it ‘demands comprehension in *one*, intuition, and *exhibition* of all the members of a progressively increasing numerical sequence’. Reason does not exempt the infinite from this demand, unavoidably making us regard the infinite as a totality and imagination is made to overreach its limits in a ‘point of excess’ (Kant, 1987:107). To be able to regard the infinite as a whole ‘indicates a mental power that surpasses any standard of sense’ (Kant, 1987:108-111). This supersensible mental power is the experience of the mathematical sublime, which can be caused by the contemplation of an object but which is actually a property of the mind.

Kant provides an analogy to help elucidate this dense argument, comparing sublime feeling to the difficulty of viewing the pyramids. Stand too far away and ‘the apprehended parts (the stones on top of one another) are presented only obscurely, and hence their presentation has no effect on the subject’s aesthetic judgement’, stand too close and problems also arise, because ‘the eye needs some time to complete the apprehension from the base to the peak, but during that time some of the earlier parts are invariably extinguished in the imagination before it has apprehended the latter ones and hence the comprehension is never complete’ (Kant, 1987:108). In attempting to view the pyramids then, we are caught between two different and irresolvable perspectives.[27]

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[27] As we have just seen, this is the effect that cubism works towards.

Stein’s massive and massively repetitive novel, *The Making of Americans* is like Kant’s pyramids in that there is no satisfactory position from which to ‘view’ it. From page to page or repetition to repetition we are too ‘close’ or focused to keep all apprehended parts (repetitions and variations) in the comprehension, and if we, as it were, take a step back from the language of the novel and begin to think about its macro structure – for example by trying to consider the larger narrative events – our aesthetic judgement is hampered because we cannot focus on the complexity of the construction of repetitions and variations.[28] The rest of this section will show that these initial similarities point to a deeper relationship between *The Making of Americans* and sublime feeling, by describing the process through which the novel induces the experience of the sublime in the reader.

For Kant, the problem encountered in comprehension which leads to sublime feeling is created by the estimation of magnitude which is, according to Kant, an aesthetic judgement. In terms of our subjective aesthetic judgement, *The Making of Americans* is judged to be ‘absolutely large’ (Kant, 1976:107). We consider it thus because:

> even though there is no maximum for the mathematical estimation of magnitude.. yet for the aesthetic estimation of magnitude there is indeed a maximum... when it is judged as [the] absolute measure beyond which no larger is subjectively possible (i.e., possible for the judging subject), then it carries with it the idea of the sublime and gives rise to that emotion which no mathematical estimation of magnitude by means of numbers can produce…

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[28] This attribute of the text highlights another important analogy between Stein and cinema: ‘while a painting may be seen as a whole in a moment in time, cinema cannot be reflected upon “all at once,” but rather through what Loy calls the “disintegration and reintegration” of parts in Stein’s “intercepted cinema of suggestion”’ (McCabe, 2005:60).

> for a mathematical estimation of magnitude never exhibits more than relative magnitude, by a comparison with others of the same kind, whereas an aesthetic one exhibits absolute magnitude to the extent that the mind can take it in one intuition. (Kant, 1987:107-8)

So while *The Making of Americans* can be judged (mathematically) to be *relatively* small when compared to certain larger objects of its class - it is smaller for example, than *In Search of Lost Time* - no larger estimate of magnitude is subjectively possible whilst reading the novel. Strictly speaking the novel is not absolutely large, it is simply 'used' as such by judgement: 'what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but is the use that judgement makes naturally of certain objects so as to [arouse] this (feeling)[of having a supersensible power within us], and in contrast with that use any other use is small' (Kant, 1987:106).[29]

A problem still remains however. We regard *The Making of Americans* as absolutely large but we do not regard an equally vast novel by (for example) Dickens to be so. *The Making of Americans* is clearly daunting or overpowering in a way that *Bleak House* cannot be but why is this the case?[30] This question concerns the form of the work and is the first indication that repetition itself is crucial to the creation of the mathematical sublime.

It is likely that Stein's narrator, at least in the earlier stages of the novel, would actually view her repetition as in some respects working against sublime feeling. By

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[29] There is the feeling when reading the novel however, that it could proceed inexhaustibly. It displays a compositional strategy which would allow it to be expanded indefinitely, the only limit to its potential for infinite repetition being our growing sense of the narrator's fatigue.

[30] Of course, we cannot rule out another rather blunt factor in the perceived magnitude of the book. The current Dalkey Archive edition of *The Making of Americans* is a physically foreboding 9", 6", 2".

‘beginning again and again’ (as Stein describes her practice in a later lecture) her narrator seems to be attempting to combat the difficulty faced by comprehension in such a large novel by trying to draw everything that has happened so far (or in some cases what is going to happen later) together in the present moment of writing/reading; by repeating she attempts to keep the repeated information in present awareness for herself and the reader.[31] This attempt is misguided however as repetition in the novel works in the following three ways to create sublime feeling: by encouraging us to experience a huge number of diachronous events (linguistic units) simultaneously; by creating a relative featurelessness in the novel; and by generating a ‘defective propositional attitude’ based on a lack of propositional content.

The first of these reasons is simply an intensification by repetition of the Kantian argument presented above. The way we experience repetition causes sublime feeling when we read *The Making of Americans* because repetition requires that we be aware of all its instances, it is the synchronous experience of two or more diachronous events. Apprehension carries on perceiving each repetition but comprehension cannot hold such large quantities of repetition in one intuition. This problem does not arise in a non-repetitive novel because, although we must use the memory of previous events to understand the current moment in the narrative, there is not the necessity to hold the diachronous events together in one intuition of comprehension as there is when we experience repetition. A non-repetitive novel does not present a huge series of elements that are required to be experienced simultaneously in this fashion. The requirement produced by repetition to perceive a successive series synchronously is analogous to the imagination’s failure when looking at objects such as the pyramids, a necessarily successive act which reason demands be taken in one simultaneous intuition. As Kant claims,

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[31] Dubnick also suggests that the prevalence of the adverb ‘then’ in the novel is ‘perhaps related to [the narrator’s] attempt to bring all knowledge gained over the passing of time into the present moment’ (Dubnick, 1990:69).

> Measuring (as [a way of] apprehending) a space is at the same time describing it, and hence it is an objective movement in the imagination and a progression. On the other hand, comprehending a multiplicity in a unity (of intuition rather than of thought), and hence comprehending in one instant what is apprehended successively is a regression that in turn cancels the condition of time in the imagination's progression and makes *simultaneity* intuitable' (Kant, 1987:116).

As a brief aside here, it is also likely that a completely repetitive book - such as the one found in Borges' 'Library of Babel' which consists of the letters MCV repeated from start to finish - would not be as taxing for the imagination as *The Making of Americans*. It is because there is so much minute variation that Stein's novel cannot be schematically represented in any satisfactory way.

The next two (related) reasons for the novel's generation of sublime feeling result from the way repetition in *The Making of Americans* creates a deficit between the amount of language readers must process and the amount of meaning they are able to recover from this processing. In *The Romantic Sublime* (1976), Weiskel transfers the theory of the sublime into semiotic terms and argues that sublime feeling results from an excess either on the plane of the signifier (the object, language etc.) or on the plane of the signified (the mental representations of the object, language etc). In the case of the mathematical sublime the former is true, with Weiskel characterising the experience of the mathematical sublime as follows:

> [T]he feeling is one of *on and on*, of being lost. The signifiers cannot be grasped or understood; they overwhelm the possibility of meaning in a massive underdetermination that melts all oppositions or distinctions into a perceptional stream; or there is a sensory overload. Repetition, or any excess of "substance" in the signifier is a technique, familiar in architecture, music, and poetry, for inducing the sense of *on and on*… the imagery appropriate to this category of the sublime is usually characterized by featureless (meaningless) horizontality or extension: the wasteland. (Weiskel, 1976:26)

The Making of Americans exhibits such attributes as are described here and we can see that the difference between *The Making of Americans* and an equally vast novel by Dickens lies in just these attributes. The huge amount of repetition in Stein's novel makes it relatively featureless, and ensures that the reader is exposed to an imbalance between the planes of signifier and signified. A Dickens novel is replete with features, and when reading it we recognise a distinct plot to which more information is added with each progressive sentence and which can be summarised or segmented and described or represented in a way other than that in which it has been written. *The Making of Americans*, on the other hand, is incantatory and unchanging. Any random selected page of the novel seems like a glimpse of an uninterrupted mass of language (signifier) which cannot be partitioned off, and we feel that it simply goes on and on, but it is a featureless on and on that we experience, with no representable increase in signified content. This suggests that the novel could not be adequately translated, described, represented in any other form, i.e. in the type of plot summary we could easily create for *Bleak House* or *Little Dorrit*. That is not to deny the possibility of extracting the meagre ‘plot’ of *The Making of Americans* and summarising it, the problem is rather that this summary would fail by any standard to give an adequate representation of the novel and that any attempts to describe or analyse the novel in relation to its narrative seem to be completely beside the point anyway, because the impact of the novel resides so completely in its radical form and its size.[32]

In order to get a clearer understanding of the mental processes involved in the creation of sublime feeling, it will be necessary to move away from Weiskel’s helpful but limited semiotic account of the sublime (and in fact Weiskel himself admits the limitations of such an account). Shifting the semiotic imbalance between signifier and signified into pragmatic terms, I will now show that this excess of signifier over signified in *The Making of Americans* is due to the fact that repetition in the novel continues long after the creation of new propositional content has ceased. This continual repetition on the plane of the signifier still requires inferential processing of the reader but without the subsequent increase in the number or strength of propositions generated. Hence an imbalance is felt between the planes of signifier and signified, an imbalance which is increased with every further repetition and which eventually leads to the creation of sublime feeling. In Weiskel’s account, this signifier/signified imbalance *in itself* could be enough to create sublime experience, but a pragmatic reading provides us with further evidence as to why this imbalance leads to an intense aesthetic feeling.

In Sperber and Wilson’s analysis of various repetitive utterances in *Relevance*, repetition is seen to achieve relevance by increasing the contextual effects of each utterance. Some uses of repetition lead to modifications of propositional form or to the strengthening of explicatures. These are utterances in which an increase on the plane of the signifier creates a subsequent increase on the plane of the signified. Stein's repetition in *The Making of Americans* at times fulfils this type of function, as can be seen in the following two statements.

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[32] For more on this point see chapter 8.

(1) 'this is very strongly in me just now in my feeling, very very strongly in me' (Stein, 1995:520).
(2) 'his mother was his dear dear friend then and from her he received all the thoughts and convictions that were definite and conscious then and or a long time after in him.' (Stein, 1995:429)

The explicature of utterance (1) is that *something is felt very strongly by the speaker*. The repetition of 'very' will be experienced as either modifying the propositional form and hence the explicatures (in which case the feeling is stronger than we would otherwise have thought) or strengthening the existing explicature by reflecting the speaker's degree of commitment to the assumption expressed.

In (2) the repetition of 'dear' suggests that the narrator's utterance is echoic. It seems to be representing the thought or speech of the character himself or, more likely, his mother. The narrator's repetition represents the thoughts of the mother and then implicitly disagrees with or even mocks them. This assumption is later strengthened by the fact that the character turns out to not have good thoughts and convictions.

However, it is not the case that the creation of poetic effects must necesarily include the creation of further implicatures containing new propositional content. Recall Fabb's claim that 'weak implicature is a characteristic of inferencing rather than its specific contents, and is at the same time a source of experience beyond simply the experience of propositions: i.e. an 'aesthetic' experience with affective and psycho-physiological characteristics' (Fabb 1998). As Sperber and Wilson suggest in *Relevance*, 'utterances with poetic effects can be used precisely to create this sense of apparently affective rather than cognitive mutuality' (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:224).

As we saw in the introduction, Fabb argues that sublime feeling emerges when 'there is an intense experience of a defective propositional attitude, whereby the attitude is unattached to a content' (Fabb, 1998). As readers who are willing to persevere with *The Making of Americans*, we assume that the effort required of us to process the repetition in the novel does not entail the novel's failure to achieve relevance. The balance of effort versus reward that Relevance theory describes means that we require a substantial cognitive/aesthetic gain from this difficult novel. But after such a large series of repetitions of a word, phrase or clause, the creation of further propositional content must cease. We are no longer gaining new explicatures or implicatures, we are just generating the same explicatures and implicatures again and again.

What does not cease however, is the process of inferencing itself. Even if we are confronted with a hundred close variations of a clause in *The Making of Americans* there are no means (short of lessening our attention) of turning off the inferencing process related to reading these clauses. Associated with the repetitions is a repeated inferencing process with no retrievable extra content. Because inferencing in itself can be an affective process, the lengthy repeated inferencing process, while creating no new implicatures, does generate the associated increase in the affectiveness of the text, meaning that readers are involved in an intense affective aesthetic experience which is decoupled from propositional content.

As in Weiskel's formulation of the mathematical sublime, in reading *The Making of Americans*

> the absence of a signified itself assumes the status of signifier, disposing us to feel that behind this newly significant absence lurks a newly discovered presence.. We recall Kant's terms: "unattainability (*Unerreichbarkeit*) is regarded as a "presentation" (*Darstellung*): indeterminacy signifies. (Weiskel, 1976:28)

Unlike most of Stein's other repetitive texts, *The Making of Americans* does not generate sublime feeling by giving the reader too many potential meanings to choose between, but by presenting a gap where meaning should be and at the same time encouraging readers to engage in a massive inferencing process to fill this gap. The lack of new propositional content actually increases the intensity of our attitude because, as Fabb notes, there exists an 'inverse relation between the explicitness of content of a thought and the intensity of attitude held towards it…' (Fabb 1998).[33]

Reading *The Making of Americans* creates sublime feeling then, in two related ways. Firstly, in Kantian terms, as a vast and featureless object with its infinite (for aesthetic judgement) series of repetitions, the novel is impossible to represent, however, reason demands the novel and its repetitions be exhibited as a totality nonetheless and this triggers the awareness of a supersensible power within us, the feeling of the mathematical sublime. Repetition is the experience of diachronous events simultaneously, this is why *The Making of Americans* creates a problem for comprehension where an equally vast non-repetitive novel would not. Secondly, the process of reading the massive and featureless novel, repetition to repetition, creates a pragmatic situation in which the reader is engaged in an extremely lengthy inferencing process with no parallel increase in propositional content, leading to the defective propositional attitude characteristic of sublime experience.

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[33] As mentioned in chapter 2, Fabb's suggestion here is a rethinking of arguments found in Sperber (1996).

We must bear in mind however, that *The Making of Americans* constitutes an incredibly risky communicative strategy, especially when we consider that it was written in the first decade of the twentieth century, three decades before the only other major modernist work which presents a comparable difficulty for its readers, *Finnegans Wake*. Comparison of these two works is illuminating when considering just how 'difficult' a book *The Making of Americans* is, arguably presenting a much greater challenge to its readers than even Joyce's novel.[34] Difficult as it is, *Finnegans Wake* actually presents a superabundance of proposition-based rewards for the effort we expend upon it. As Stein has Picasso remark in her *Autobiography of Alice, B. Toklas*, Joyce is 'the incomprehensible whom everyone can understand' (Stein, 1947:218). It is clear that the effects I am tracing here, and throughout this chapter, will not be found by all readers of *The Making of Americans*, many of whom will justifiably find Stein's work too arduous.[35] Few readers commit the required effort to Stein's novel because, as Smitchz (1990) suggests, 'with a boldness that is often truly stupefying, she risks all the priorities of a text' (Schmitz, 1990:171). What this section has shown, is that if we *are* willing to expend a large deal of effort on *The Making of Americans* then it can be expected to generate equally large aesthetic rewards.

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[34] We cannot rule out the possibility that the feeling of insurmountable difficulty attached to *The Making of Americans* may in itself, contribute to some of the sublime feeling that the novel generates.

In *The Making of Americans* sublime feeling is created by a lengthy process of inferencing that is caused by the sheer volume of repetitions that Stein presents. In the following sections we shall see that Stein's writing can also lead to this sublime defective propositional attitude by creating a seemingly interminable inferencing processes out of only a few highly ambiguous repetitive phrases. In both cases the amount of inferencing required of readers is a key feature of the intense aesthetic experience.

4. Levels of Representation

As we have seen, Stein claims that she never repeats in her writing and I will attempt to show in this section that her claim – which seems blatantly false after an initial glance at her texts – becomes more credible if her texts are seen to include various parallel levels of representation on which repetition may or may not exist. I will then go on to discuss the advantages of a writing practice which problematises the existence of repetition on these different levels.

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[35] Even Alan Ginsberg, in a passage in which he praises *The Making of Americans*, admits that he has been unable to read it in its entirety (Ginsberg, 1990:55-6).

Let us assume that repetition can exist on any of several different levels of representation which are created when a text is read and analysed. These levels are: (1) the surface textual detail (resemblance between units of language on the page) (2) the story eventualities described/represented by (1), (3) the explicatures and implicatures generated as a result of the pragmatic processing of (1) by the reader, (4) the reader's syntactic representation of (1) (i.e. our analysis of the syntactic structures and word classes which constitute (1)).

While Stein's repetition is apparent at the surface level of the text, repetition often does not hold at many of the deeper or further abstracted levels of analysis. When we consider our interpretation of Stein's texts pragmatically, new contextual effects are generated by the repetition, such as the strengthening of existing explicatures or generation of new explicatures and implicatures. Aside from *The Making of Americans*, the experience of reading Stein's repetition is generally not the experience of the same explicatures and implicatures over and over again. The underdetermined nature of Stein's prose means that the syntax of her texts is radically ambiguous. Stein's sentences support various different analyses of their syntactic structures and provide no definite means of deciding between alternatives. The same is also true of the eventualities that the texts represent.

A text may be completely repetitive on the page, but once it is experienced by a reader some form of difference will usually emerge because the context in which each new sentence is received is necessarily different. The fact that we have read a sentence twice before cannot but have an impact on how we process it when we read it for a third time. Readers who encounter the same clause or sentence three times will be looking for some sort of cognitive reward for the increase in effort that they are required to make. The more effort that readers give to Stein's texts, the more potential meaning the texts disclose. By considering the text on these other levels, we find that exact or near exact linguistic repetition actually supports a high number of co-present alternative meanings. This is a probable explanation for Stein's claim about change in emphasis and non-repetition, but problematically, we saw that her emphasis argument is also incompatible with the claim that her texts do not repeat because there is no memory of repetition. Repetition must be remembered in order for the context to be changed, or to put it another way, if there is no memory of the prior units of a text, then there is no context within which to receive the current unit.

The following sections will focus on instances of surface level repetition in Stein's work which disclose possible non-repetition on these other levels. These sections will deal with each level of representation separately although it must be kept in mind that our discovery of possible non-repetition on any one level is likely to change our interpretation of all the others.

4.a.Pragmatic Level

Considering Stein's texts pragmatically is a means of extracting a richer variety of meaning (and ambiguity) from the initially repetitive surface representations. The explicatures and implicatures that emerge from a text may subtly change over the course of what seems at first to be a highly repetitive series of statements, as in the following example from *Matisse, Picasso and Gertrude Stein* (also known as *GMP)* :

> They respected when they stayed all they said and they stayed and they said all they said. They said that they respected what they said while they stayed and they stayed. They stayed and they said what they respected and what they said.
>
> They did not stay to stay they stayed and they said they respected what they said. They did what they said they respected and they said they respected what they respected. That was not enough and they said it was enough and that it was not enough. They said they stayed and they said that they respected all they respected and they respected all they said.
>
> They stayed when they stayed. They all stayed when they stayed. They all respected what they said when they said what they said. They all said what they said. They all stayed. (Stein, 2006:150-1)

The first strange aspect of this text, from a pragmatic point of view, is that it regularly repeats explicatures. The narrator repeatedly tells us about the participants' staying, respecting and talking. Let us take the several instances of 'they stayed' as an example. 'They stayed' appears four times in the first two sentences, and in order for a criteria of relevance to be met here, we must presume that some sort of contextual effect is being created by the repetition. A further implicature that is perhaps being created by this repetition is that the participants stayed for a very long time, longer than was communicated by the original appearance of 'they stayed'. As 'they stayed' is encountered many more times over the course of the three paragraphs we expect more, or more significant meaning than just the further strengthening of the implicature that they stayed *for a long time*. Perhaps the implication is that 'they' are being mocked for staying so long and doing all this talking, and further, the length of time that *GMP* dwells on the staying and talking of these characters both formally mimics this implication while at the same time creating an ironic view of the narrator because she is guilty of doing the same thing that she subtly mocks the participants for. Once we start thinking about the pragmatic outcomes of this sort of repetition, what seems like highly redundant textual practice can lead to the creation of quite complex new meanings in the text.

Another strange feature of the passage from *GMP* is its use of the pronoun 'they'. Sentences which include unspecified terms such as 'they' must be contextually enriched in order to become fully propositional. A general practice of Stein's is the building of sentences whose undetermined structures and meanings provide no contextual clues which could help the reader to enrich their logical forms. As a result there is a general ambiguity of reference in her texts. Pilkington (2000) suggests that

> In poetry, reference assignment and disambiguation are often deliberately made problematic, requiring greater processing effort on the part of the reader. It will be argued later that these are ways of encouraging readers to explore memory more thoroughly, to combine memories stored at different conceptual addresses in order to increase the range of cognitive effects. (Pilkington, 2000:77)

As discussed in chapter 2, we will Stein's texts creating different effects from those traced by Pilkington, with the aesthetic outcomes of Stein's underdetermined repetitions having nothing to do with the concepts involved, or our memories of them.

Let us take 'they stayed when they stayed' (from paragraph 3) as an example for analysis here. If 'they' refers to the same set of people in both uses then it follows from the fact that they stayed that they must stay *when* they stay. This sentence seems tautological, bordering on the farcical, and again it is initially difficult to understand how relevance is being met. One possible interpretation is that the two uses of the pronoun 'they' refer to two different sets of people and if two sets of people are staying then the whole passage becomes much more informative. But this is not necessarily the first impression the text gives and as such Stein forces readers into either bemusement or a very close reading which will be attuned to the ambiguities present in her sentences.

The following example from *A Novel of Thank You* is similar to the above passage from *GMP* in that it unnecessarily repeats information that seems to be obviously entailed: 'every time she writes she writes and every time she talks she talks and every time she eats she eats and every time she does not she does not. Every time she does not. Carrie is Carrie' (Stein, 1994:21). Up until its last sentence this passage suggests the same interpretation we considered for *GMP*, i.e. every second use of the pronoun 'she' refers to a different person. This interpretation would certainly make the passage more relevant as an informative utterance. But the passage ends with the sentence 'Carrie is Carrie,' suggesting that what has gone before may actually have been intended as a list of tautologies (or as close to tautology as is possible in natural language). In ‘Logic and Conversation’ Grice explains one way in which tautological utterances can still be informative:

> Extreme examples of flouting the first maxim of Quantity are provided by utterances of patent tautologies like *Women are women* and *War is war*. I would wish to maintain at the level of what is said, in my favoured sense, such remarks are totally noninformative and so, at that level, cannot but infringe the first maxim of Quantity in any conversational context. They are, of course, informative at the level of what is implicated, and the hearer’s identification of their informative content at this level is dependent on his ability to explain the speaker’s selection of this PARTICULAR patent tautology. (Grice 1999:85)

Grice’s argument suggests that tautology is still informative on the level of what is implicated and that our identification of any informative content depends on finding an explanation as to why a speaker has chosen this *particular* patent tautology. What I would suggest is that in reading Stein we must go against Grice on both counts. We should not be concerned with why Stein decided to employ a tautology related to the ‘character’ Carrie, this does not help us at all as we have no information about Carrie other than what is given to us in this paragraph. It is highly likely that the same effect would be achieved by the insertion of any name or even any pronoun; the effect is in the structure of tautology itself, not in the particular content of the tautology. This realisation leads us to refute Grice’s other claim (if only in relation to Stein’s practice) because it does not seem to be Stein’s intention with this tautology to be informative at the level of what is implicated; there are no great gains to be made in terms of propositional content, or at least not in deciding on any *specific* implications. We should also note here that, contrary to the kind of repetition analysed by Pilkington (2000), the affectiveness of these tautological repetitions has nothing to do with conveying particular phenomenal states or with activation of particular concept-related memories. Rather the effect of this passage comes through the repetitive structure of the tautology, its strangeness and its affectiveness and through a deliberate problematising of simple meanings which involves us in a valuable and enjoyable inferencing process. This is why passages such as this one, and many others like it in Stein (e.g. lines such as 'it is it is it is it is'), are rewarding even though they are barely informative in terms of recovering specific propositions. Wilcox (1990b) claims that 'in abstract writing the words are given you more or less stripped of subject matter and it is through the author's excitement in them that your own excitement is roused. In the purest forms of abstract writing the excitement aroused would I suppose be devoid of subject….' (Wilcox, 1990b:107).

We saw in chapter 2 that Stein's explanation of her famous rose line echoed Victor Shklovsky's doctrine of defamiliarisation in linking 'strangeness' of style with vitality of language.[36] Stein claims that to a Homer or Chaucer there was no separation between a word and thing it attempted to represent, but that after hundreds of years of literature the poet calls upon the same words only to find that they are 'just wornout literary words' from which 'the excitingness of pure being ha[s] withdrawn'. In order to work again with 'pure being' the poet must, Stein claims, 'put some strangeness, as something unexpected, into the structure of the sentence in order to bring back vitality to the noun'. She concludes by stating that, 'I know in life we don't go around saying

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[36] 'Shklovsky's doctrine of defamiliarisation has a particular historical interest in relation to Stein's writings because of the similarity in their artistic and intellectual points of reference… contexts of Russian formalism, which was closely allied to French avant-garde before World War 1, and Jamesian psychology' (Walker, 1984:15-16).

"… is a… is a… is a…"…but I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years'[37] (Stein, 1967:7). Crucially here, Stein is not only linking 'strangeness' of style with vitality of language, but she is also linking, specifically, strangeness built upon repetition and/or tautology, or what seems like repetition or tautology, with vitality of language. Although in the particular instance of 'a rose is a rose' the repetition may be working to convey particular phenomenal states (e.g. the redness of the rose) the strangeness of repetition can be affective without being linked to specific, rich concepts.

In pragmatic terms, the effort that readers are asked to give to this strange utterance means that we require extra contextual effect from the line. In our desire to find relevance in this line (as with many other repetitive passages in Stein's texts) we are led to question its component parts much more deeply, finding more and more potential problem areas and ambiguities, even to the stage, as Perloff suggests, of problematising the word 'is'(Perfloff, 1996:96). Whether it is possible to settle on any final propositional meaning for lines such as this is secondary to the fact that Stein is deliberately creating interpretive problems with this type of linguistic structure. She obviously cannot presuppose that readers have the information required to interpret such utterances, rather she purposefully places them in a situation where they cannot know how to interpret. Readers are forced into a presupposition that cannot be met, but by being placed in this situation by the text, they are also asked to engage in the process of attempting to generate further meaning in order that the text will achieve relevance. The texts generate contextual effects by forcing us to make difficult but rewarding inferences about semi-propositional representations, and in our realisation of the processes of meaning generation that exists between the text and the reader. In this way these repetitive passages come to be ‘about’ the generation of meaning. This, it must be emphasised again however, is an extremely high-risk communicative strategy, even in the context of modernist literary experimentation.

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[37] Two other readings of this sentence suggest themselves. (1) The rose is 'read' for the first time in a hundred years. (2) One of the most famous repetitive lines in the English language is Burns' 'my love is like a red red rose'. Stein may be alluding to him in her explanation. Burns' repetition of the word red was seen to evoke particular phenomenal states related to love by Pilkington (2000), and Stein thinks her repetition is achieving similar ends.

The analysis undertaken so far in this section also presents us with another reason to believe that the continuous present theory is not always the best way to approach a Stein text. To read Stein always in the present moment with no memory of previous utterances is to read some pretty mundane material. It is only when repetition is experienced and creates interpretive difficulty that the richness of Stein’s writing can be appreciated. In the above passage from *GMP* it is of little importance, and perhaps ultimately impossible to decide whether there are one or two sets of people staying. What is important is that Stein has created a deliberate difficulty for readers over this issue. Read in this light Stein’s texts are meaning games and they must be analysed attentively if they are to yield cognitive rewards. Obviously her texts are not achieving relevance in quite the same way that a regular utterance is. With a regular utterance we look for the interpretation that requires the least effort. With Stein, in order to get the full array of cognitive effects we are required to take the path that requires more effort. As Sperber and Fabb suggest, this process is responsible in itself for cognitive effects, and therefore for relevance.[38]

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[38] Kleeman (2008) shows how even the brute fact of repetition itself may increase our aesthetic pleasure in a text. Kleeman links Stein’s lecture ‘Composition as Explanation’ with the psychological phenomenon of Mere Exposure Effect (MEE) which ‘refers to a situation in which multiple exposures to a stimuli increases subject preference for that particular stimuli’. Kleeman argues that in this lecture ‘Stein creates a mere exposure effect in the mind of her readers, making her unconventional style of syntax more fluent, more appealing. As the reader monitors his own reactions to the essay throughout the course of reading, he notices that sentences no longer feel as “difficult,” and that he is able to spend more resources attending to the content of the sentences, or to other aesthetic factors related to their form, such as rhythm. As a result, the same structures begin to reveal a previously unacknowledged or

4.b.Level of eventualities (story components)

Stein has stated in her lectures that ‘I wanted not to write about any one doing or even saying anything’ (Stein, 1967:103). The truth of this statement is borne out in our passage from *GMP* which, although it contains many verbs purporting to be about actions or states, these actions and states are not really allied to any content (they do not clearly lead to representations of story components for the reader). Take the sentence ‘they did what they said they respected’ which is made up of three clauses with each successive clause being subordinated under the previous one. The sentence informs that an action has been carried out (did) based upon other actions (said) based on beliefs (respected), but what that action is is not recoverable from the text because the original beliefs that were under discussion and then copied in the actions are never described. In terms of what is actually happening in the text (content, represented eventualities) we are presented with an undisclosed set of beliefs and an undisclosed action based on those beliefs. The only real image created by the text is one of people talking a lot and for a long time, and this image is also made more abstract by the fact that the participants are so ambiguously and so vaguely referred to. Representation of eventualities is a difficult issue this text (and in much of Stein’s other work) as all the participants’ actions, apart from their talking at great length, have been obscured by the style. (Again, as we saw above, the narrator may be mocking the participants for

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inaccessible beauty. Whether this effect is related to perceptual fluency created in the implicit learning of Stein’s grammar, or to a conditioned positive response to stimuli that have been shown to have no negative effects, the end result is the same: the inherent beauty of a refused object is exposed, its refusal turns to acceptance’ (Kleeman, 2008). This argument adds weight to Sherzer’s (1994) assertion (see chapter 2) that repetitive texts familiarise the unfamiliar. However, Kleeman also notes that overexposure to stimuli results in the reversal of MEE. This suggests that MEE may make us better appreciate some of the passages we have been discussing in this section, but it cannot account for or contribute towards the intense effects traced in the reading of *The Making of Americans*.

staying and talking at such length, while at the same time being constructed ironically by Stein for the same reason.) If reference cannot be fixed conclusively then propositions cannot be formed; propositions must have a truth value. Any story events that are being represented are being represented in a schematic form. The question of whether story components are being repeated hinges on whether the repeated pronouns refer to the same or different people, and if they refer to the same people, whether there is a new event (a new ‘staying’) with each sentence, or the same event (the same instance of ‘staying’) that is repeatedly referred to by the narrative.

From what we have seen so far then, it is difficult to tell whether there is any repetition at the level of story eventualities because the eventualities are so difficult to recover from the text. But as we saw in the discussion of abstraction above, there are also cases where the avoidance of representation, or the attempt to create a certain level of abstraction, actually leads to the creation of what may in fact be misleadingly repetitive eventualities. Recall that Harold Osborne describes abstraction as ‘equivalent to incomplete specification’ arguing that in an abstract art ‘some of the details in which things differ are omitted or played down so that in the representation things appear more alike than in reality they are perceived to be’ (Osborne, 1979:26). Stein’s underdetermined texts, which incompletely specify the things they seem to be representing and which also incompletely specify their own formal properties, such as syntax, lead to this type of abstraction. Underdetermination means that two sentences which are only superficially alike, which are made to be superficially alike through an underdetermination of, for example, participants, can be making two completely distinct statements about the fictional world which collapse into much greater (often direct) resemblance at the surface level of the text; narrative repetition does not always equal story repetition. The two sentences may also be distinct syntactically but this distinction will often be erased; again, apparent resemblance (syntactic parity) is created from actual difference (sentences which are syntactically distinct) and this equals abstraction.

Stein's abstraction may lead then, to the potentially incorrect assumption that repetition exists on the level of represented eventualities. We can see this type of repetition at work in the following passage from *A Novel of Thank You*:

…they said they were.
They said they were they said they were. (Stein, 1994:12)

The immediate representation that is extracted in reading these sentences is the repeated eventuality that 'they [unspecified group of people] said they [unspecified group of people] were [unspecified attribute or action]'. Ambiguity caused by underdetermination of participants means that the potential range of details being conveyed in this passage are highly diverse (i.e. not actually repetitive). The second sentence in the above example could refer in various ways. They(1) could say that they(2) 'were' and then they(2) could say the same about they(1). They(1) could say it about they (2) then they(2) could say about they(3). They(1) could say about they(2) and then they(3) could say about they(4). They(1) could say that they(1) 'were' and they(2) could say that they(2) 'were'. They(1) could say that they(1) were and they(2) could say that they(3) were, and so on. Further ambiguity is created because we cannot be sure whether the narrator may just be repeatedly narrating the same event three times, three events once each, or if there are two events one of which is narrated once and the other twice. In addition the word ‘were’ could refer to the same attribute or action all cases, or three different attributes or actions in the three repetitions, or the same thing in two and a different thing in one.

It may seem to be an obvious point (but it is one worth making) that if there is any temporal ordering to the different events being described in this passage, then again it is non-recoverable from the text. Labov and Waletsky (1967) claim that the sequence of clauses in a narrative can represent the temporal sequence of events described by the narrative. A narrative clause ‘is a clause whose position relative to other clauses encodes the temporal location of the event which it describes’. One result of this attribute is that the temporal sequence of the events will change when the clause order is changed (Labov and Waletsky, 1967). An example would be ‘I pushed him. He pushed me.’ changing to ‘He pushed me. I pushed him ’. There seems in this instance to be a clear temporal relationship between the two clauses, with the eventuality represented by the clause that comes first preceding the eventuality represented by the clause that comes second in each ordering. However, with repetitive clauses the relationship between clauses becomes more problematic. If the passage reads: ‘I pushed him. I pushed him’ Then the reordering of the clauses will obviously read exactly the same on the page and hence, for the reader anyway, will represent the story repetition of two similar events or one event being described twice in the narrative. Where this reordering could be come problematic is if the author intends to represent two different events between which there may be an important distinction but, for whatever reason, the author chooses to represent both events in exactly the same way. This seems quite often to be the case when we read Stein’s repetition because her writing is so often unspecific in terms of reference.

Repetition and underdetermination in the narrative in this passage and others like it leads to possible false repetition in the story because the text repeats semi-propositional representations that cannot be contextually enriched. The importance of this realisation does not relate to the attempt to eventually work out what Stein *meant* with these ambiguous clauses, what events ‘actually happened’ in the story and in what order. Aside from the fact that it is impossible to get to a definite propositional form for these events and hence to recover a definite temporal order, it is very likely the case that there was no original intention to create definite propositional forms or a definite temporal order. What is important for this passage and others like it, is not that we try to recover Stein’s *particular* intentions, i.e. which alternative she is actually trying to represent. It is quite probable that she does not want to represent any one particular meaning or set of meanings with this type of repetitive structure. Passages such as this achieve relevance not through the propositional content they generate but through (rewarding) cognitive difficulties in which they place the reader and through the amount of different interpretations that they support. Stein makes our reading and our search for meaning deliberately problematic and in so doing she creates a text that generates extremely large numbers of co-present alternative meanings.[39] Again here we see that a large increase in cognitive effects can result from a consideration of how repetitive texts may potentially be non-repetitive on levels other than that of surface textual detail.

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[39] Whereas at least some of the repeated pronouns at the end of a work like *The Making of Americans* could potentially be assigned to particular characters, when we consider the lack of context for these statements, the number of interpretations for this passage is actually infinite. The pronouns could be referring to an infinite variety of people, and ‘were’ could refer to an infinite variety of states or actions.

4.c.Level of syntax

Another level of representation of the text on which Stein's surface repetition may not be paralleled is that of syntax. Stein is expressly interested in syntax, claiming, (and perhaps exaggerating her stance on the matter slightly) that she does not know that 'anything has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences' (Stein 1967:124). Stein has also explained her decision to utilise certain word classes more than others. She dismisses nouns as 'completely not interesting' because they are the names of things. The same is true of adjectives because of their association with nouns ('because after all… the thing that affects a not too interesting thing is of necessity not interesting'). Verbs and adverbs are more interesting because of their possible ambiguity ('nouns and adjectives never can make mistakes can never be mistaken but verbs can be so endlessly, both as to what they do and how they agree or disagree or whatever they do…the same is true of adverbs'). Verbs are also praised because they can 'change to look like something else… they are, so to speak, on the move'. Adverbs, Stein claims, move with them. Pronouns are not as bad as nouns, mainly because they are 'not really the name of anything' and this gives them a greater possibility of 'being something'. Prepositions are Steins favourite part of speech because they are the thing that can be 'mistaken most of all' (Stein, 1967:123-6).

Although it appears likely that Stein's ideas concerning parts of speech may have been influenced by her former teacher William James (see Levinson, 1941), it is also apparent that the crucial attribute that attracts Stein to certain word classes over others is their potential for creating ambiguity.[40] It may be this same quality that makes Stein derogate typographical features such as question marks, exclamation marks, and quotation marks, all of which are dismissed as 'revolting'. She claims that a reader will automatically know when they are reading, for example, a question, but it seems likely that she would be more pleased if they were unsure.

The following paragraph appears in Stein's lecture 'Composition as Explanation,' and is a good illustration of her creation of ambiguous syntax

> And after that what changes what changes after that, after that what changes and what changes after that and after that and what changes and after that what changes after that. (Stein 1967:26)

This sentence appears to be a series of questions. The fact that no question marks appear in the sentence does not, as we have seen, indicate the lack of a question. The sentence could contain eight or more individual (although highly repetitive) questions. One possible reading of the sentence is as follows: 'and after that what changes? what changes after that? after that what changes? and what changes after that? and after that? and what changes? and after that? what changes after that?' There is also the possibility for some of the questions to be of the form, 'after that?' 'what changes what?' or just of the form 'what?'.

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[40] It should be noted however, that after her period of excessive repetition, Stein went on to create an equally ambiguous literature based on concrete nouns with her *Tender Buttons* style, when she switched her attention 'from the sentence to lexical choice' (Schmitz, 1990:173). The contrasting styles of these two periods have been extensively discussed, and are often related to Jakobson's metonymic and metaphoric types of aphasiac language disturbance, and to the analytic and synthetic phases of cubism,. See for example Brinnin (1959), Lodge (1974), Walker (1984), Dubnick (1990), Isaak (1990).

Of course there may be no questions in the sentence at all. For example, instead of question marks in the above rewritings, imagine instead exclamation marks, creating a meaning such as ‘and after that (happens,) what changes (we will see occurring!)’. This ambiguity arises partly from Stein’s use of words whose class is ambiguous, leading to ambiguities of syntax. For example the word ‘what’ may not be being used in an interrogative manner. Stein may be saying that the word ‘what’ changes several times; she may even be referring self reflexively to the shifting status of the word ‘what’ in this text. The word ‘changes’ is also ambiguous. Is it a noun each time it is being used, or a verb every time, or does its status change? There is also an issue around the demonstrative ‘that’. Does ‘that’ refer to the same object or event each time or does each successive ‘that’ refer to the previous ‘that’? If the answer to this question is that ‘that’ refers to the same thing each time then this would mean that Stein is simply repeating the same question over and over again in different forms. If ‘that’ always refers to the previous ‘that’ then Stein is asking a series of questions whose answers lead further and further into the future. The type of variation under discussion here falls under two distinct categories. One is unmarked morphological change (the same word belonging to two different word classes) and the other is simply a change in the referent of the word (two instances of the same demonstrative or noun referring to two different things or sets of things).

Stein’s claim that she never repeats because there is always a change in emphasis is relevant here. If the above sentence were spoken aloud then the changes in emphasis, we may presume, would help us decide on word class, or the existence of a question as opposed to a statement. What at first may seem like a highly repetitive sentence may not actually contain any direct syntactical repetition at all, and one may have hoped that if these texts were being read aloud then the changes in insistence and emphasis would show that the text was less repetitive than it appears on the printed page, but listening to Stein reading her work does little to dispel the idea that she is repeating, or the fact that her syntax is highly ambiguous.

There are a vast number of combinations of assignments of meanings to these sentences and those others like them in Stein's texts, and it is finally impossible to tell which sentence has which of the multiple possible meanings. As William Gass has claimed, Stein will 'treat the elements of the sentence as if they were people at a party, and begin a mental play with all their possible relationships' (quoted in Perloff, 1981:95). She also requires that we readers do the same thing. Rexroth (1959) makes a similar point, stating that 'poetry is not the same as 'please pass the butter' which is simple imperative. But Gertrude Stein showed… that if you focus your attention on 'Please pass the butter' and put it through enough permutations and combinations, it begins to take on a kind of glow, the splendour of what is called 'aesthetic object.' This is a trick of manipulation of attention' (Rexroth, 1959:10).

Perloff discusses this attribute in Stein's *Susie Asado,* showing how the text repeatedly requires readers to ask question about its syntax and word class. Perloff claims that

> These are questions that Gertrude Stein would want us to ask. For her verbal configurations are set up precisely to manifest that arbitrariness of discourse, the impossibility of arriving at "the meaning" even as countless possible meanings present themselves to our attention. (Perloff, 1981:76)

Perloff's comments are about a relatively un-repetitive text in Stein's oeuvre but they serve to highlight what is beginning to emerge as the central attribute of Stein's repetitive and underdetermined texts. With the expenditure of extra processing effort, these texts which at first glance seem to be communicative failures, generate extremely large numbers of co-present alternative meanings. As Walker (1984) suggests, Stein can produce a vast 'degree of individual variations in meaning… from drastically limited semantic resources' (Walker, 1984:79). Our job as readers is to explore these meanings.

5. Aesthetic gains

Two arguments about Stein's style emerge from the above analysis. The first is that by analysing the different levels of representation in her texts, by abstracting from the actual printed words on the page, we can agree with her to a certain extent that her texts are non-repetitive. The second is that her texts are deliberately repetitive and that the experience of repetition leads to cognitive and aesthetic gains. The correct reading is a combination of these two arguments. Stein deliberately creates texts that are both repetitive and non-repetitive at the same time in order to produce certain outcomes. Thus the narrator of *The Making of Americans* tells us that she is aware she is repeating and that her characters are repeating, claiming that she 'begins again as if she had never heard it', whereas in a later lecture, Stein herself suggests that the novel contains no repetition (Stein 1995:304-5) (Stein, 1967:105).

The positive outcomes that Stein generates through this deliberate ambiguity are: ‘putting some strangeness into the structure of the sentence’, and thereby forcing readers into deeper analysis; asking readers to discover that on various other levels of representation, these texts are not as repetitive as was first imagined, which is a rewarding experience on its own; creating through repetition and underdetermination the intense cognitive effect whereby massive ambiguity creates a sublime defective propositional attitude.

The most significant of these outcomes in terms of our aesthetic response to Stein’s texts is the latter, the creation of a mass of simultaneously available meanings that cannot be decided between. The texts which generate this response are more radical than the cubist paintings to which they have been compared because while those paintings may be irresolvable, they do not offer nearly as many co-present alternative interpretations. We have seen that in many of Stein’s underdetermined repetitions there exists an extremely large number of different interpretations for each repeated unit. When we consider the combinations of interpretations that are available for the repetitive passages as a whole, the total number of co-present alternatives is huge. Recall that Sperber defines a semi-propositional representation as one which ‘fails to identify one and only one proposition’, and that such representations can be given as many propositional interpretations as there are ways of specifying the conceptual content of their elements. Stein’s underdetermined repetitive passages make us entertain such representations in very direct way; they are bluntly minimal in terms of the type of concepts they make us process yet they generate masses of potential propositions from a small group of semi-propositional representations.

A confrontation with such high numbers of interpretations creates sublime feeling by generating the defective propositional attitude described by Fabb (1998). In order to cope with the impossibility of dealing with the effectively infinite number of interpretations for these passages, the mind creates an intense propositional attitude decoupled from any actual propositional content, evacuating all the potential interpretations and protecting this absence inside an intense attitude of belief. Each of the huge number of well defined propositions we may give to each linguistic unit is mundane and unimportant, what is important is that so many of them exist. Stein's repetitive texts then, are geared towards the creation of 'meaning' in general rather than the creation of specific meanings. As Stein says in *Two*, 'meaning is meaning' (Stein, 1951:91). These repetitive texts come also to be 'about' the process of meaning generation, as readers gain meta-level awareness of the processes Stein has set in motion through her radical stylistic choices. The texts' reliance on pronouns and shifters, words which on their own are effectively meaningless, means that the entire 'meaning' of the texts lies in this interpretative play that their repetitive structures activate. Our initial interpretations of the passages are mundane, and the eventual outcomes of our inferencing are also mundane. It is in the quantity of meaning and the processing of this meaning that the aesthetic effect of these texts lies. These repetitive passages are pragmatic games, radically un-poetic from one point of view because they do not allow us to progress to the stage of generating implicatures, but massively productive at a semi-propositional level.

6. **Memory and repetition**

I would like now to revisit Stein's claims regarding the continuous present and cinematic technique in light of the preceding analysis. It should now be clear that much of the reward of reading Stein comes from the complex relationship that exists in her work between repetition and non-repetition. If repetition is not experienced by the reader, if instead we read only in the present, with no memory of past linguistic units then it would seem that these rewards would be lost.

We are now in a position to re-assess the merits of the continuous present reading and two quick examples will serve to show both the advantages and the disadvantages of applying the continuous present theory to Stein's work. Kawin notes that Stein's success depends on 'her being able to… educate her audience to read only in the present' (Kawin, 1972:119). It does seem correct that on occasion Stein's texts are structured so as to *suggest* this kind of reading, usually when the repetition is at its most direct, for example in the first portrait of Picasso:

> One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was certainly completely charming. (Stein, 1967: 203)

Here, because each new sentence is almost but not quite identical to the last one, it is possible that we may forget how the previous sentence differs from the current one, hence in some respects only the current sentence exists in consciousness. This is where Stein's cinematic technique is most evident. In theory, the reader keeps a sentence in mind as long as it takes to read to the end and process it. The original sentence is then superseded in consciousness by its near exact repetition in the next sentence, hence it is possible to say that the original sentence is discarded from memory. There is no forgetting mid sentence. A sentence is like a film frame in this writing because there is such a small - almost unnoticeable – change from sentence to sentence. This is the area of Stein's writing that applies most readily to Kawin's claim that her texts 'baffle' the memory (Kawin, 1972:126). It would seem however that rather than Kawin's concentrated act of attention, this type of effect would actually require what McCabe calls 'our distracted attention' (McCabe 2005:82).

As we saw in our discussion of Bergson, in order for Stein's representation to be a continuously moving one, we must (just as we must in the cinema) actually retain the trace of the superseded sentence in 'memory'. Stein must use the traces of repetition as a means of reuniting the discrete units or fragments (phrases, clauses, sentences) into a moving whole, a continuous present in the style of the cinema projector. Each sentence is just that much different from the last so that there is motion in the representation, but still similar enough to the last that there is no consciousness/memory of the discrete units. So repetition and the awareness of repetition (at whatever level of consciousness this awareness occurs) is necessary for the cinematic technique to succeed. In theory at least, this process would use repetition to eradicate the conscious experience of repetition. In reality, however, fluid movement with no discrete memory of different units is obviously much more difficult to achieve in language than in the 25 frames per second of the cinema, and seems to posit a type of reading that is impossible. For the moment though, let us imagine that this cinematic reading is possible because of the special way in which Stein constructs her texts and let us assume that even though some form of retention of previous repetitive units is involved, since it is unconscious, this does not constitute ‘remembering’.

Even given these additional assumptions, a problem still arises for the continuous present theory when we begin to look at less directly repetitive (though still highly repetitive) texts, such as the following passage from *The Making of Americans*,

> A history of any one must be a long one, slowly it comes out from them from their beginning to their ending, slowly you can see it in them the nature and the mixtures in them, slowly everything comes out from each one in the kind of repeating each one does in the different parts and kinds of living they have in them, slowly then the history of them comes out from them, slowly then any one who looks well at any one will have the history of the whole of that one. Slowly the history of each one comes out of each one. Mostly every history will be a long one. Slowly it comes out of each one, slowly any one who looks at them gets the history… (Stein, 1995:183)

Stein sees *The Making of Americans* as ‘doing what the cinema was doing’ but there is in this passage too much variation from sentence to sentence for the reader to experience the cinematic movement of the Picasso portrait (Stein, 1967:104). The local repetitions in this passage are also repetitions, or near repetitions of many other occurrences of these sentences and clauses in the previous two hundred pages of the novel, and much of this repetition will be experienced and remembered. The ideal

Stein reader posited by herself and Kawin does not actually exist who can read so intensely in the present moment that this type of repetition will exist below the level of consciousness, yet Stein claims that *The Making of Americans* contains no repetition (Stein, 1967:105).

What the continuous present approach would fail to account for in this second passage are the cognitive and aesthetic effects Stein's text achieves through the reader's awareness of repetition. To take even a relatively mundane example from the previous quotation, repetition enables the form of the passage to mimic its content. But the repetition must be experienced to have this effect. In the previous section I have highlighted many more powerful effects that arise out of our experience of repetition in Stein's texts, chief among them the creation of massive amounts of co-present alternative meanings for the texts.

Compared to the effects of remembered repetition, Stein and Kawin's continuous present would not be a very exciting one to experience. Does anyone actually want the continuous experience of knowing (or indeed, not really knowing) things like 'they said they were, they said they were, they said they were'? Instead of the sublime experience created by the high levels of co-present alternative meanings, if we read in a continuous present, the reader would simply have a continuous experience of mundane and barely representational material.

That being said, the reading of Stein's texts that I have offered in this chapter is partly dependent upon an investigation of the truth of Stein's claim that she does not repeat. Her comments are partly responsible for the desire to look more closely at the different ways her surface repetition can be non-repetitive. By repeating one small linguistic unit and telling readers that the practice is non-repetitive, we are made to seek out a huge number of slightly different interpretations that exist for her repetitive passages. So regardless of her motivation behind claiming she doesn't repeat, or the truth of such a claim, Stein's own views on her texts do open up their significance to readers. This significance lies chiefly in getting readers involved in a highly affective inferencing process that results in the generation of extremely large quantities of potential meaning. Experienced in the continuous present, Stein's repetitive texts could not be regarded as relevant communication, considered as they have been in this chapter, they are among the most productive and rewarding texts a reader is ever likely to encounter.

7. Conclusion

We saw in section 1 that Stein claims repetition does not exist in her texts for two reasons: (1) what seems like repetition is actually 'insistence' with change in emphasis, (2) repetition with minute variation (either in the form or in the reader's interpretation) leads to a continuous present in which repetition is no longer consciously experienced. Doubts were then raised regarding the validity of these seemingly mutually exclusive claims that were then borne out in the course of the chapter.

In section 2 Stein's repetitive style was situated within the context of Bergsonian philosophy and contemporary avant-garde painting. Bergson's most famous doctrine is that time, as it is lived, is a continuous whole that cannot not be broken into discrete units as space can. However, Bergson suggests that the intellect changes our perception of time away from real duration and into a spatialised fragmentation, in which our past is broken into externally related recollections (Bergson, 2008). Stein's texts attempt to work against this fragmentation by creating a cinematic moving image, but crucially, we saw that an awareness of repetition at some level of consciousness is necessary for any attempt to generate a continuously moving representation. Stein's repetitive texts were also shown to be analogous to cubist painting in their emphasis on the conditions of their medium and their parallel movement towards abstraction. Like the cubists, Stein creates texts which thwart our attempts to extract specific unambiguous meanings.

In section 3, Stein's massively repetitive novel *The Making of Americans* was seen to generate sublime experience in two related ways. In Kantian terms, as a vast and featureless object with its infinite (for aesthetic judgement) series of repetitions, the novel is impossible to comprehend in a unity, however, reason demands the repetitions be exhibited as a totality nonetheless and this triggers the awareness of a supersensible power within us, the feeling of the sublime. The novel's creation of sublime feeling was also seen to have a pragmatic basis, generating for readers an intense propositional attitude decoupled from propositional content. The balance of effort versus reward that Relevance theory describes means that we require a substantial cognitive/aesthetic gain from *The Making of Americans*. Reading the repetitions in the novel, however, involves us in a very lengthy inferencing process with no resultant increase in propositional content. But because inferencing in itself is an affective process the lengthy repeated inferencing process, while creating no new implicatures, does generate an associated increase in the affectiveness of the text, meaning that readers are involved in an intense affective aesthetic experience which is decoupled from propositional content. We saw that, unlike most of Stein's other repetitive texts, *The Making of Americans* does not generate sublime feeling by giving the reader too many potential meanings to choose between, but by presenting a gap where meaning should be and at the same time encouraging readers to engage in a massive (affective) inferencing process to fill this gap. The lack of new propositional content actually increases the intensity of our propositional attitude because, as Fabb notes, there exists an 'inverse relation between the explicitness of content of a thought and the intensity of attitude held towards it…' (Fabb 1998). As in Weiskel's (1976) description of the mathematical sublime, in reading *The Making of Americans* 'the absence of a signified itself assumes the status of signifier, disposing us to feel that behind this newly significant absence lurks a newly discovered presence' (Weiskel 1976:28).

In Section 4 we saw Stein's repetition generate sublime experience by different means. This section discussed the aesthetic outcomes of passages from Stein's texts with smaller quantities of more exact repetition than *The Making of Americans*. Analysis of such passages showed that repetition allied with underdetermination can lead to the generation of a superabundance of co-present meanings that cannot be decided between. These passages create massive ambiguity related to, among other things, word class, syntax, participants and the relationship between narrative order and story order. I suggested that the pragmatic resolution for our attempt to cope with such a huge number of possible interpretations is the generation of an intense propositional attitude which lacks specific propositional content, what Fabb (1998) calls the sublime 'blown-fuse'. An extremely important factor in both cases of sublime feeling outlined in this chapter is the affectiveness of the difficult inferencing process (often related to semi-propositional representations) that the texts force us into. The difficulty of the repetition works to make us expect a large cognitive reward for our efforts, and our efforts (the inferencing process) are rewarding (affective) in themselves. Both forms of sublime experience discussed so far have at their centre an unusually lengthy inferencing process that is triggered by Stein's repetitive style.

Section 5 and 6 revisited Stein's claims about non-repetition in her work, arguing that Stein deliberately creates texts that are both repetitive and non-repetitive at the same time in order to produce the following aesthetic outcomes: 'putting some strangeness into the structure of the sentence', and thereby forcing readers into deeper analysis; asking readers to discover that on various other levels of representation, these texts are not as repetitive as was first imagined, which is a rewarding experience on its own; creating through repetition and underdetermination the intense cognitive effect whereby massive ambiguity creates a sublime defective propositional attitude. The complex relationship between repetition and non-repetition in Stein's work then, is the basis for much of its aesthetic value. We saw that Stein's claim about non-repetition and the continuous present would fail to account for the intense cognitive and aesthetic effects her texts generate through the reader's awareness of repetition. Instead of the sublime experience created by the high levels of co-present alternative meanings, if we read in a continuous present, Stein's texts would simply create a continuous experience of mundane and barely representational material. However, Stein's claims about non-repetition were also considered to be partly responsible for our discovery of so much co-present meaning in her texts. By repeating one small linguistic unit and telling readers that the practice is non-repetitive, we are made to seek out a huge number of slightly different interpretations that exist for her repetitive passages. Regardless of her motivation for claiming that she doesn't repeat, or the truth of such a claim, we saw that Stein's own views on her texts do open up their significance to readers.

Stein's texts confront us with the limits of repetitive textual practice both in quantity and exactness as, while there is obviously no upper limit to the amount of repetition a text can contain, it is difficult to imagine another novel ever approaching the quantity of repetition presented in *The Making of Americans*. Stein's massively repetitive novel also approaches our potential limit case of maximum metalinguistic and interpretive repetition as the vast majority of its repetitions simply generate the same explicatures and implicatures over and over again. In populating the initial typology with real texts in chapter 6 we shall decide whether Beckett or Burroughs has approached this limit more closely than Stein. It is obviously much easier to produce limit cases of exactness in repetition than of quantity, but we have seen in this chapter that Stein's particular achievement with exactly repetitive structures is to make them not only worth reading, but highly aesthetically rewarding. In shorter passages such as 'they said they were…' or 'after that what changes…' Stein actualises one of our potential limit cases of repetitive practice, maximising metalinguistic repetition while keeping interpretive repetition to a minimum by employing repetition alongside underdetermination to produce overwhelming levels of semi-propositional meaning in her texts; in confronting us with these limits of repetition, Stein also confronts us with the limits of our interpretive abilities in sublime experience.

Perhaps the most important outcome of this chapter is to have shown that a pragmatic account of Stein's texts allow us to understand why they are valuable, a difficult feat for less linguistically oriented studies of her work which are unable to trace its pragmatic outcomes. Walker (1984) is representative of much Stein criticism when she discusses Stein's pursuit through repetition of 'new meanings that transcend the limitations of rationality'(Walker, 1984:112). The problem has been that without a pragmatic account of Stein's repetition, critics were unable to move beyond such vague assertions in order to discuss what actually happens after propositional meaning recedes from Stein's texts. Of course, not all of Stein's exactly repetitive passages will be equally as rewarding as those discussed above; when her narrator counts to one hundred in ones or produces repetition such as 'he and he and he and he and he,' there may be a humorous outcome to the repetition, and we may experience a Mere Exposure Effect response if the repetition is not extended too far, but it is unlikely that the there will be an intense aesthetic outcome because, pragmatically, these repetitive structures are much less rewarding.

This assertion does not constitute a return to Pilkington's (2000) argument that the right concepts must be repeated in order for poetic effects to be generated; it is simply that repetition must be used in ways that are pragmatically stimulating. Recognising that the narrator is counting to a hundred in ones or that she is referring to either one man many times or many men one time is not challenging or rewarding enough to produce intense aesthetic effects. These passages do not produce the super-abundance of meaning that we find in others that are ostensibly similar to them. The analysis undertaken in this chapter shows that specific concepts and specific meanings are not the key to affectiveness of large scale repetition as a stylistic device. Rather the key to successful repeating is in creating an abundance of potential meaning (or, as in the case of *The Making of Americans*, simply creating the impression that such a meaning must exist) and asking the reader to become involved in a difficult but highly rewarding inferencing process to generate this meaning.

This chapter has shown that the strangeness of Stein’s repetition can be contextualised to some extent, whether or not this makes her work more relevant as a communicative strategy, it certainly does not make it any less challenging. Stein’s texts are among the most difficult any reader is likely to encounter, and most will feel justified in passing her work over. I hope to have shown in this chapter that for those willing to persevere, the rewards can be great.

CHAPTER 4. SAMUEL BECKETT

1. Introduction

In contrast to the other writers under discussion in this thesis, there is little to say with regards *why* Samuel Beckett chooses to employ so much repetition. He has expressed a desire for symmetry in his work (see Federman 2000) and his texts display a recurring interest in mathematics and permutation (for a detailed account see Ackerly 1998); these two tendencies clearly feed into his use of repetition but they do not come close to fully explaining it. Beckett offers no denial or justification of repetition (Stein) and he admits to no overall program which would require repetition as a core practice (Burroughs).[41]

This lack of any explicit motivation to repeat should not hinder our analysis of Beckett's texts in any case. Ultimately, the previous chapter did not justify the difficulty of Stein's repetitive texts through any appeal to her artistic goals, but through a concentrated effort to uncover the aesthetic effects of her textual practice. Similarly, in this chapter we will derive a much better understanding of Beckett's desire to repeat by discovering what repetition achieves for Beckett’s texts, and for their cognitive and aesthetic effects on the reader.

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[41] The closest thing we have to a reason for Beckett's repetitive textual practice lies in his oft quoted remark about art and expression (from *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*). Here, in what has come to be considered by many critics as his artistic mission statement, Beckett proposes that art work with 'the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express'(Beckett, 1983:139). We can see repetition as one way (silence is another) that Beckett found to work around this impossible constraint. While it is, by Beckett's own admission, unfeasible to express that there is nothing to express, repetition does allow Beckett's texts to create the illusion of such a state. By creating the impression that at least there is nothing *new* to express, and nothing *new* from which to express, repetition allows Beckett to generate huge amounts of meaning without too obviously breaking any of these credos from *Three Dialogues*. However, we must remember that this quotation comes from a discussion of contemporary painters, and is not a direct statement from Beckett about his own work, making it wise not to labour this point.

In the course of the analysis of Stein we uncovered a set of possible problems and outcomes that repetition creates in a text. This chapter will build on the analysis of Stein, focusing on many of these same issues, and drawing appropriate comparisons that will help us better understand the practice of both writers and lead us closer to the creation of a typology of repetitive writing practice. Beckett’s description of Stein as ‘in love with her vehicle, albeit only in the way in which a mathematician is in love with his figures... for whom the solution of the problem is of entirely secondary interest, indeed to whom must the death of his figures appear quite dreadful’ could quite easily be applied to the protagonist and/or the narrator of *Watt*, and Anderson (2007) provides evidence to situate the protagonist of the novel as a possible parodic embodiment of what Stein was trying to achieve (Beckett, 1983:172). But although in *Watt* Beckett may at times seem superficially close to Stein, there are some fundamental differences between the two authors’ use of repetition, particularly in the relationship in their texts between Genette’s categories of narrative and story, and in terms of the permutative and symmetrical quality of much of Beckett’s repetition. Perhaps coincidentally, the strongest allusive links between the two authors’ work (one that to my knowledge has not been investigated) are found in Beckett’s *Texts for Nothing* and *How it is*. Stein claims that when writing she is completely listening and talking together, using the phrase ‘I say it as I hear it’ (Stein, 1967:107). Whether in conscious allusion to Stein or not, Beckett includes this phrase (once) in *Texts for Nothing* and repeats it with great insistence in his novel *How it is*. Both texts feature protagonists that are always listening and talking at the same time. *How it is* also features characters stuck in an eternal repetitive cycle with no memory of the repetition, although, in contrast to Stein, Beckett's narrator is aware that his language is repetitive. When at his most repetitive in works such as *Watt* and *Lessness*, however, Beckett's permutative and combinatorial texts are much closer to the work by the writers such as the Oulipo group than to Stein.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first deals with the impact of repetition on the following aspects of Beckett's texts: the relationship between narrative and story; the creation of permutation and symmetry; the suggestion of infinite potential for further repetition 'outside' the text; and the generation of aesthetic response. Section two investigates these issues together in Beckett's most repetitive text, *Lessness*. The concluding section of this chapter introduces a new variety of repetitive practice. 'Intratextual repetition', found much more often in Beckett and Burroughs than in Stein, is repetition that holds between two or more texts written by a single author. The use of intratextual repetition in Beckett and Burroughs points to a fundamental difference between their work and that of Stein. Intratextual repetition necessarily requires some repetition of content in order that it be recognisable. Stein does not employ intratextual repetition often because the *things* that she repeats are of little or no importance, her texts are investigations of the potential of repetitive formal structures.[42] Less extreme in their formalism than Stein, Beckett and Burroughs, albeit in different ways, make the repetition of content an important part of their overall practice.

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[42] As William Carlos Williams has claimed, Stein deals with 'simply the skeleton, the "formal" parts of writing, those that make form' (Williams, 1990:20). Is should be clear from our discussion of Stein however, that those parts 'which make form' also make their own particular type of meaning.

2. Text-internal repetition

Stephen Connor discerns two types of repetition in Beckett's early novel *Watt*. On the one hand, there is finite permutation which exhausts all possible combinations of its elements and, on the other, repetitive sequences which are open to indefinite expansion (Connor, 1988:30-1). Beckett produces large amounts of metalinguistic repetition through these two strategies. Superficially, these types of repetition appear similar to instances of the repetition I have analysed in Stein's work. We have already encountered the following passage from Stein's *GMP*:

> They stayed when they stayed. They all stayed when they stayed. They all respected what they said when they said what they said. They all said what they said. They all stayed. (Stein, 2006:150-1)

In this passage there is an excess of language (narrative) over the eventualities it represents (story). The repetition of the information that 'they stayed' seems excessive because it tells us almost nothing new. If the pronoun 'they' is taken as referring to the same set of people each time then, in terms of Genette's terminology, the relationship between the represented story event 'they stayed' and the narrative statements that represent it is 1S/nN (one story event narrated multiple times). Whatever further interpretation this repetition invites, the immediate experience of this passage is of multiple narrative statements for each story event, with the story events themselves being experienced as abstract and indefinite. In *The Making of Americans* Stein takes this feature of her writing to extreme lengths, repeatedly referring in the narrative to the same story event or components, such as a description of a character trait, hundreds of times.

Beckett's repetition in *Watt*, though often more extensive than Stein's, does not in the main present an imbalance between story events and their narrative representations. Beckett's repetition here can be considered more 'reasonable' and certainly more immediately informative than Stein's because the eventualities that it describes are themselves repeated in the fictional world, as in the following example of permutative repetition:

> from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the window; from the fire to the bed, from the bed to the fire; from the bed to the fire, from the fire to the bed; (Beckett, 1976:203)

This repetitive language refers to different repetitive events and in contrast to the passage from *GMP*, these events are also well determined, making it clear what events actually happen and that each represented event happens after the completion of the last one. These traits are also apparent in many of the open sequences of repetition in *Watt*, including the repetitive series that Arsene describes to Watt, such as 'eats again then rests again then eats again then rests again then eats again then rests again…' (Beckett, 1976:51). Here the language is repetitive because the series of actions is repetitive; successive story events are paralleled by successive narrative units. We saw that in Stein's work it can be difficult to tell if there are multiple representations of one action or the representation of a successive series of repetitive actions, or even if there are any actions at all. In *Watt*'s lists and permutations, with no ambiguity of reference, Beckett repeats in language what is being repeated in the fictional world.[43]

The permutative character of Beckett's repetition in this passage (and throughout his writing) also further distinguishes his work from Stein, whose repetition is much more arbitrarily structured. The following excerpt from a list in *Watt* is indicative of the permutative repetition in the novel

> As for his feet, sometimes he wore on each a sock, or on the one a sock and on the other a stocking, or a boot, or a shoe, or a slipper, or a sock and a boot, or a sock and a shoe, or a sock and a slipper, or a stocking and a boot, or a stocking and a shoe… (Beckett, 1976:200)

The list continues on for more than a page, filling out a complete logical set of alternatives. As we have seen, the narrator often lists every possible permutation of whatever (often arbitrary) set of objects or relations he is currently detailing. This permutational process was carried out rigorously by Beckett, who actually produced exhaustive truth tables for the novel, 'ticking each permutation so as to cover every possibility' (Ackerly and Gontarski, 2004:631).[44]

Stein's variation, on the other hand, is based more on the arbitrary rules of what she is attempting to narrate and upon varying stylistic factors such as word choice. It is rare to find an instance of Stein providing all the permutations of any given set with which she is working. A typical example of Stein's use of permutation is the following passage from *The Making of Americans* where the narrator lists various activities and states. This is the order that the permutations appear (in the novel itself the permutations are broken into two sections by an intervening paragraph):

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[43] Even in *Watt*'s listing of logical alternatives there is no real imbalance between narrative and story. Although we are often presented with contradictory possible alternatives to a situation, such as those centred on the arrangement of giving food to the Lynch family dog, each possibility does involve more meaning in the story, the meaning is simply potential rather than actualised.

[44] Mood (1971) does show however, that certain sets are left incomplete.

> feeling thinking believing knowing doing
> feeling believing thinking knowing doing
> believing thinking feeling knowing doing
> believing knowing feeling doing thinking
> believing thinking knowing feeling doing
> feeling knowing thinking doing
> doing feeling believing knowing thinking
> believes thinks knows feels does
> do, think, feel, believe, know
> feeling thinking doing knowing believing
> doing knowing believing *or* thinking
> thinking feeling believing knowing
> thinking feeling believing knowing doing
> knowing feeling, believing thinking doing
> believing feeling thinking knowing doing
> thinking feeling doing believing knowing
> believing feeling thinking doing knowing
> feeling believing thinking knowing doing (Stein, 1995:496)

Here we can see that only fourteen permutations of the possible one hundred and twenty are given, and four of these permutations are repeated, two with different morphology (as in the first set to be repeated where ‘believing thinking knowing feeling doing’ becomes ‘believes thinks knows feels does’). The ordering of the permutations seems to obey no rule and on three occasions one of the terms is dropped from a permutation. In short there is no attempt for completeness or symmetry, either in the structure of the list as a whole, or in the placement of the repeated permutations.

Stein never attempts symmetrical structuring of her repetition, nor does she set out to list complete sets, as the following example from *A Novel of Thank You* shows: ‘Distanced too, Julian Julius Julia, Julian Julia Julius, Julius Julian Julia, Julius Julia Julian. It’s a favour’ (Stein, 1994:21). Here Stein begins to fill out a complete set of permutations on the three names but stops short (the alternatives beginning with Julia do not appear). The fact that they stop short also means that the possibility of their symmetry is not recoverable by the reader, but the order the possible combinations *are* given in (abc acb bac bca) is not symmetrical in any sense. Even more so here than in the previous example (where to list one hundred and twenty permutations in a symmetrical arrangement may been regarded even by Stein as creating too much difficulty for readers) there is evidence that Stein is deliberately working against completion and symmetry within her permutational structures.

So whereas the above passages feel a lot like *Watt* when they are read, the repetitive practice is actually very different. Where Stein’s permutations seem to be produced and ordered randomly, in addition to being complete sets, Beckett’s permutative repetitions are typically symmetrical, these symmetrical tendencies in Beckett’s work have been well documented, (for more on symmetry in Beckett see for example, Kenner 1962, 1973, Sage 1975, Ackerly 1998, Federman 2000).[45] In the description of Mr. Knott's movement between door, window, fire and bed given above, the repetitive list advances in the following fashion: ab,ba; ba,ab; cd,dc; dc,cd; ac,ca; ca,ac; bd,db; db,bd; cb,bc; bc,cb; da,ad; ad,da (where a: door, b: window, c: fire, and d: bed). After completing this initial structure the narrator moves on to the following, more complex pattern with each cycle taking longer to complete (ab,bc; cb,ba); (ba,ad; da,ab)… (and so on):

> from the door to the window, from the window to the fire; from the fire to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the bed; from the bed to the door, from the door to the window… [Again all the alternatives are filled out.] (Beckett, 1976:203)

These types of variation are paralleled in Watt's different inversions and mirrorings of language when he meets Sam in the institution, where he changes the order of letters and words in various different combinations.[46]

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[45] Symmetry is also found throughout Beckett's work at a structural and character level. He often employs large scale structural repetitions which create binary symmetricality (for example in *Waiting for Godot, Happy Days, Play, Lessness, Rockaby, Quad,* the two *Acts Without words,* and *Nacht and Traum*). The balancing of two characters who are either opposed (Pozzo with Lucky, Hamm with Clov, the tormentor and victim of *How it is* etc.) or alike up to the point of being almost interchangeable in some cases (Vladimir with Estragon, Mercier with Camier, Molloy with Moran, again the tormentor and victim of *How it is*, Reader and Listener from *Ohio Impromptu* etc.) is also a common trait in Beckett's work. *Waiting for Godot* sees this symmetricality taken to extremes, with two acts which are repetitions of each other, two pairs of characters, a pair of boys, one in each half of the play, and a host of micro level balances between the two acts in terms of dialogue and action. For a more detailed discussion of symmetry in *Godot* see Kenner (1973) who goes so far as to claim that 'the molecule of the play, its unit of effect, is symmetry' (Kenner, 1973:35).

[46] For a much fuller discussion of mathematics and permutation in *Watt* (and throughout Beckett's fiction and drama) see Ackerly (1998).

Beckett and Stein's creation of atypical utterances through repetition and reordering may create a superficial likeness for their text, but Beckett's straightforward narrative/story relationship contrasts with Stein's deliberately ambiguous representation of eventualities and Beckett's rigorous permutations differ from Stein's wilfully asymmetrical repetition. Our pragmatic response to the two authors' use of repetition can also be highly dissimilar. As opposed to Stein's deliberately problematic texts, the pragmatics of reading *Watt*'s repetitive passages is relatively straightforward in that each unit in the list creates new explicit propositional content with no ambiguity of reference. Any difficulty of interpretation of the lists will be focused not on the information itself, but on the narrator's decision to provide it. As Kawin points out, Watt remembered all these things and told them to the narrator; there is no question in this novel of repetition as a result of forgetting, as in Stein (Kawin, 1972:137). The question of whether relevance is being met is especially pressing when we consider the repetition in the open sequences of repetitive actions. At least with cases of permutative repetition in the novel readers can recognise the goal of the creation of a complete set of logical alternatives, but the open repetitive sequences could just as easily have been covered by a statement of the form 'she would repeat actions x and y alternately'. How does Beckett's excessive repetition achieve relevance then?

The reader recognises that the character who is saying these things is not producing a relevant statement for another character; this is obviously the case since all the strange information that Watt encounters in the novel, far from being relevant, actually perplexes him to the point of his eventually entering a mental institution. For the reader, on the other hand, these statements can achieve relevance through other effects, the most obvious of which is their absurd humour. Repetition, regardless of what it repeats, can become extremely comical when taken to these lengths, and Watt's insistence on thinking through *every* logical alternative results in farcical statements such as 'Mr Knott was not responsible for the arrangement but knew that he was responsible for the arrangement, but did not know that such an arrangement existed, and was content' (Beckett, 1976:87).

More importantly however these long periods of intense effort that Beckett's texts demand of readers also serve to magnify immensely the effects of the small fragments of a more poetic nature that we encounter. The nature of intense aesthetic experience seems to be that we must go through a relatively arduous process to get to it,[47] and the moments of real impact in Beckett's work always seem to come in the midst of periods of deliberately created boredom and fatigue. John Ashbery has made a similar point in relation to Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation*:

> These austere "stanzas" are made up almost entirely of colourless connecting words… though now and then Miss Stein throws in an orange, a lilac, or an Albert to remind us that it really is the world, our world, that she has been talking about. The result is like certain monochrome de Kooning paintings in which isolated strokes of colour take on a deliciousness they never could have out of context, or a piece of music by Webern in which a single note on the celesta suddenly irrigates a whole desert of dry, scratchy sounds on the strings…. As in life, perseverance has its rewards – moments when we emerge suddenly on a high plateau with a view of the whole distance we have come. In

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[47] Recall Pilkington's (2000) claim that easily accessed stereotypical beliefs do not generate the same wide range of effects that we find as a result of the more difficult process related to truly poetic utterances.

> Miss Stein's work the sudden inrush of clarity is likely to be an aesthetic experience… It is for moments like this that one perseveres in this difficult poem, moments which would be less beautiful and meaningful if the rest did not exist, for we have fought side by side with the author in her struggle to achieve them. (Ashbery, 1990:108-110)

Repetition in *Watt* is undoubtedly being employed to this effect, as when the following passage appears directly after the tabulation of Mr Knott's footwear habits:

> To think, when one is no longer young, when one is not yet old, that one is no longer young, that one is not yet old, that is perhaps something. To pause, towards the close of one's three-hour day, and consider: the darkening ease, the brightening trouble; the pleasure pleasure because it was, the pain pain because it shall be; the glad acts grown proud, the proud acts growing stubborn; the panting the trembling towards being gone, a being to come; and the true true no longer, and the false true not yet. (Beckett, 1976:201)

The striking poetic quality of this passage is aided in no small part by its contrast with the fatiguing process of reading the lists that have come before it. Johnstone et. al make a similar point about repetition when they suggest that 'the more something is repeated, the more people come to expect it to be repeated; repetition eventually becomes the *less* foregrounded option, and suddenly *not* repeating is foregrounded.' (Johnstone et. al., 1994:19)

Recognition of this trait in Beckett's texts allows us to expand on a more general point about difficult experimental literature. If relevance is to be met in reading a text, our effort must be balanced by our reward. If we expend a large effort we must receive a large reward, but inversely, *in order to receive a large reward a large effort must be expended*. This is true in a straightforward way in cases of poetic effect related to, for example, productive metaphors. To get more meaning from a 'good' metaphor we must think about it for more time, more deeply. Beckett's practice is one in which the effort we expend feeds into reward in a different way. The little moments of intense beauty that exist throughout Beckett's texts, *Watt* included, are preceded by vast passages of difficult prose that is often fatiguing for the reader. The contrast between the torturous passages and the intensely poetic moments is what makes the reward of the latter so great. Perhaps Stein's relative neglect by readers and critics is due to her near total abandonment of these moments of relief. As the quotation from Ashberry makes clear, in Stein the relief is minimal, often consisting of a single noun ('an orange, a lilac, or an Albert'), and only very rarely do we encounter prolonged moments of clarity in her work. On the other hand, Beckett (and we shall see Burroughs too) is more generous in his balancing of monotony with relief. That *Watt* creates further propositional content from each repetition is of little importance to the reader in terms of aesthetic effect. What is important is that there is a large effort required get through the repetition, and this effort feeds into the aesthetic reward of the text.

We will see that in later texts, and especially in cases of intratextual repetition, Beckett's repetition no longer necessarily leads to the creation of further propositional content as it does in *Watt*'s permutative lists. Propositional content in his later work often becomes secondary to vaguer ‘meaningfulness’ and affectiveness, and in this respect at least Beckett’s repetition begins to come closer to Stein’s.

In later texts Beckett also uses repetition to move away from the straightforward relationship between narrative and story that we find in *Watt*. In his plays, Beckett often employs large-scale structural repetitions which include much micro-level metalinguistic and interpretive repetition. In *Waiting for Godot, Play* and *Quad* repetition is employed alongside devices which suggest temporal movement in order to convey the fact that the structural repetition is successive in time.[48] *Godot*’s second act features the degeneration of Pozzo and Lucky, and the change in season indicated by the tree growing leaves. *Quad*’s second act is identical to the first but with decay and diminution being suggested by the slower pace and shift from colour to black and white. Beckett remarked that the second act of *Quad* is ‘a thousand years later…’ (Esslin, 1987:44). In *Play* Beckett introduced features such as slower movement of spotlight and reduced speed and strength of characters’ voices in order to suggest the successive relationship of the acts (Beckett, 1983:111).[49] Esslin notes that in some productions Beckett also provided differently permutated texts for the repeat second act, suggesting to the audience that there exists a huge number of further possible ways in which the characters would be able to repeat their purgatorial situation (Esslin, 1986:115). Ackerly also comments on this strategy, seeing Beckett’s practice in *Godot, Happy Days*, *Play* and *Rockaby* as one in which ‘minor variations contribut[e] to the sense of diminution, the action shorter and the dialogue more ritualised' (Ackerly, 1998:17).[50]

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[48] The narrator of *How It Is* confirms that the situation he is narrating will be repeated ‘eternally’ but he only presents one version of it. He later claims that what he has told us is ‘all balls’ (Beckett, 1996).

[49] Like Beckett’s ‘repeat play’ direction in *Play,* Stein in *Four saints in Three acts* gives the stage direction – ‘repeat first act’.

The clear indications of temporal change between the two acts in these plays ensures that the narrative repetitions will be interpreted as successive in story time, but the relationship implied by this structural repetition does not add up to a simple balancing of two story occurrences with two narrative occurrences. The way in which Beckett employs repetition in these texts results in the suggestion of extensive, possibly infinite, further repetitions of these same story situations. With *Play* and *Godot*, repetition suggests that the situation has been repeated before the audience began watching, and will be repeated after they cease to watch. In *Quad* the situation is slightly different, the extreme decay indicated in this case by the slowing of the images and the change from colour to black and white suggests a huge set of repetitions in the intervening period between the two acts, in addition to the implication that more repetitions will follow. What we have in these plays then, is one repetition in narrative time, suggesting an indefinite, possibly infinite, succession of repetitions in story time. Esslin (1986) sees in these repetitions the suggestion of 'infinity as "entropy"… the gradual running down of the universe, which, however, because absolute zero can never be reached, must also go on, diminuendo, forever' (Esslin, 1986:114).[51]

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[50] Gradual diminution or dwindling (out-with this binary structure) is also apparent in many other of Beckett's texts such as *Ill Seen Ill Said*, *The Lost Ones* and most famously in *Endgame* in which the slow and painful approach towards nothingness is the overarching theme.

[51] In these texts Beckett's practice is completely opposite to that of Stein. In her most extreme case, *The Making of Americans*, Stein uses vast amounts of narrative repetition to describe one story event. Beckett in his binary plays uses one narrative repetition to suggest vast amounts of successive story events.

These binary plays use repetition to optimise the presentation of what is perhaps Beckett’s most typical (and most repeated) fictional and dramatic situation: purgatory. This repetitive structure allows Beckett to suggest the potentially endless repetition of the purgatorial situation that is an obsessively recurring theme in his work, first alluded to in the figure of Belacqua, the hero of Beckett’s earliest fiction, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *More Pricks than Kicks*. An interesting speculation with regards repetition in these plays is whether the characters comprehend their conditions. Although in *Godot* the characters are painfully aware of their purgatorial repetitive situation, it is not entirely clear in *Play* and *Quad* whether the characters have any cognisance of their endless repetitive fate. As Arsene makes clear in *Watt* however, memory of repetition can make little difference in Beckett’s world: ‘…and if I could begin it all over again, knowing what I know, the result would be the same… a hundred times, knowing each time a little more than the time before, the result would always be the same, the hundredth life as the first’ (Beckett, 1976:47).

This technique of suggesting further repetitions that exist out-with the text is also apparent in *Watt*, although without the clearly temporal dimension found in the binary plays. As mentioned above, Connor distinguishes between two types of repetition in the novel, the open sequences (such as the ‘eating then resting’) and the permutative sequences (such as the movements of Mr. Knott). The first type of repetition could be expanded indefinitely, as Connor suggests, ‘there seems to be no real reason why the sequence should ever stop, and there is a consequent sense of relief when it finally does...’ Further to this however, Connor discerns a similar arbitrary and unfinished nature in the seemingly closed permutative systems. He gives the example of the permutative tabulation of voices in Watt’s head, ‘after which we are told unnervingly that this has been ‘to mention only these four kinds of voice, for there were others’’. Connor goes on to suggest that

> The same applies to other sequences, the elements of which are often made to seem arbitrary, so that the act of repetition becomes infinitely renewable.
> This has important implications for our sense of *Watt* as a whole. If we see the book as a duplicating structure of finite sequence then this makes it self-enclosed, and, on its own terms, exhaustive. But we might also want to see the book as an infinite series, or rather as a part of an infinite series of arrangements of every possible group of elements. There is no possibility of closure for such a book, only abandonment. (Connor, 1988:31)

Connor adds that the Addenda section of the novel, which ‘open[s] up areas of incompleteness’, suggests Beckett may have held this view of *Watt*. In this case, unlike the binary plays, it is not that many more story events of a similar nature will happen after the narrative is finished, but rather that the narrative could have described an endless list of further objects and arrangements.[52]

Watt and the binary plays are experienced as excerpts of larger, perhaps infinitely large series of repetitions and this is another of the many instances of repetitive textual practice confronting readers with the unlimited. An interesting question is whether the attempt to imagine such a huge amount of repetition can lead to an experience of the mathematical sublime. The attempt to represent these infinitely proliferating repetitions is no doubt awe inspiring, but the sublime is a process and it is doubtful whether it can be generated by something experienced only as a suggestion rather than directly through the form of the text. Much of what we have seen of intense aesthetic effects so far suggests that effort is essential to reward. The problem with the internal representation of potential repetition lies in the conjecture that this act of imagination may not be as effort consuming as the inferencing process related to reading repetition. Furthermore, if this act is not as effort consuming then is it really possible that it could generate an aesthetic experience as intense as the sublime? The resolution of this issue must wait until the concluding chapters of the thesis.

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[52] Ackerly (1998) also discusses the massive potential for expansion of *Watt’*s permutations.

3. *Lessness*

The potential repetition that exists in *Watt* and the binary plays exists as an outcome of our interpretation of the texts. While we can imagine schematic versions of these potential repetitions, we can never generate complete representations of them. The potential repetition that exists in *Lessness* on the other hand, is objectively present as an outcome of the text's compositional strategy. We can, following Beckett's compositional formula, generate a huge number of further texts from the sentences of *Lessness*.[53] The concrete nature of this potential means that *Lessness* may have a stronger claim to generate sublime feeling through potential than the other texts currently under discussion. This section will deal exclusively with *Lessness* - a relatively neglected text in the densely populated field of Beckett studies - tracing the interaction of all the issues we have encountered so far in a single text. *Lessness* is the ideal text with which to do this because it is Beckett's most symmetrical, most completely permutative, most exactly repetitive work, and in its potential for regeneration it displays a massive imbalance between narrative and story.[54]

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[53] Mads Harr and Elizabeth Drew have created the 'Possible Lessnesses' website, which uses a random number generator to create new arrangements of the text: http://www.random.org/lessness (Harr and Drew, 2000).

Before beginning our analysis of repetition inside the text, it should be noted that *Lessness* as a whole is almost certainly a repetition of a previous idea from Beckett's work. I would like to suggest that *Lessness* had its genesis in a passage from Beckett's *Texts for Nothing*, in which the narrator describes the following situation:

> ...time has turned into space and there will be *no more time*… my past has thrown me out… or I burrowed my way out alone, to linger a moment free in a *dream of days and nights*, dreaming of me moving... Ever since nothing but fantasies and *hope of a story*... to be, under a restless sky… *faint stirs day and night*, as if to grow *less* could help, ever *less and less* and never quite be gone... (Beckett, 1995:132, my emphasis).

The strong linguistic and situational echoes between this passage and *Lessness*, suggest that in the later text Beckett has repeated and expanded upon his original theme from *Texts for Nothing*. Beckett's most internally repetitive text then, is also an intratextual repetition.

Lessness is Beckett's translation of his original French text *Sans*, and it is well documented that *Sans* was composed by writing sixty sentences and ordering them randomly twice, to create the first and second halves of the piece, making the text another of Beckett's macro-level binary structures (Cohn 1973, Brienza and Brater

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[54] Much of the material in this section is based on my analysis of *Lessness* in Paton (2009).

1976, Dearlove, 1977, Knowlson and Pilling 1979). The possibility of all the other orderings of the sixty sentences of *Lessness* is suggested to readers by the form of the published text (and the overall repetitive/permutative structure would have been even more readily apparent to readers of the original publication in the *New Statesman* where it was printed on a single page with a gap between the first and second sets of sentences). As Coetzee claims, *Lessness* 'displays (flaunts?) a compositional procedure which would allow it to extend its length almost infinitely' (Coetzee, 1973:1).[55]

Lessness also uses this repetitive permutational structure to manipulate the relationship between narrative and story time in a highly original way. *Lessness* is about timelessness, as the title of the text suggests, the word 'lessness' being (among other things) 'timelessness' but with 'time' taken out.[56] By enacting what it wants to describe, the title serves to highlight, while at the same time managing to avoid, one of the main difficulties of the text: how to speak about timelessness without speaking about, and creating, time.[57] Many of the strange features of the language of *Lessness*, such as omission of tensed verbs, omission of connectives and of subordinate clauses, and the exceptionally high levels of repetition and parallelism, attempt to find other formal means to remove time from the text.

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[55] Lerdahl (1988) argues that because its organisation is artificial (based primarily on permutation), serialist music can create a split between 'compositional grammar' and 'listening grammar'. In other words it is possible that the 'input organisation' of such music will bear no relation to its heard structure (Lerdahl, 1988:234). *Lessness* provides an interesting contrast to this claim in that the organisation of its sentences is certainly an instance of an artificial compositional grammar, but this compositional grammar is still relatively easy to recover from the form of the text.

[56] In this respect a parallel exists between the English title and the original French title, *Sans*. *Lessness*, if it is considered to be timelessness without the 'time' would be pronounced with two unstressed/reduced vowels, and 'sans' is a stressless preposition without a complement.

[57] In one of the many balancing binary structures of the text, the fact that the title is 'about' timelessness without stating it is countered by the fact that the overall structure of the text is 'about' time without stating it. As Ruby Cohn has shown, there are 60 sentences in each half of the text, 12 paragraphs in each half, 24 paragraphs in total, and each paragraph contains a maximum of 7 sentences. *Lessness* is constructed from the numbers used to measure (western) time (Cohn, 1973:263).

Esslin (1986) argues that by presenting two versions of the huge number of possible versions of *Lessness'* sixty sentences, Beckett found an economical approach to 'the representation of infinity' (Esslin, 1986:120). In terms of the relationship between narrative and story repetitions this would place it in the same category as texts like *Waiting for Godot*, with one narrative repetition suggesting a huge number of further successive story repetitions. Formal and linguistic analysis of the text suggests a different interpretation however.

We saw in the last chapter that repetition can impact upon the iconic relationship that usually holds between event order and clause order in texts with Labov and Waletsky (1967) claiming that the sequence of clauses in a narrative can represent the temporal sequence of events described. A narrative clause 'is a clause whose position relative to other clauses encodes the temporal location of the event which it describes'. One result of this attribute is that the temporal sequence of the events will change when the clause order is changed (Labov and Waletsky, 1967). An example would be 'I pushed him. He pushed me.' changing to 'He pushed me. I pushed him '. There seems in this instance to be a clear temporal relationship between the two clauses, with the eventuality represented by the clause that comes first preceding the eventuality represented by the clause that comes second in each ordering.

Repetition can problematise the attempt to discern the proper sequence of the events being represented. In *Watt*, no such problem exists because there is a clear indication that a repetitive series of events is being described by a repetitive series of statements, with direct indicators of sequence such as 'then' being employed. In *Lessness*, however, Beckett cancels this iconic relationship. The most obvious way in which progression between clauses is omitted from *Lessness* is through the exclusion from the text of any formal features that imply sequence. The text's potential for cohesive random permutation is one indication that it's sentences must not contain any such formal features, and this assumption is borne out by further analysis.[58] Aside from the ambiguous case encountered in the sentence which ends the text, there are no connectives in *Lessness*, no explicit markers such as 'then' or 'next' to indicate that the eventualities described in any one clause happen before or after those in any other. The text also contains no subordinate clauses, which, if included, may have conveyed sequence. The fact that the sentences were written as they are means *Lessness* will still be cohesive regardless of what order its sentences are placed in, and the repetition of the sixty sentences in the second half of the text only serves to further this cohesion. The only evidence for the successivity of the text's sentences is their sequentiality on page and in narrative time (time of reading). Other than this, the sentences seem to suggest the simultaneous existence of their eventualities. The fact that the order of the sentences is entirely left up to chance further strengthens the idea that their inevitable successivity on the page should not automatically be taken to translate into a parallel successivity of eventualities.

In addition, Coetzee (1973) shows that the individual phrases that make up Beckett's sentences are also highly mobile. A quick example should suffice here. Coetzee analyses the repetition in the following three sentences from *Lessness*

19. Little body / same grey as / the earth / sky / ruins / only upright.

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[58] Any doubts regarding the cohesion of the possible other version of *Lessness* can be put to rest with a visit to the 'Possible Lessnesses' web site (http://www.random.org/lessness).

26. No sound/ not a breath / same grey / all sides / earth / sky / body / ruins.
44. Flatness endless / little body / only upright / same grey / all sides / earth / sky / body/ ruins.

Coetzee shows that sentences 19 and 44 share 4 phrases (plus 2 close variants), and sentences 26 and 44 share 6 phrases (Coetzee 1973:197). This level of repetition holds across almost all of the sentences in *Lessness*. In light of this fact the sequence of words presented in *Lessness* comes to mean very little. Rather, the text suggests itself as simply one of an extremely large set of permutations, further strengthening the suggestion that the sequence of words on the page should not necessarily be taken to imply a parallel sequence in the eventualities being described. The iconic relationship that so often holds between sentence/phrase order and story order is cancelled in the language of *Lessness*.[59] Appendix A shows, with reference to Labov and Waletsky (1967) and Hopper and Thompson (1980), that the vast majority of clauses in *Lessness* are ‘orientation clauses’ and hence highly mobile.

What we are approaching then, is a reading of *Lessness* which regards the eventualities described in the text as existing simultaneously, and this suggests a connection with Jakobsonian poetics. In ‘Linguistics and Poetics’ (1987), Jakobson describes the ‘two basic modes of arrangement used in verbal behaviour, *selection* and *combination*’. Selection is based on equivalence whilst combination is based on contiguity. However, the poetic function of language ‘projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.’ In the poetic function equivalence becomes ‘the constitutive device of the sequence’ (Jakobson, 1987:71). Jakobson’s theory suggests that the prevalent force in poetic language is simultaneity. In non-poetic or prosaic language where a sequence or chain of events is described, the force of successivity is prevalent. Conversely, because poetic texts consist of ‘a system of equivalent pieces of information expressed in various symbolic forms,’ the prevalent force of poetic language is simultaneity (Pomorska 1985:171).

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[59] Genette in his discussion of order states that ‘one can run a film backwards, image by image, but one cannot read a text backwards, letter by letter, or even word by word, or even sentence by sentence, without its ceasing to be a text.’ (Genette, 1980:34). This is not true of *Lessness*. The text’s unique compositional strategy means that it can be read backwards, sentence by sentence, and still be a text, in the sense that it will still be as cohesive as it was when it was read forwards. Beckett’s compositional strategy means that a reverse ordering was a potential outcome, and that the text would not lose cohesion as a result of any ordering.

The force of simultaneity in *Lessness* is especially strong owing to the high degrees of repetition and equivalence in the text. Coetzee has shown that the text’s 120 sentences are constructed from the limited vocabulary of only 166 words (Coetzee 1973:195). The sentences consist of a small amount of phrases recombined in different ways and this means that all sentences share ‘repetitive equivalent elements’ with one or, more usually, several others. This repetition leads to equivalencies of various type in the *Lessness*. There are several examples of parallelism in the text, (for example ‘sky mirrored earth mirrored sky’). There is repetition of sound in the many instances of alliteration (such as ‘blue little body heart beating’) and assonance (such as ‘ruin true refuge’) (Beckett, 1995:197). There is also a large amount of syntactical repetition in *Lessness* arising from nominalisation, omission of verbs, and reliance on specific combinations of certain words and word classes; and the fact that the whole set of sixty sentences is repeated in its entirety further heightens the simultaneity by doubling the repetitive elements in the text. The huge number of repetitive and equivalent elements in the *Lessness* leads to the creation of a radical Jakobsonian simultaneity, as every equivalence in the text suggests the simultaneous perception of its elements.

Lessness actually provides something of a stylistic blueprint for the representation of simultaneity in language. Beckett's combination of non-finite verbs which refer to unbounded activities; the near complete omission of tensed statements (and the collocation of words which refer to cessation of time with any tensed statements that *are* made); the omission of formal features which imply sequence (such as connectives and subordinate clauses); the cancellation of the iconic relationship which usually holds between sentence/phrase order and story order; and a high degree of repetition and parallelism (in structure, in syntax, in vocabulary, and in sound patterning), leads to the creation of a radical formal timelessness which parallels the text's description of a timeless situation. The analysis of *Lessness* suggests these formal features as methods for the iconic representation of timelessness and simultaneity through language, and some of the compositional procedures of *Lessness* have in fact been used to this effect in less experimental settings. Nanny and Fischer (2006) provide examples of Dickens and Rossetti omitting finite verb forms in order to convey stasis, and of Scott employing syntactic parallelism (in conjunction with asyndeton) to create a sense of simultaneity (Nanny and Fischer, 2006:469). Beckett's text differs from examples such as these only in its extremity, it employs many formal features that suggest timelessness co-presently, and it employs them comprehensively. This extremity means that *Lessness* stands as a limit case of what it is possible to achieve in the stylistic/formal representation of timelessness.[60]

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[60] *Lessness* (and to a lesser extent all the repetitive texts under consideration in this thesis) can also be considered as examples of Frank's (1963) notion of 'spatial form,' characterised by Smitten (1981) as follows: 'What the concept of spatial form does is to call attention to the departures from pure temporality, from pure causal/temporal sequence. When these departures are great enough, the

We must be clear however that no matter how strongly the text suggests itself as simultaneous, our experience of the narrative, rather than the story, must obviously be temporal. This opposition between the simultaneity of the story and the necessary successivity of the narrative in *Lessness* is a potential source of Fabb's (1998) sublime defective propositional attitude (discussed in the preceding chapters) as the reader attempts to simultaneously represent the set of successive elements of the text, a set which is doubled by the text's macro-level repetition and massively extended by text's potential for regeneration. This argument will be expanded in chapter 8 where will see that the experience of contradiction, and especially contradiction related to the attempt to simultaneously represent successive events, is a key factor in any attempt by authors to transmit sublime feeling to readers.

Beckett's creation in *Lessness* of a text which strongly suggests that a non-linear, non-temporal relationship exists between its elements is further complicated by the macro-level repetition which structures the text. Although the repetition of the first sixty sentences of *Lessness* doubles the elements that create simultaneity, the repetition also creates a strong (if highly unusual) element of successivity. Beckett attempts to create simultaneity out of its successive elements on a micro level, and then reverses this procedure on the macro-level. As already discussed, the text begins with sixty randomly ordered sentences, which are then repeated in a different random order. Each set of sentences lacks successivity internally but when the two halves are placed one after the other they introduce an unconventional form of structural successivity.

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conventional causal/temporal syntax of the novel is disrupted and the reader must work out a new one by considering the novel as a whole in a moment of time. That is, the reader must map out in his mind the system of internal references and relationships to understand the meaning of any single event, because that event is no longer part of a conventional causal/temporal sequence'(Smitten, 1981:20).

The two sets of sentences could have been placed side by side on the page to create yet more simultaneity in the text. Genet had created such a work in 1967 in ‘What Remains of Rembrandt Torn into Four Equal Pieces and Flushed Down the Toilet’, and Derrida and Ashbery would both do the same in 1974 in *Glas* and *Litany* respectively. In addition, Beckett could have avoided successivity while still doubling the simultaneous elements by allowing the interpenetration of the two sets of sixty sentences. But the choice of two successive sets of sentences creates a deliberate opposition between simultaneity and successivity.

However, just as the sequence of sentences, or even phrases, on the page does not imply any sequence of events within the fictional world, the text’s structural successivity does not translate into a parallel semantic or eventuality successivity. Through macro-level repetition of the two sets of sixty sentences, Beckett creates a false successivity and order in much the same way that he does when he randomly orders the sentences themselves. At the micro-level of individual sentences successivity is negated by the fact that the sentences could be ordered in any way without changing the situation described. Similarly, at the macro-level, the two sets of randomly ordered sentences could be placed in either order on the page with negligible effects in terms of the overall picture being presented (with perhaps the exception of the probably non-random final sentence). Because the sentences of *Lessness* do not convey any temporal sequence, repetition here serves the opposite purpose. The second set of sixty sentences finds the situation described in the text completely unchanged. There has been no progression, no movement, and no passing of time. All the micro-level repetitions of equivalent elements, which create simultaneity in the first sixty sentences, are doubled by the macro-level repetition, simply creating more simultaneity. Hence, no time is created and no story emerges from this sequential structure.

While the successivity of the binary structure of *Lessness* is false in terms of movement in time within the text (story), this is clearly not the case for readers. *Lessness* conveys the same timeless situation twice but with the result that it takes (all things being equal) double the time to read about that situation. In terms of story duration, no progression is achieved by the reordering and repetition of the sixty sentences of *Lessness*, and no progression in time will be achieved by any of the possible variations of the sentences. It takes two variations in order for us to understand this fact; hence repetition strengthens the impression of the timelessness of the story situation. However, this repetition also doubles narrative duration, and this increase in narrative duration becomes even more apparent when we listen to the extremely slow paced radio production. Beckett eradicates progression in time and creates simultaneity *within* the fiction though formal means, but doubles the narrative time (of reading or listening) through macro-level repetition.

If the two sets of sentences are read as suggesting all the other possible permutations, this means that in terms of the two time levels, Beckett has produced the converse of the procedure of *Waiting for Godot*. *Godot* has one repetition in the narrative which suggests infinite successive repetitions in the story; *Lessness* has one repetition in the narrative which suggests the possibility of huge amounts of repetition in the narrative but with no parallel progression in story duration. Repetition in *Godot* is felt by the characters and by the reader whereas repetition in *Lessness* only exists at narrative level, it does not occur in the story world. It is impossible for repetition (an event 'in time') to exist in the timeless environment of the *Lessness* story world.

4. Intratextual repetition

We saw that *Lessness* is an intratextual reimagining of a passage from *Texts for Nothing*. In addition to repeating *Texts for Nothing*, *Lessness* also contains situational and linguistic echoes of its immediate predecessor *Ping* and is in turn echoed by Beckett's next text *For to End Yet Again*. In its theme of the protagonist waiting indefinitely in a purgatorial situation, it also resembles the large number of Beckett's other works which are built around this fundamental situation. The encounter with such high levels of intratextual repetition presents difficulties for our interpretation of Beckett's work; problems arise when we begin to think through how this 'intra-narrative' repetition affects the fictional world that is being represented in an author's texts. For readers of Beckett this problem is compounded by the fact that it is difficult to find a Beckett text that does not resemble at least one of his other texts. Beckett recycles themes, settings, situations, characters, events, motifs, objects, allusions, dialogue, monologue and incidental details. In a sense, each of Beckett's texts is a repetition of all the others, displaying what Abbott has called Beckett's 'aesthetic of recommencement' (Abbott, 1994:109).[61] It is this aspect of his work that brings it closest to that of his admirer Burroughs. Zurbrugg (1988) cites Burroughs as commenting that 'Beckett… has only one character', and, Zurbrugg himself adds, 'only one plot' (Zurbrugg, 1988:253). We could easily say the same of Burroughs.

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[61] Renton (1994) traces the complex repetitions across Beckett's later prose works and suggests that these texts 'become increasingly interconnected and self-referential. One text literally generates another.. the texts may compulsively repeat what has already been written… this is not just a stylistic resonance, but a re-negotiation of something altogether more solid' (Renton, 1994:167).

However, as we shall see in the next chapter, although Beckett and Burroughs both use a great deal of intratextual repetition, this repetition is often employed with highly dissimilar results.

As with Burroughs, Beckett's intratextual repetition undermines the text in which it is included by highlighting the fictionality of that text. Our suspension of disbelief is affected by the realisation that the events or situations we are encountering also occur in one or more of the author's other texts. However, unlike Burroughs, Beckett's use of intratextual repetition generates an uncanny significance for the events or situations that are being repeated, sometimes loading an already highly suggestive motif with more meaning, sometimes taking an everyday object such as a bowler hat or a greatcoat and giving it a strange resonance.[62] Intratextual repetition also affects our reception of Beckett's characters and although, like Burroughs, Beckett is always willing to foreground the fictionality of his creations, there is still the sense that the interchangeability of characters leads to an increase in significance, more meaning, and more important meaning. As we shall see however, it is doubtful whether these uncanny feelings of significance can be given propositional form by Beckett's readers.[63]

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[62] Again, it seems unlikely that the particular concepts involved in the repetition here are responsible for the intense aesthetic effect. While Beckett's repetition of a suggestive motif such as hand holding may work (in the way described by Pilkington 2000) to make us access our phenomenal memories of hand-holding and to think more deeply about the significance of such an action, it seems unlikely that we would generate similar effects due to accessing our phenomenal memory store related to certain types of coat or hat.

[63] Although I am employing the word 'uncanny' here it must be pointed out that the essential element of fear is missing from the effects of Beckett's intratextual repetition in order for it to meet the criteria of 'uncanny' (at least in Freud's sense of the word). That being said, Freud's conception of the uncanny (minus the fear) is definitely akin to the effects of Beckett's intratextual repetition. The uncanny as defined by Freud, is essentially bound with the act of re-cognition, it is 'that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (Freud,2003:124). The links between Beckett's texts and Freud's paper are discussed by Oppenheim (2005), who shows that 'the confusion between inanimate and animate, the doubling, repetition, fear of the look, and omnipotent thinking' are the main elements which make Beckett's writing uncanny (Oppenheim 2005:132).

One example (among many) of Beckett's intratextual repetition of content, is the importance of hands and holding hands in texts such as *Embers, Eh Joe, Come and Go, Enough, Nacht and Traum, Company* and *Worstward Ho*. The effects of this type of repetition are particularly hard to describe. Taking the three prose works first: in *Enough*, two characters, one older, a man, one younger, the narrator of indeterminate sex, spend all their time together hand in hand and walking while the older man talks. In *Company* the voice speaks to the listener of a time when he walked hand in hand with his father, and a time when his mother 'shook off' his hand in anger. In *Worstward Ho* the third-person narrator describes two figures, one small and one large 'plodding along' together. In the drama: *Embers* features a male character who recalls how his daughter wants to walk hand in hand with him across the fields (he does not like this). In *Come and Go* the three characters all learn a secret about each other and the play closes with them holding each others' hands in a complicated and highly stylised movement. These are five instances – and one could find more - of a Beckett text placing great emphasis on hands and holding hands.[64] Among these texts one could also find other networks of self allusion that refer to texts which do not necessarily include instances of hand holding.

Beckett's texts are continually self-allusive in this way, but the high levels of self referentiality do not work to stabilise or unify meaning across his texts; there is no increase in understanding to be had through increased familiarity will all the examples of a certain repetitive motif in Beckett's work. The more Beckett texts one reads (the more repetition with difference of these types of motif one encounters) the less easy it is to feel secure in our interpretation of the individual works.

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[64] Texts such as *Eh Joe* and *Nacht and Traum* also place great emphasis on hands but have been omitted from this discussion because they feature no hand-holding.

We have already seen Connor criticise studies of Beckett which stress the ‘unifying or centring’ effect of his repetition. For Connor the work of Cohn (1980) and Rabinovitz (1984) wrongly assumes that repetition ‘guarantees the inviolable selfhood and particularity of each text as well as the essential unity of Beckett’s oeuvre as a whole’. Against this view Connor stresses the ‘complexity of the displacements effected by repetition in Beckett’s work, the challenges which it proposes to notions of essential unity’ (Connor, 1988:11-12). The pragmatic account of Beckett’s intratextual repetition of motifs that I am about to propose will support Connor’s claim but will do so without Deleuzian premises.

Intratextual repetition destabilises meaning in Beckett’s texts by opening up the interpretation of each repetitive text to include the interpretation of all the others, thereby placing readers in an impossible interpretive situation. When the motif of holding hands occurs in a text (text E), thus echoing a similar motif in four other previous texts (texts A-D), the reading of these previous texts and their interpretations become included within the reading and interpretation of text E. Text E can no longer stand alone, since we cannot ignore the distinct repetitions of significant details from other texts that it includes. At the same time texts A-D are opened up by subsequent echoes and repetitions. The interpretation of text A, not an easy thing in the first place, now includes the equally difficult interpretations of texts B-E and so on. Further complicating matters in this instance (and it is certain that you could find allusive qualities in many of Beckett’s motifs) is the possible allusion to *Paradise*

Lost where the holding or non-holding of hands in a pastoral setting is highly significant.[65]

Although Beckett's intratextual repetition is allusive to outside sources, these sources are generally of a much more canonical type (e.g. Dante, Shakespeare, Descartes) than those that we will see in Burroughs' work (e.g. pornography, pulp fiction). The next chapter will show that an important aspect of Burroughs' use of allusion is that we recognise the intention of parody and the unsettling, destabilising effect whereby we recognise that the parody is almost indistinguishable from the original (we get the meta-level meaning 'this text is parodying pornography' along with the realisation that on a very basic level Burroughs' texts are pornographic themselves). Beckett's allusion to *Paradise Lost*, on the other hand, while it certainly *means* something in that it has a significance in the text, does not mean anything that we can actually put into propositional form. It does not generate a higher, meta-level of meaning as it does for Burroughs, instead it adds to the perceived significance of the fictional events while at the same time making it more difficult to understand this significance. This significance is created by a pragmatic situation already encountered in the previous chapter: an intense attitude of belief decoupled from specific propositional content.

None of the feeling of significance that is created by the intratextual repetition in Beckett can be given propositional form. Our experience is of several texts which contain moving or poetic content when read separately, and when read together these texts also echo each other's poetic content. Although we may be able to partially grasp the significance of these events in one text - for example, by analysing the motif in relation to the feelings of a central character - the only proposition that can be formed regarding the intratextual repetition of motifs here is the meta-level realisation that for Beckett, as he confessed to James Knowlson, these images are ‘obsessional’ (Knowlson, 1996:xxi). This realisation helps us very little when we attempt to think through what the significance of these repetitions are for the story worlds Beckett is creating. We should not be tempted however, in the absence of propositional interpretations, to naturalise this difficult aspect of Beckett’s texts by pointing to the significance of the images for the author, thereby substituting a relatively uninteresting fact about an author for an extremely compelling aesthetic effect.

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[65] For a discussion of Beckett's allusions to Milton see Ackerly and Gontarski (2006:370-1).

It is actually this aporetic interpretive difficulty surrounding Beckett’s intratextual repetitions which generates their significance for readers. The added intensity of aesthetic feeling produced by the repetition arises as a result of our inability to form propositions about its intended import and from the attempt to interpret the relationship between the entire series of repetitive motifs, and the texts that contain them. As discussed above, after reading all of Beckett’s repetitive texts (which in the final analysis would likely include every single one of the author’s texts), there is no way to interpret any one of them without recourse to all the others. The fact that the repetition exists is enough to make us believe that there must be an interpretive link between the texts. Repetition forces us into an interpretation - we cannot ignore the links between texts - but the specific content of this link is completely non-recoverable. This is because aside from the fact of the repetition, there *is* no real interpretive link; the repetition could mean any number of things but in reality it ‘means’ nothing at all. Precisely because it means nothing it comes to ‘mean’ rather a lot. In Weiskel’s (1976) terms the repeated absence of a signified itself assumes the status of a signified. The inferencing process related to these intratextual repetitions is potentially unlimited, with no hope of settling on any definitive interpretation, and our attempt to interpret the entire series of repetitions along with any other significant related material from their respective texts is staggering. In order that the mind can have the illusion of mastery over this impossible interpretive situation it will protect its necessarily blank representation within an intense metarepresentational attitude of belief, a sublime epistemic illusion. We interpret the lack of propositional content as ineffable rather than as a blank because, to paraphrase Fabb, form is producing the effect of content as a by-product (Fabb 2009).

Kenner has also noted this trait in relation to Beckett's internal, symmetrical repetitions, noting that 'nothing gives so convincing a look of being substantial' as repetitive balances, and goes on to link this feature of Beckett's writing with the influence of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, stating that, 'Beckett spent much time in his youth with the great virtuoso of such effects, James Joyce, whose last work.. may be described as a system of intricate verbal recurrences to none of which a denotative meaning can with any confidence be assigned' (Kenner, 1973:35-6).

To conclude my analysis of Beckett I would like to highlight one other curious point relating to the uncanny feeling of significance that Beckett's intratextual repetition creates. In comparing Stein and Beckett, Kawin has pointed out that

> Beckett's sequence of novels with the same archetypal character – but with each attempt at the character a new one - can be compared to a sequence of Steinian statements, each beginning again, with an occasional Proustian flash from novel

> to novel, as when the Unnamable "remembers" his other manifestations. (Kawin, 1972:143)

Beckett has written at length on Proust and the phenomenon of involuntary memory in his monograph *Proust* (Beckett, 1970). In Beckett's world, and for Beckett's characters such memories do not offer the sense of epiphany and revelation that we find in Proust and other earlier modernists, as Zurbrugg (1988) has shown.[66] The real significance of these Proustian flashes in Beckett is that, unlike our experience of Proust, the intense experience of involuntary memory can also be experienced by Beckett's reader. This is because intratextual repetition allows Beckett's characters to relate a memory that is already shared by the reader. For the reader it is a memory of a fragment of a previous text by Beckett, for the character it is a memory from his or her fictional life.[67] This is Beckett's way of creating a Proustian involuntary memory from his texts, but in the mind of the reader. For this effect to occur it is not essential that the repeated motif be a character memory, the fact that it often is just adds even more uncanny strangeness to the experience. These reader memories are triggered without conscious effort by the intratextual repetition we encounter, in much the same way that Proust's narrator finds himself suddenly overtaken or 'flooded' by memories that he has not consciously or voluntarily summoned, and as with Marcel's experiences, the repetitions which trigger the memories are never exact. What we shall label 'reader's involuntary memory' disrupts the normal experience of time for the reader as it does for Proust's narrator: by making the (intra-narrative) past exist again in the present moment. Although in reading Proust we can recognise the immensity of Marcel's experiences, it is doubtful whether we actually share them (unless through some form of phenomenal state transference by stylistic means), in Beckett's 'reader's involuntary memory' the intensity for the reader is created by the defective propositional attitude we must create in order to deal with the interpretative possibilities of these intratextual memories.

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[66] See also Erickson (1991) on Proustian memory in *Krapp's Last Tape*: 'despite the ability to rescue the past through recordability, the past as object remains impermeable by the present subject. True self-possession remains an impossibility' (Erickson, 1991:187). Also see Zurbrugg (1991) for a detailed account of the relationship between Proust's involuntary memory and that of Beckett's characters.

[67] Further complicating matters here is the fact that the amount of intratextual repetition his texts contain there is always the suspicion that the memories of Beckett's characters *are*, in some way, the content of previous texts that Beckett has written.

5. Conclusion

After some brief introductory remarks, Section 2 of this chapter traced the impact of repetition on the following aspects of Beckett's texts: the relationship between narrative and story; the creation of permutation and symmetry; the suggestion of infinite potential for further repetition 'outside' the text; and the generation of aesthetic response. Beckett's most repetitive text in terms of actualised quantity is *Watt*. We saw that in this novel, and in contrast to Stein, Beckett's repetitive, permutational and symmetrical language refers to different well determined and clearly ordered repetitive events. The language of *Watt* is repetitive because the series of actions it represents is repetitive; successive story events are paralleled by successive narrative units. We saw that the pragmatic outcomes of such repetition resides in its absurd humour and, importantly, in its deliberate creation of an arduous reading experience which greatly increases the impact of the many poetic passages encountered throughout the novel. Many moments of real intensity in Beckett's work come in the midst of periods of deliberately created boredom and fatigue, which should lead us to consider whether it is the nature of intense aesthetic experience that we must necessarily go through a relatively arduous process to get to it. We know that if relevance is to be met in reading a text, our effort must be balanced by our reward. If we expend a large effort we must receive a large reward, but inversely, *in order to receive a large reward a large effort must be expended*. This is true in a straightforward way in cases of poetic effect related to, for example, productive metaphors. To get more meaning from a 'good' metaphor we must think about it more deeply for more time. Beckett's practice is one in which the effort we expend feeds into reward in a different way. The little moments of intense beauty that exist throughout Beckett's texts, *Watt* included, are preceded by vast passages of difficult prose that are often fatiguing for the reader. The contrast between the torturous passages and the poetic moments is what makes the reward of the latter so great.

While none of Beckett's texts contain the quantity of repetition encountered in *The Making of Americans,* we saw in this section that in many of Beckett's texts, repetition is used to suggest the possibility of vast quantities of further *potential* repetition out-with the boundaries of the text. The optimisation of such a practice was seen in the binary plays *Godot, Play* and *Quad* in which one narrative repetition was employed to suggest the existence of a potentially infinite series of further story repetitions.

Section two focused on Beckett's most symmetrical, most completely permutative and most exactly repetitive text, *Lessness*. Here we saw the suggestion of potential repetition out-with the text taken in a new direction by Beckett, who creates in the unusual compositional method of *Lessness* a means of massively extending its narrative duration. In contrast to the binary plays, the potential for narrative extension in *Lessness* was found not to be paralleled by any extension of story duration, as the text's one repetition proved that no movement in time is possible in the fictional world it describes. Beckett's repetitive practice in *Lessness* was also seen to affect the relationship between narrative and story in a unique way by creating a text which suggested the simultaneous existence of all of its eventualities. This suggestion was seen to be problematised by Beckett's deliberate creation of an aberrant form of successivity in the macro-level repetition of the text's sixty sentences. We saw that if the two sets of sentences are read as suggesting all the other possible permutations, in terms of the relationship between narrative and story, Beckett has produced the converse of the procedure of the binary plays. *Lessness* has one repetition in the narrative which suggests the possibility of huge amounts of repetition in the narrative but with no parallel progression in story duration.

Of the works encountered so far in this thesis, *Lessness* is the one which most closely approaches our potential limit case of maximum metalinguistic and maximum interpretive repetition. That it does not stand as a limit case is due to the fact that its repeated sentences are reordered. A version of *Lessness* which repeated its sentences in exactly the same order should be considered more metalinguistically repetitive than the published work. (It should be noted however, that an exactly repetitive *Lessness* was a possibility of its compositional method.) The re-ordering of the sentences also leads to a less than maximum level of interpretive repetition. Different juxtapositions of sentences in the second half create different meanings on a micro level, even though the overall meaning of the two halves is remarkably similar. That the overall meaning of the second set of sentences is not significantly altered by re-ordering is in part due to the fact that Beckett composed the sentences so that they could support any permutation. We must also consider the fact that one highly significant new meaning emerges from the repetition of its sixty sentences, namely, the realisation for readers that time cannot pass in the story world. Other Beckett texts analysed in this chapter are less exactly and less consistently repetitive than *Lessness* and hence will reside closer to the mid point of our typology in chapter 6.

Section 3 discussed a new variety of repetitive practice not encountered to any significant degree in Stein's work. Here we uncovered the process through which Beckett's intratextual repetition generates intense resonance in his texts, the uncanny significance that is strongly experienced but which cannot be given propositional form by readers. Intratextual repetition was first shown to destabilise meaning in Beckett's texts by opening up the interpretation of each repetitive text to include the interpretation of all the others, thereby placing readers in an impossible interpretive situation. This aporetic interpretive difficulty surrounding Beckett's intratextual repetitions was seen to generate their strange significance for readers. The added intensity of aesthetic feeling produced by the repetition arises as a result of our inability to form propositions about its intended import and from the attempt to interpret the relationship between the entire series of repetitive motifs, and the texts that contain them. After reading all of Beckett's intratextually repetitive works (which in the final analysis would likely include every single one of the author's texts), there is no way to interpret any one text without recourse to all the others. The fact that the repetition exists is enough to make us believe that there must be an interpretive link between the texts. Repetition forces us into an interpretation - we cannot ignore the links between texts - but the specific content of this link is completely non-recoverable. This is because aside from the fact of the repetition, there *is* no real interpretive link; the repetition could mean any number of things but in reality it ‘means’ nothing at all. As we saw in Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, precisely because this intratextual repetition means nothing it comes to ‘mean’ rather a lot. In Weiskel’s (1976) terms, the repeated absence of a signified itself assumes the status of a signified. The inferencing process related to these intratextual repetitions is potentially unlimited, with no hope of settling on any definitive interpretation, and our attempt to interpret the entire series of repetitions along with any other significant related material from their respective texts is staggering. Section 3 suggested that in order that the mind can have the illusion of mastery over this impossible interpretive situation it will protect its necessarily blank representation within an intense metarepresentational attitude of belief, creating a sublime epistemic illusion. We interpret the lack of propositional content as ineffable rather than as a blank because, to paraphrase Fabb, form is producing the effect of content as a by-product (Fabb 2009).

Although this chapter has relied less frequently and less explicitly than the last on pragmatic readings of texts, we have seen that some of the most important outcomes of Beckett’s repetitive practices can be accounted for in pragmatic terms. In addition to the account of the non-propositional affectiveness of Beckett’s intratextual repetition, and the contradictory experience of story simultaneity and narrative successivity in *Lessness*, in terms of defective propositional attitudes, we also encountered the idea that repetition can work in texts to create deliberate difficulty and fatigue in order that particularly poetic moments of relief be experienced all the more forcefully. This is an interesting advance on the Relevance theory notion of effort vs. reward, the standard interpretation of which would require that the effort expended be on the same part of the text which will eventually produce the rewards. In short, the pragmatic approach to Beckett’s texts has shown once again that the seemingly redundant textual practice of repetition can generate powerful aesthetic experience.

CHAPTER 5. WILLIAM BURROUGHS: REPETITION AND THE WORD-VIRUS

1. Outline

This chapter will focus on William Burroughs' most repetitive novels, *The Soft Machine,* and *The Ticket that Exploded* with some intermittent reference to *Nova Express*.[68] These texts are repetitive in many of the same ways as the those of Stein and Beckett, but *The Making of Americans* aside, no text analysed in this thesis is as overtly and extensively repetitive as Burroughs' cut-up novels. Everything repeats in these texts: they consist of highly repetitive stock narratives and scenes, based around a few ever present themes and feature a revolving cast of undifferentiated characters who are always saying the same things, going through the same processes, and being described in the same terms. And this excessive repetition is not confined within the boundaries of a single text; Nelson's (1991) claim that 'Burroughs continually rewrites the same book' is no overstatement when considered in relation to the cut-up novels (Nelson, 1991:128).[69]

Repetition with (minimal) variation is on every level the guiding compositional strategy of these books and, to a certain extent, of Burroughs' entire body of work, but however excessively repetitive Burroughs' texts become, their effect is never one of monotony. As Shaviro (1991) comments, 'all of William Burroughs' fiction, is characterised, on the one hand, by the narrowness of its obsessive repetitions and, on the other hand by an astonishing freedom of invention' (Shaviro, 1991:197). Shaviro's comment highlights a fundamental difference between Burroughs' repetitions and those of Stein and Beckett. Burroughs' oeuvre may be characterised by excessive repetition, but it is repetition of a fundamentally different character from that found in Stein and Beckett, it does not deal in the deliberate tedium created by works such as *The Making of Americans* or *Waiting for Godot*.

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[68] These three novels are generally considered to form a trilogy, most commonly labelled the 'nova' or 'cut-up' trilogy. Much of the content of the these novels was drawn from the same collection of manuscripts, referred to by Burroughs as the 'word hoard' (for more on this see Miles, 2002). This common source accounts in part for the high levels of intratextual repetition across the trilogy, with many passages repeated verbatim and many more passages being repeated with variation, permutative or otherwise. Most of what is said here regarding *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket that Exploded* will be widely applicable to *Nova Express* but I will have less to say about the latter book because it is less internally repetitive than the others. This is partly due to a significant portion of the cut-up material in this novel being drawn from external sources rather than Burroughs' own writing. For more on 'found' texts in *Nova Express* see Lydenberg (1987).

[69] Both Mikriammos (1975) and Lemaire (1979) go so far as to suggest that *The Soft Machine, The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express* are best thought of as three versions of a single book.

This chapter will have a dual purpose not present in the preceding analyses of Stein and Beckett. In addition to mapping the outcomes of Burroughs' use of repetition, it will also show that an overall strategy of Burroughs' repetition is to represent and enact what he famously calls the 'word-virus'. This chapter will begin by introducing Burroughs' own ideas on the nature of repetition and the word-virus and will then briefly discuss some critical views on Burroughs' style and what it tells us about the aims of his writing, before beginning the analysis of repetition in the cut-up novels. In addition to revisiting important concepts from previous chapters such as poetic effects, intratextual repetition, simultaneity and successivity, and story and narrative, a new variety of repetition will be introduced in this chapter: repetition as metarepresentational device. Many of the particular instances of repetition in Burroughs' cut-up novels are representations of something out-with the immediate content of the text, often they are meta-representations of other textual practices such as pornography and pulp fiction. These metarepresentational practices will be approached through the Relevance theory concept of 'echoic' utterances, in which a speaker represents an attributed thought or utterance and also conveys their own attitude towards it (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Wilson 2000). This echoic use of repetition sets the postmodernist Burroughs apart from Stein and Beckett.

As with Swift, to whom he is often compared, Burroughs' echoic language is unsettling because his texts resemble their targets so closely that they make it difficult for readers to uncover and strictly define an authorial attitude. One continual target of Burroughs' cut-up novels is the word-virus, and as always, Burroughs represents his target through his fiction. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of parallels between Plato's conception of writing in the *Phaedrus*, and Burroughs' repetitive textual practice. Derrida's (2004) analysis suggests that Plato's criticism of writing is unsettled by his characterisation of writing as *pharmakon*, both 'poison' and 'cure'. As Derrida shows, Plato's writing condemns writing, but the intended target comes to be an essential part of the very thing that he is most keen to protect as Plato cannot explain dialectics (the means of true knowledge) without recourse to writing (with the result that dialectics becomes another sort of writing). Similarly Burroughs attempts to use words to 'rub out the Word'. His language holds this double nature by being at once the enemy that is parasitic on the individual, and the homeopathic cure that he administers through his novels. His texts fulfil the double role of the *pharmakon*, simultaneously poison and remedy.

We will also see that in their radical self-referentiality, Burroughs' cut-up novels create an interminable process of interpretation for readers, presenting us with a condensed version of the effects of intratextual repetition that we traced across Beckett's texts. In the last chapter we saw that Beckett repeats important motifs through various works, opening up the interpretation of each text by suggesting the existence of interpretive links (which cannot be given propositional form) between the story worlds of each text. Beckett's repetitions create the obligation to interpret without providing the means of interpretation. Burroughs cut-up novels take this effect to extreme lengths in their endless circuits of self-referentiality which create an unlimited series of interpretive dependencies throughout the texts.

2. Word-virus, General Semantics and Dianetics

The novels under discussion in this chapter express the desire to 'rub out the Word,' which is regarded as a hostile virus living parasitically on, and controlling the human subject.[70] Burroughs at times presents his texts, with their use of cut-up and fold-in techniques, as weapons to be used against this controlling word-virus. The idea is that his radical methods of textual reorganisation are able to free the speaker and/or reader from the word-virus by breaking down the normal syntactic and logical structures of the language. Many critics have acquiesced with this view, summed up by Friedberg (1991) when she states that 'Burroughs' own corrosion of syntax is intended to dismantle the mechanism of control' (Friedberg, 1991:71). What I will suggest in this chapter is that, in keeping with the general metarepresentational character of Burroughs' repetition, these novels do not simply seek to escape from or dismantle the controls of the word-virus, instead they combat the word-virus by enacting it. In other words, the very thing that Burroughs so fervently desires to eradicate is also the model for his most challenging novels. Just as Burroughs repeatedly recommends

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[70] Beckett expresses the similar desire to 'bring language into disrepute' and to 'bore one hole after another' in it until 'what lies beneath' begins to seep through (Beckett, 1986:139). Also recall that Sontag (2002) links Stein, Beckett and Burroughs in their ambition to 'out talk language' (Sontag, 2002:27).

(morphine derivative) apomorphine treatment as a cure for addiction to morphine, his *words* provide a cure from addiction to 'the Word.' As an enactment of the virus, his texts become a form of homeopathy.[71] As we are told in *The Ticket that Exploded,* 'inoculation is the weapon of choice against virus and inoculation can only be effected through exposure' (Burroughs, 2001c:8).[72]

In his biography of Burroughs, Barry Miles singles out *Naked Lunch* as the place where Burroughs 'first proposed the virus metaphor to represent control, or agents of control' (Miles, 2002:26). This idea of the virus as a metaphor representing control soon becomes something more however, with Burroughs building a mythology, expressed in both in his fiction and non-fiction, around the notion of the word being a parasitic and malevolent virus in the human body. Miles goes on to note that by the time Burroughs had completed *The Soft Machine* he was convinced 'some outside agency was manipulating events, and that their agents had infiltrated all levels of society.' This control was exercised, Burroughs believed, through language: 'words are the principal agents of control. Suggestions are words. Persuasions are words. Orders are words. No control machine can operate without words' (quoted in Miles 2002:134). In *The Ticket that Exploded* Burroughs further pursues this argument

> The 'Other Half' is the word. The 'Other Half' is an organism. Word is an organism. The presence of the 'Other Half' a separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air line of words can now be demonstrated experimentally... the word is now a virus. The flu virus may once have been a

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[71] In addition to references to apomorphine treatment in *Naked Lunch* and the cut-up novels see also Burroughs (1962a).

[72] Elsewhere Burroughs has claimed that 'the purpose of my writing is to expose and arrest nova criminals' (Burroughs, 1962 b:102). Nova criminals being, in Burroughs' mythology, the parasitic invaders who use language as a means of controlling human subjects.

> healthy lung cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the lungs. The word may once have been a healthy natural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk. That organism is the word. (Burroughs, 2001c:38-9)

The word-virus remained a recurring theme throughout Burroughs' subsequent fiction, and in 1983's *The Place of Dead Roads* a character describes the repetitive nature of the virus: 'the human cell can only divide and reproduce itself fifty thousand times. This is known as the Hayflick limit. But a virus can do it any number of times. A virus is immune to the deadly factor of repetition' (Burroughs, 2001a:123). Later in this same novel we are told that the 'guess that language operates on the virus principle of replication has been verified in the Linguistic institute…' (Burroughs 2001a:185).

The two major features of the word-virus, as discussed by Burroughs himself, are repetition and dependency on the human subject. Burroughs' 1960s texts - and particularly his cut-ups and fold-ins - are constructed through repetition, and this repetition places most parts of his texts in a relationship of interpretive dependency with each other, and with Burroughs other texts. The repetitive passages, especially those created through cut-ups, are dependent on their source texts for their interpretation and in a reciprocal movement the interpretation of the source texts changes when the repetition is read. A third feature of the make-up of viruses is their high mutation rates and again, Burroughs' repetitions are also always mutations, ranging from minute variations applied to words in cut-up repetitions, to large scale repetition with variation of mini-narratives and stock scenes.

These features suggest that Burroughs is attempting to represent the word-virus through the formal properties of his text, an argument that is strengthened by the novels' repeatedly stated aim of 'total exposure' of the methods of the parasitic invasion and control. This exposure exists not only at the level of fictional description, but also in the form of the novels themselves, through which the virus is enacted. Several prior readings of Burroughs' cut-up texts have highlighted the paradoxical nature of Burroughs' situation, whereby the only weapon he can employ as a writer is the very thing he is trying to destroy. Murphy (1997) suggests that 'if the primary means of control is language – the Word – then all writers are, in principle, implicated in the Nova conspiracy… including Burroughs' (Murphy 1997:115). Tanner (1991) discusses the paradoxical nature of Burroughs' use of the word to fight the Word, and links this with the author's continual desire to immerse himself in the images that he finds horrific. Tanner suggests that Burroughs' method is one in which 'the ugliness has to be recorded, then the recorder (author) can play with it at will, exerting *his* control over *it*. By constantly regurgitating all the foul material, replaying it at his tempo, with splicings and "inchings", as it were, he is accelerating its disappearance' (Tanner, 1991:110-11). In support of this thesis Tanner cites the conclusion of *The Ticket that Exploded* which tells readers, 'the more you run the tapes through and cut them up the less power they will have cut the prerecordings into thin air' (Tanner, 1991:110-11). Tanner's view is shared by Nelson (1991) who suggests that by 'turning the enemy's weapons against him.. language is encouraged to destroy itself' (Nelson, 1991:128). This view is a typical one (supported by many of Burroughs' own statements regarding the nature of his texts) in which Burroughs' radical formal practices are thought to destroy the word-virus through subversion.[73] This chapter will suggest rather, that these very practices (excessive repetition and cut-up permutation) are what make Burroughs' texts so strongly resemble the virus and that this enactment of the virus is the necessary homeopathic cure that Burroughs seeks to effect.

In one of the earliest appraisals of the cut-up novels, Hassan (1991) approaches my reading more closely when he recognises the fact that Burroughs texts are a version of what he seeks to destroy. However, Hassan is doubtful of how aware Burroughs may be of this situation: 'the virus, it must be concluded, has affected Burroughs more than he realises. His denunciation of infamy slips into acquiescence with it; outrage cancels itself by a partial relish of outrage… Burroughs seems to have devised in the cut-up method not so much a means of liberating man as of declaring his bondage.' (Hassan, 1991:60-1). This problem over how we are to situate Burroughs' texts in relationship to the things they are attacking is, this chapter will suggest, a deliberate tactic on Burroughs' part, a facet of his general strategy of echoic language use without a stable metarepresentational standpoint, in which Burroughs texts bear an unsettlingly close resemblance to their targets. Just as Lydenberg (1987), sees the attempt in Burroughs' fiction to destroy the delusions of 'the 'Garden of Delights' and its arsenal of images by a method of cure in which the reader is immunised by exposure' I will show that Burroughs' cut-up texts as a whole are homeopathic exposures to the word-virus (Lydenberg 1987:73).[74]

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[73] Burroughs later proposes the idea that simply subverting language in the cut-ups will not destroy the virus. Shaviro (1991) notes how in his later novel *Cities of the Red Night*, Burroughs seems to accept that the subversive strategy of the cut-ups cannot destroy the word-virus: 'the cut-up method remains in solidarity with the mechanism against which it is directed: 'changes, Mr Snide, can only be effected by alternations in the *original*… the copies can only repeat themselves word for word. *A virus is a copy*. You can pretty it up, cut it up, scramble it – it will reassemble in the same form''. (Shaviro, 1991:202)

This view of the relationship between Burroughs texts and the word-virus shares some basic assumptions with Baldwin (2002) and Russell (2001). This chapter shares Baldwin's belief that Burroughs adopts the representational techniques of the medium he is challenging. This 'desire to imitate media one intrinsically suspects' is regarded by Baldwin as a key feature of much postmodern American writing (Baldwin, 2002:162). Russell approaches my reading of Burroughs when he links the radical repetitive form of the cut-up novels with Korzybski's General Semantics and Scientiology founder L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetic therapy, leading him to the view that repetition can be a means of freeing the subject from regulative control by 'bringing the mechanisms of control into consciousness' (Russell, 2001:82).

Burroughs became interested in General Semantics after attending lectures by Korzybski in Chicago in 1939. Russell suggests that

> Burroughs takes Korzybski's belief in a non-verbal plane of objective reality as the motivation for his attempt to "rub out the word forever" (*NE*, p12). The cut-ups are an attempt to subvert the control exercised through language, literally to cut the word lines and to convince the reader that "In the beginning was the word and the word was bullshit" (*TTE*, 198). ... as semantic conditioning is transcended, a liberated subject, freed from internal limitation

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[74] Burroughs cut-ups resemble his definition of anxiety, further supporting the claim that the cut-ups are not a means of simply liberating the subject. Zurbrugg (1988) quotes Burroughs: 'what anxiety is, is contradictory signals. That's what causes the feeling of shakiness and powerlessness; you are getting simultaneous signals that are contradictory' (Zurbrugg, 1988:59). As should be clear, Burroughs' statements regarding the importance of the cut-ups are often contradictory.

> and external control is produced. Once "delusional" structures of relating self to world are overthrown, the subject can reach its full potential… In the trilogy, Burroughs' cut-up technique is used literally to destroy the "faulty" structures of our semantic heritage. As Burroughs suggests, the cut-up challenges "the mental mechanisms of repression and selection" that work against the subject. He explicitly links this with General Semantics (*Third Mind* p5-6). (Russell, 2001:68)

Alongside General Semantics, Russell cites Dianetics as the other major influence on Burroughs' conversion to the cut-up technique. Russell relates Burroughs' first hand experience of L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetic Therapy. Hubbard believes that the mind constantly stores "engrams" which are 'complete recording[s]... of every perception present in a moment of partial or full "unconsciousness."' These engrams are akin to motion pictures but much more rich, containing as they do, all sensory experience. Hubbard claims that the danger of the engram is that it can be *'permanently fused into any and all body circuits and behaves like an entity*' (quoted in Russell, 2001:69-70, my emphasis). The engram acts like Burroughs' word-virus, and Burroughs even goes so far as to state in *The Ticket that Exploded* that 'engrams are living organisms viruses in fact' (Burroughs, 2001c:17). (The engram and the word-virus also closely resemble Plato's conception of writing in the *Phaedrus,* as I will show in the concluding sections of this chapter.)

The aim of Dianetic therapy is to bring engrams from the unconscious back to consciousness where the 'influence of these stored memories can be worked through and quickly eradicated'. The subject is placed in a reverie while the auditor talks through experiences, emotions and words until a reading is picked up on an ‘E-meter’. Whatever triggers the meter is then ‘repeated over and over until the reading shows clear’ (Russell, 2001:71).

Russell claims that although Burroughs became quickly disillusioned with Hubbard and Scientology,[75] he went on to employ Dianetics, alongside General Semantics, ‘as one of the theoretical foundations for his textual experimentation’:

> By repeating words and phrases, and by literally cutting them up, pasting them to each other, jumbling them together, Burroughs creates a textual parallel to the therapies’ attempts to purify the individual. Thus the cut-up technique produces... a textual metaphor of the kind of liberation-through-purification that Burroughs was seeking in each of these therapies... From this perspective, the repetitive “pornographic” style of passages such as “The Streets of Chance” (*SM*, 108-138) makes much more sense, their purpose being similar to self-purification enacted by the auditing process. The repetition of the audit seeks to remove the engrams stored in the reactive mind, bringing them to consciousness; Burroughs’ repetitions seek to bring the mechanisms of control into consciousness, allowing the subject to recover his original identity – that is, the one that existed prior to regulation. (Russell, 2001:72-82)

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[75] Tanner (1991) discerns a ‘genuine interest’ in the dianetic process on Burroughs’ part but does highlight the slightly mocking tone in Burroughs’ writing about the Dianetics in *Nova Express* (Tanner, 1991:107). Murphy (1997) adds that Scientology actually declared Burroughs to be ‘in condition of treason’ ‘following his abandonment of the church in 1968 and his subsequent composition of critical articles “ratting” on its techniques of psychological analysis and control.’ (Murphy 1997:115). Given that *The Soft Machine*, *The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express* were published in 1961, 62 and 64, and the first two novels were revised in 1966 and 67 respectively, it seems reasonable to assume that Burroughs was still seriously interested in the possibilities of dianetic therapy when writing these books.

The realisation that Burroughs repetition attempts to make conscious the mechanisms of control is an important one. However, Russell goes too far in his contextualisation of Burroughs' form here, proposing to turn his overtly experimental prose into a self help therapy, whilst at the same time seeking to justify the pornographic elements in his work. But he is not alone in this outlook. Russell quotes Allen Ginsberg:

> The cut-ups were originally designed to rehearse and repeat [Burroughs'] obsession with sexual images over and over again, like a movie repeating over and over again, and then recombined and mixed in; so that finally the obsessive detachment, compulsion and preoccupation empty out and drain from the image [...] And that's the purpose of the cut-ups: to cut out of habit reactions, to cut through rehearsed habit, to cut through conditioned reflex, to cut out in the open space... (Quoted in Russell, 2001:82)

It is difficult to agree with Ginsberg and Russell that one of the most innovative literary experiments of the twentieth century can be explained away with the identification of just one over-riding 'purpose'.[76] In any case, as we saw in Stein's work, repetition in Burroughs' texts need not be experienced by the reader in the way that the author conceives it.[77] That being said, Russell's recognition that cut-up-repetitions are analogous to dianetic therapy is an important one. In making this claim he approaches the view of Burroughs' texts as a form of homeopathy through enactment. In Dianetic therapy, the repetition of signifier for the engram eventually eradicates the engram. Similarly, Burroughs repeats his representation of the word-virus in order to cure readers of the word-virus. The major difference between the engram and the word-virus is that the word-virus is itself repetitive, further strengthening Burroughs' need to repeat. The cut up is always repetitive, and Dianetic therapy provides another reason – alongside, and linked to the enactment of the word-virus - why Burroughs might wish to employ so much repetition in these novels.

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[76] This tendency to justify the radical nature of Burroughs' texts is a common one among critics, perhaps taken furthest by Oxenhandler's (1991) psychoanalytic reading which uncovers (or imposes) a framework of unconscious desires and complexes for Burroughs' most grotesque imagery. Taken to extremes this type of psychoanalytic reading becomes farcical, as when Oxenhandler interprets the above quoted passage from *The Ticket that Exploded* which begins 'the 'Other Half' is the word. The 'Other Half' is an organism. Word is an organism. The presence of the 'Other Half' a separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air line of words can now be demonstrated experimentally...' Oxenhandler suggests that 'if for 'other half' we read "mother" and for "word" we read "milk", then this curiously archaic passage duplicates the pre-oedipal situation: the body is attracted to the poisoning mother and blames her for the damage (castration) to his body.' (Oxenhandler, 1991:140-141) The justification for the substitution of 'other half' by 'mother' and 'word' by 'milk' is not provided.
A more helpful judgement of Burroughs' imagery can be found in Zurbrugg (1991). Zurbrugg agrees with Ginsberg's comments, and sees the same trait in Beckett's recurring images, but he adds that 'whether Burroughs' texts serve or served Burroughs personally as pornographic intoxicant or disintoxicant is perhaps beside the point, or at least very secondary to their decisive difference from pulp pornography in terms of their exploration of the cut-up as both a literary device and as a subversive weapon for the verbal-visual urban guerrilla. To acknowledge this function of Burroughs'

However, caution must be exercised with regards how far we chose to 'explain' experimental form through such contextualisation. While Burroughs' repetition and cut-ups are influenced by Dianetics, General Semantics, and his desire to enact the word-virus, these influences do not provide a final explanation or justification for the form his texts take. The question of 'why repeat' is partly answered by the desire to expose the virus through enactment, by Burroughs links with dianetic therapy, and, as we shall see, by the fact that the targets of Burroughs' echoic language are often repetitive. Burroughs, to an extent, repeats because these things repeat. But to attempt to definitively answer the question 'why repeat?' in this manner is to fall into the same habit as Russell and Ginsberg, contextualising radical form until it 'makes much more sense'. A more satisfactory answer to this question will now be sought by

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writing is neither to deny its pornographic content nor to accept blindly the frequent eccentric formulations and exemplifications of its variably convincing theories' (Zurbrugg, 1991:185).

[77] Burroughs' is unusual, however, in making his radical compositional methods extremely transparent. Even going to the extent of repeatedly explaining them inside his texts.

analysing the outcomes of Burroughs' repetitive form. We will see that the question 'why repeat?' is best answered in the form 'because repetition does x y z', rather than the form 'because of the influence of a b c'.

3. Repetition of stock scenes, echoic use, and parody

Out-with the cut-up itself, the most persistent form of repetition in the cut-up novels, and particularly in *The Soft Machine*, is the repetition with variation of stock sex scenes.[78] That there are at least seven sex scenes within the first six pages of *The Soft Machine* gives a good indication of their frequency in the text.[79] The sex scenes are generally included in more elaborate mini-narratives and the content of these narratives and the content of the scenes themselves are often so similar as to be almost interchangeable. Most of these mini-narratives involve a white male and an exotic/alien male in very similar sexual practices and with very similar outcomes. Kazin's (1991) comment about Burroughs' *Wild Boys* – that repetition 'turns the coupling into an obsessive primal scene that never varies in its details. The technical arrangements never vary…' – is highly appropriate to the cut-up texts and to all of Burroughs' subsequent fiction (Kazin, 1991:117). Sex scenes with very close resemblance to the ones in *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket that Exploded* are found throughout Burroughs' other text, these novels simply contain more of them per page.

Every sex scene in the cut-up novels draws its content from a stock pool of actions and descriptions mainly relating to undressing, erection, sexual positions, and ejaculation. Every sex scene in the cut-up novels and in Burroughs fiction generally, resembles many others because of the highly formulaic nature of their content and style. This formulaic resemblance carries over to scenes that do not necessarily include sexual intercourse, such as the frequently encountered sexualised hangings in which the hanged men always defecate and ejaculate and the viewers are always aroused by the spectacle.[80] The sexual nature of hanging means that Burroughs can draw on the same repetitive content that he uses in the sex scenes.

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[78] As Lydenberg (1984) notes *The Soft Machine* seems to 'begin again and again' (Lydenberg, 1987:71) (Stein begins again in each sentence, Burroughs begins again in each chapter, and Beckett begins again in each text.)

[79] It is difficult to judge just how many sex scenes there are in *The Soft Machine* as they occur so frequently that they often cannot be clearly demarcated.

This repetition is based on interpretive resemblance between the content of the stock scenes and on the exact or near exact metalinguistic repetition of verbal elements, with Burroughs rarely varying the phrases he employs across repetitive scenes. The following quotations from three adjacent descriptions of sexual intercourse in *The Soft Machine* display this method of composition

> The Mexican kid unbuttoned his shirt. He kicked off his sandals *dropped his pants and shorts* grinning and his cock flipped out half up. The Mexican kid *brought his finger up in three jerks* and his cock came up with it...

> Kiki *shoved his shorts down* leaning forward. *He dropped his shorts* on his pants and shirt and stood up... Kiki put *his hands on the boy's shoulders*...

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[80] Hanging in Burroughs is always the opposite of Billy Budd's serene death. Late in *The Soft Machine* Burroughs' rewrites Billy Budd's hanging: Budd breaks wind and is discovered to be a transvestite. (Burroughs, 2001b:120)

> Paco *brought his finger up in three jerks*. and took off his clothes. He hooked *his hands* from behind around *the boy's shoulders*... (Burroughs, 2001b:87-90, my emphasis)

The phrases I have emphasised here appear in many of the other sex scenes in the novel. In addition the phrase 'cock flipped out', although it only appears in one of the passages given above, is repeated in the majority of the sex scenes and many of the sexualised hanging scenes in the cut-up novels. This metalinguistic repetition embedded within larger units of interpretive repetition means that Burroughs' stock sex scenes create an echoic repetition of the techniques of pornographic representation. By recycling the same formulaic phrases over and over to create barely differentiated sex scenes, Burroughs creates echoic representations of standard pornography, where the same few narratives are repeated and recombined with minor differences in terms of plot, style and language.[81]

In the last example given above, Burroughs uses a typographic device to highlight the formulaic nature of his creation of sex scenes. A full stop followed by a sentence fragment (without a capital letter) is a readily explainable typographic feature of a cut-up - the cut up text has been left in the state that it was in before being rearranged - but when it occurs within a paragraph that seems not to be a cut-up it seems that Burroughs is using this feature to suggest a cut-up-repetition where there may not necessarily be one. Here the typographical feature *suggests* that the sex scene is a cut-up made from stock sex scene phrases without actually being a cut-up. Burroughs method for production of such scenes is not much different from a cut-up, and neither he suggests, are the methods of pornographers. The existence of fake cut-ups works alongside the stock phrases and images of Burroughs' repetitive scenes to intensify the formulaic (or mock-formulaic) impression that his texts create, with Burroughs encouraging us to believe that he simply manufactures his texts from stock parts in an almost (or at times entirely) mechanical fashion.

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[81] Stewart Home has adopted this technique in many of his novels. See for example Home (2002).

Earlier in the novel this typographical feature works in a similar way when it appears in the middle of what sounds like an insincere response to the news that a fellow addict is quitting heroin: 'Well I hope you make it, kid. May I fall down and be paralysed if I don't mean it… You got a friend in me. a real friend and if…' (Burroughs, 2001b:6). Here the typography (and the hyperbole) suggest that this speech is made from stock junky-talk, the character has said similar things a thousand times and now he just recycles the key phrases in whatever order they occur to him. The fact that the quotation tails off where it does further strengthens this claim, suggesting that the conversation is so repetitive that there is no need to carry on representing it. In this way Burroughs' suggests an absent (from the narrative but not from the story) series of repetitions of this type of conversation. What Burroughs also achieves with these fake cut-ups is the suggestion of a repetition which does not have an original. The cut-up is always necessarily a repetition of source text/s, or of other cut-ups which come from source texts, but these fake cut-ups suggest the existence of a source text that does not actually exist.

We saw in the previous chapter that, like Burroughs, Beckett often employs repetitive motifs. Unlike Burroughs, however, Beckett's repeated motifs are relatively unremarkable (the wearing of hats, holding hands etc.) and the motifs repeat each other but rarely repeat an external source. The content of Burroughs' repeated motifs, on the other hand, is generally more provocative - based around drugs, sex (often with or between aliens) and violent death - and the repetition is primarily echoic of outside sources. The outcome of the two writers' use of motifs is also very different. Beckett's repetition of motifs adds a non-propositional 'meaningfulness' to generally unremarkable content and there is never any suggestion of formulaic compositional practice; his repetition invests the commonplace with an uncanny significance. Conversely, as I will now show, Burroughs' repetition of motifs adds a meta-level of meaning (though a highly unusual one) to remarkable content, with the paradoxical effect of emptying that content of significance, making it seem formulaic. As Lydenberg suggests, in the 'monotony' of Burroughs repetitive practice 'even the most exotic or exaggerated images are reduced to the already familiar…' (Lydenberg, 1987:71)

Echoic utterances are produced when a speaker represents an attributed thought or utterance and conveys their own attitude towards it. Wilson (2000) shows that echoic utterances 'add an extra layer of metarepresentation to the communicated content, since not only the attribution but also the speaker's attitude must be represented.' She adds that 'the attitudes conveyed by echoic utterances are very rich and varied: the speaker may indicate that she agrees or disagrees with the original, is puzzled, angry, amused, intrigued, sceptical, etc., or any combination of these'. In the related cases of irony and parody the attitude conveyed by the speaker is dissociative. In cases of verbal irony, the resemblance that holds between the speaker's utterance and the attributed utterance or thought is interpretive: 'the speaker conveys a dissociative attitude to an attributed content'. Parody on the other hand, involves metalinguistic resemblance: ‘the speaker conveys a dissociative attitude not (only) to an attributed content but to the style or form of the original’ (Wilson, 2000:432-3).

Burroughs’ echoic texts represent the content and the form of pornography and pulp fiction, and because these genres are highly repetitive and formulaic, so Burroughs, when echoing, echoes many times with minimal variation each time. Burroughs’ echoic repetitions have the formal structure of parody in that they represent both the content and the style of their originals, but they do not convey the straightforwardly dissociative attitude that parody entails. There is certainly a meta-level intent when Burroughs echoes pornographic or pulp fiction representations – his texts are not *just* pornography, or *just* pulp fiction - but the attitude is not easy to interpret. Burroughs’ novels consist of too much of this type of writing for his attitude to simply be ironic or mocking; they are not *just* pornographic, but they are pornographic nonetheless. It may be his intent to suggest that pornographers write in a highly formulaic way, but he adopts their forms too completely to be able to support a completely dissociative attitude. Burroughs attitude seems to be that ‘something is wrong’ with this type of writing, but at the same time he creates significant portions of his novels by echoing it. In fact, the same type of sex scene appears so many times in Burroughs’ novels that we may wonder whether he comes to be echoing anything other than himself. What readers are left with as a result of this blurring of the boundaries between the echoic text and the attributed text, is a metarepresentation with an undefined attitude. This is the opposite of the sublime ‘blown fuse’ – strong attitude decoupled from any actual content - that we encountered in the interpretation of Stein and Beckett’s repetition. Our inability to fix an authorial attitude in Burroughs’ texts suggests that his writing is a version of what Jameson (1991) has identified as ‘postmodern pastiche’, that is satire which provides no stable perspective from which to view it. Alternatively we could classify Burroughs' echoic passages as examples of what Morson (1989) calls 'metaparody', parodies which mock both their targets and their own repetition of those targets.

As with his pornographic and pulp crime fiction elements, Burroughs' writing about drugs is also often deliberately and overtly formulaic. This is more unsettling because unlike formulaic sex or formulaic guns-and-violence narratives, the drug narratives seem to have no original. Although lurid pulp narratives of drug addiction certainly existed in the 1950s, Burroughs was one of the few authors who had written with honesty and frankness about heroin use in this period. The deliberate 'fakeness' of these drug narratives presents what seems like a case of echoic repetition but without a target text or utterance, a metarepresentation without an original representation. The drug narratives are deliberately formulaic, but there seems to be no real reason why this should be so. There is no possible target to echo or parody, and hence also no possible attitude to take towards a source representation. We saw earlier that Beckett and Stein's repetitive texts create the pragmatic situation of an attitude without a content (Fabb's 'sublime blown fuse'). In the case of Burroughs' seemingly echoic drug narratives we encounter what seems to be a metarepresentational structure with no identifiable original representation and no definable attitude, a double blank.

One possible explanation for Burroughs' repeatedly formulaic passages is his desire to enact the word virus. His texts are repetitive and formulaic because the word-virus is. Burroughs may be exposing us to the pleasures of pornography or any other type of formulaic writing for this reason: 'inoculation is the weapon of choice against virus and inoculation can only be effected through exposure… exposure to the pleasures offered under enemy conditions (Burroughs, 2001c:8). In an essay contemporaneous to the cut-up novels Burroughs suggests, ‘I am mapping an imaginary universe. A dark universe of wounded galaxies and nova conspiracies where obscenity is coldly used as a total weapon’ (Burroughs, 1962b:99). It seems that Burroughs’ formulaic writing and pornographic imagery may be another means of turning the controllers’ weapons against them. The suggestion by previous critics that Burroughs is too involved in a pornographic style of writing to also be completely dissociating himself from it is a correct one. Any clear dissociative attitude towards the pornographic representations on Burroughs’ part would mean that the imagery would fail in its enactment of the ‘pleasures offered under enemy conditions’. Burroughs’ project is exposure and enactment rather than parody. This realisation does not attempt to justify the pornographic elements in Burroughs’ texts – there is no need to ‘justify’ these elements – but it does provide a potential reading of their repetition and of our difficulty in locating Burroughs’ attitude towards them.

Whatever we may speculate regarding Burroughs’ metarepresentational attitude (or lack thereof) towards his echoic repetitions, what is certain is that the end result of these mock-formulaic scenes is meta-fictional rather than affective. There is a deliberate undermining of the fiction rather than an elevation of its affective qualities, and the meta-nature of echoic use means that meta-fictional play has primacy over content. What the repeated stock scenes and motifs ‘mean’ in a meta-fictional sense becomes just as important, perhaps more important, than what they represent inside the fiction. Unlike Beckett’s intratextual repetition of motifs, here the response of the reader is a detached one, the repetition is dissociative rather than affective.

A similar contrast is apparent in the way the two authors create characters who resemble and repeat each other. Beckett's characters are interchangeable in certain respects (recall Burroughs comment that 'Beckett… has only one character'), they repeat each other in ways that highlight their fictionality, but because they are much more fully realised, and contain a seeming depth of personality, these repetitions are felt as significant, and not simply as deliberate undercuttings of the reader's belief in the fictional world. (Beckett undercuts our suspension of disbelief in his characters but also requires that we invest a great deal in them.) In short, character repetition works to add significance to the content of Beckett's own texts. The interchangeability of protagonists in Burroughs is much more overt, especially because his characters have little or no psychological depth, they are completely textual, and completely interchangeable; they readily conform to Beckett's opinion of his own characters as 'puppets' (Beckett, 1963:86).[82] Burroughs further undermines his characters by reusing the same names in different narratives without any clear indication that we are reading about the same character, by changing the name of a protagonist (sometimes more than once) in the middle of a narrative, or even a sentence, and through the repeated bodily swappings and mergings that the characters are involved in. The fact that Burroughs' characters are interchangeable, like most of the sex scenes, again operates on a meta-level; we are constantly aware of the fictionality and depthlessness of everything these characters do because they are the same as the other characters who have also done these things. The effect is an undercutting of character identity and of the fiction as a whole. As Shaviro (1991) claims, 'Burroughs' repetitions correspond to no coherence of narrative, no integrity of character, no stability of milieu' (Shaviro 1991:197). The outcome of Burroughs continual undercutting of his own fictions and his creation of a deliberate 'fakeness' in his writing is that the reader is forced into a meta-level position with regards the texts, never becoming fully involved in the fiction, never suspending disbelief, and constantly aware of the textuality of the novels. The attribute of Burroughs' novels which most bluntly signals their textuality is the cut-up repetition.

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[82] Further supporting our view of Beckett's protagonists as fully realised creations, Beckett appends this comment with the statement that 'Murphy is not a puppet' (Beckett, 1963:86). Beckett only grants his auxiliary characters depthlessness.

4. Cut-up-repetition

The cut-up is the main source of metalinguistic repetition in *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket that Exploded*. This now famous practice involves the cutting of a source text or texts (Burroughs' own, or those of other writers) into fragments which are then recombined to create a new 'cut-up' text. The related practice of the 'fold-in' produces similar results through folding rather than cutting the paper.[83] Burroughs was first introduced to the cut-up by Brion Gysin but acknowledges a resemblance between the cut-up and works by Eliot, Tristan Tzara, and Dos Passos (Burroughs and Gysin 1979:3). All three of these writers employed juxtaposition of disparate (or seemingly disparate) images and fragments but of the three only Tzara combined this with an aleatory combinatorial method (pulling cut-up sentences from newspaper articles out of a hat). Although not cited as a precursor by Burroughs, James Joyce also achieves cut-up effects with his consciously controlled reordering of narrative fragments in the opening passage of the 'Sirens' episode of *Ulysses* (for further discussion of the effects of repetition in this passage see Kumar, 1991:41-49). [84]

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[83] I will be referring to both of these practices under the more common term of 'cut-up'.

[84] Murphy also mentions Eisenstein's film montage method as a precursor but notes that, in contrast to Burroughs' aleatory method, the techniques of collagists such as Dos Passos and Eisenstein 'are

Although antecedents exist, Burroughs was the first writer to make the cut-up a central part of his textual practice, and it is no exaggeration to say that the cut-up is the single most important formal feature of *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket that Exploded*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Beckett employs a similar compositional strategy in *Lessness* but in a more rigorously predetermined fashion and with a mathematical permutational structure. That Beckett adopted such a process is doubly interesting as he is said to have remarked of Burroughs' cut-up technique: 'that's not writing, it's plumbing' (Morgan, 1991:323).[85] That being said, Zurbrugg (1988) traces similar outcomes in Burroughs' cut-ups and Beckett's conventionally constructed texts, discussing both writers' creation of 'unharmonious groups of images and perceptions' and stating that both authors 'evoke simultaneous perceptions which fail to resolve themselves' (Zurbrugg, 1988: 58-9, 155).

A comparison with the permutational strategies of Beckett and the Oulipo will help us better understand the radically experimental nature of the cut-up. Burroughs' use of the cut-up is explicitly random, whereas the Oulipo and Beckett are interested in controlled methods for potential literature. The completely arbitrary nature of the cut-ups means that their structure and their meaning are always more difficult to interpret than texts based on permutative reordering. In their use of permutation, the Oulipo (and Beckett in *Lessness*) leave syntax unchanged, basing their reordering on

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methods of control whereby the artist imposes his or her will on resistant symbolic material' (Murphy, 1997:105).

[85] This quote has elsewhere been attributed to Paul Bowles (Charters, 2003:518) but Burroughs confirms in an interview that Beckett was the originator of the 'plumbing' joke, and also remarks on Beckett's general hostility to the cut-up technique ('he didn't approve of it at all') mainly on the grounds that Burroughs was 'using other people's words' (Bockris, 1997:211-214). Zurbrugg quotes Beckett as saying of his own permutative practice in *Lessness* that it was, 'the only honest thing to do' (Zurbrugg, 1994:40). Beckett's main concern with Burroughs' cut-ups then, seems to have been the appropriative nature and not their permutative character.

syntactic categories, as in Lescurean permutations, where all the noun phrases in a source text are reordered by various pre-determined strategies. On the other hand, Burroughs deliberately sets out to destroy the original syntax of the source literature, physically cutting into the text and reassembling the fragments as he sees fit.

The physicality of Burroughs practice, as opposed to the mathematical, potential nature of the Oulipo's permutations is an important trait. A Lesucrean permutation does not really need to involve any actual physical reordering and it could be argued that the potential for re-ordering is more important than any actual outcome. Even in Queneau's *100,000,000,000,000 Poems* where the lines of each sonnet can be cut with scissors to allow the production of the titular number of poems, each individual line is isolated and protected from reordering. In addition Queneau ensured that each line was written in such a way that it could work inside every other potential sonnet in the sequence. In short, the lines are predetermined to 'fit'. The same goes for Beckett's practice in *Lessness*, where the sentences were written on separate bits of paper, and constructed so that each one could reside in any part of the text. Beckett does away with ordinary syntactic convention within the source sentences but keeps the sentences as complete units, untouched by the reordering. Burroughs, on the other hand, often creates a more conventional (though by no means standard) syntax in the source texts and deliberately cuts (or folds) into the sentences in an arbitrary fashion. This means that whereas Queneau and Beckett each have a level of discourse which the permutation cannot touch - a specific unit, the line and the sentence respectively, which is not affected by the reordering process - Burroughs has no such minimum unit rule. His cut-ups do not respect sentence, phrase or even word boundaries; the reordering process is purely physical and spatial and this results in a much more radically altered reading process, through which Burroughs creates deliberate anxiety for readers who must deal with 'simultaneous signals that are contradictory' (Quoted in Zurbrugg, 1988:59).

Crucially, Burroughs cut-ups are also repetitions, usually appearing in the same novels as their source texts. A reordering practice such as Lesucrean permutation is not strictly a form of repetition, because the permutation *replaces* the source text; in contrast, the cut-up (unless it is a fake) is invariably presented (anaphorically or cataphorically) *in addition* to its source/s. Beckett's permutational repetition in *Lessness,* although it is closer to Burroughs' method, differs considerably in its totality, its perfect symmetry and in the ease with which each repetition can be linked to its predecessor in the first half of the text. In Burroughs' texts, on the other hand, it is often extremely difficult to be sure what exactly is being repeated and where the originals are to be found because the repetition is often multiple and is drawn from various sources which are often very similar in content. This type of repetition is much more unsettling for readers, who are placed in a near constant state of *déjà-vu*.

The most consistent use of cut-up repetition in *The Soft Machine* and *The Ticket that Exploded* is in the disruption of a mini-narrative by a cut-up repetition of itself, with the cut-up ending the narrative before any resolution can occur. A constant in Burroughs' in the cut-up novels is the continual alternation between cut-up and straight narrative. Burroughs made it clear that the deliberate contrast between the arduous cut-up sections and moments of relief in straight narrative was an aesthetic choice. Harris (1991) quotes a letter of advice that that Burroughs' wrote to Claude Pelieu, suggesting that the latter 'try interposing some straight narrative with the cut-up material … this potentiates both narrative and cut-up' (Harris, 1991:256). Again here we see, as in Beckett (and to a lesser extent Stein), a repetitive text exploiting the effort/reward economy of relevance in the creation of deliberate contrast between effort consuming sections and rewarding sections.

Although he employs a constant alternation between cut-up and straight narrative, Burroughs' cut-up-repetitions do not always follow this pattern of referring back to an 'original' coherent text. Often the cut-up fragments will refer forward to narrative statements yet to be presented in their coherent form with the source material only appearing after the spliced fragments which 'repeat' it in a new context. One particularly complicated instance of cataphoric cut-up exists across the chapters of *The Ticket that Exploded* entitled 'combat troops in the area' and 'silence to say goodbye'. These chapters deal in the main with a mini-narrative about two protagonists called Bill and Johnny. In all there are three non-cut-up 'source' texts relating to these two characters, which shall be labelled A, B and C. The story order of these texts is as follows:

Text A

Text B = Succeeding Text A by 10 years

Text C = Immediately succeeding Text B

The narrative order of the texts is as follows:

(1) Cut up of all three texts: A/B/C

(2) Text A

(3) Cut up of texts A and B: A/B

(4) Text B

(5) (several chapters later, after many other narratives have been introduced) Text C. Text C also includes new cut-ups of Texts A and B. These cut ups are presented as components of the story world.

In addition to this complex structure of repetition comes the usual interpretive resemblance to a huge number of other scenes in Burroughs' oeuvre, as the three texts (A, B, and C) involve sexual encounters between two men, drug use, and several other smaller motifs, both interpretive, for example a character urinating during hysterical laughter, and metalinguistic, such as the phrase 'spurts of semen across the dusty floor'. Further complicating matters is the fact that Billy and Johnny are also the assumed names of the narrator and his associate in an earlier narrative from *The Soft Machine,* in which the two characters keep swapping names and identities: 'one day I would up as Bill the next Johnny' (Burroughs 2001:9). (This quick summary highlights the huge amount of resemblance relationships that readers encounter in almost every scene of the cut-up novels.)

The structure of these cut-up repetitions creates deliberate confusion over the representation of story time in the text, with the initial cut-up (Text A/B/C) being presented by a character as an example of 'time travel on association lines' (Burroughs: 2001:86). The cut-up as textual time travel is a recurrent theme in Burroughs' work with the fold-in being figured as a form of time travel in 'The Mayan Caper' section of the *Soft Machine*, and Burroughs stating in *The Third Mind* that, 'the cut-up perverts scriptural practice in the sense that the space-time of the text is distorted. There is an impression of *déjà-vu*, as well as an indication of what's to come' and in another essay claiming that 'when the reader reads page ten he is flashing forward in time to page one hundred and back in time to page one' (Burroughs and Gysin, 1978:21) (Burroughs 1962a:6-7).

Text A actually involves Bill and Johnny discussing the nature of time travel. Bill wonders about the possibility of the boys seeing themselves ten years hence, and Johnny points out that time does not consist of actions, but the representation of actions. Text B is a narrative detailing a meeting between the two characters ten years after text A, and in text C Johnny and Bill are again talking to each other in what we must presume is a continuation of the situation presented in text B. Here Johnny is operating tape recorder machinery, splicing different texts and different voices together. Bill reads an extract from his novel into Johnny's tape recorder until Johnny tells him to stop. The excerpt Bill reads begins with the straightforward repetition of the beginning of text A, and then becomes a cut-up of texts A and B (and possibly other texts). This opens up the possibility that texts A and B, and cut ups A/B/C(1) and A/B(4) are actually extracts from the Bill of text C's novel. That 'Bill' is usually Burroughs' pseudonym in his own novels suggests that Burroughs may be representing himself as the author of *The Ticket that Exploded* (or parts of it) within *The Ticket that Exploded*. Another interpretation is that Bill's novel is just a very accurate (i.e. containing metalinguistic resemblance) representation of the words and events which took place in texts A and B, which are already representations contained within the novel *The Ticket that Exploded*. This would mean however, that Bill's novel contains scenes which have only just happened, i.e. the content of text B.

After stopping Bill, Johnny reads into the tape recorder from a magazine (text D) which, it seems likely, he is about to splice with Bill's text. What actually happens is that immediately after Johnny stops talking we are presented with a cut up (text A/B/D) of his reading from the magazine and details from text A and text B that Bill has not even read into the tape recorder. Next we learn, impossibly, that the extract which Bill read into the tape recorder contains fragments from a paragraph which appears after Johnny has finished playing Bill the cut-up tape. The way these cut-up repetitions manipulate the levels of representation in *The Ticket that Exploded* is unsettling.[86] Interpretation of these passages becomes impossible as the meta-character of the cut-ups inside cut-ups precludes any attempt to make sense of the story world of Bill and Johnny. Although we can certainly form propositions about new micro level meanings emerging from juxtaposition and repetition in these cut-ups (for example see Lydenberg (1987:84-94) on some of the specific new meanings which emerge from these particular cut-ups) we cannot arrive at any overall explanation for the metarepresentational difficulties the cut-ups create. We cannot turn off the inferencing process that these repetitions instigate but nor can we form any propositions that make sense of the repetitive structure. We may understand that the repetition is in one sense meaningless (it is a purely spatial/textual manipulation of language) but its existence still forces us into an inferencing process (that cannot be completed) because meaning is implied by repetitive form in these passages.

Form implying meaning is the general effect of repetition in the cut-up novels. The existence of so many formal links between all parts of the novels generates a superabundance of potential interpretive links. Each resemblance and each repetitive link between different parts of the novels instigates further inferencing but rarely with any propositional results. We may never be sure what to make of the fact that two seemingly unrelated scenes in two different novels contain the phrase ‘spurts of semen across a dusty floor’, there may be no propositional interpretation possible for such a repetition, but the repetition forces us to interpret all the same and it is the existence of such a huge number of these potential interpretative links that is far more important than any single interpretation that readers may generate, if indeed they *can* generate any. In reading Burroughs we can see that cut-up repetition is an arbitrary formal process, we can see that the author makes his scenes repetitive by using stock scenarios and phrases, but the transparency of the compositional strategies cannot block the massive inferencing process generated by the seemingly endless self referentiality and interpretive interdependency of the formal links they create, and the related and impossible attempt to represent every repetition in one intuition. Even more than with Stein and Beckett, we feel that in reading Burroughs our interpretive abilities are being tested beyond their limitations. The only possible outcome for this overloading of our interpretive ability is the sublime defective propositional attitude discussed in the previous chapters. Burroughs' readers must escape from this impossible interpretive situation by cancelling the mass of potential interpretive links and embedding their newly formed blank representation within an intense propositional attitude, thereby generating a sublime epistemic illusion.

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[86] Several critics have noted the way in which Burroughs problematically blurs what McHale calls the ‘ontological boundaries’ of the text, in a deliberate attempt to unsettle readers by de-stabilising our reading perspective and our relationship to the fictional world. For more on this see Lydenberg (1987), Hassan (1991), Nelson (1991), McHale (1994) and Baldwin (2002).

We can see just how much interpretive interdependency repetition creates in these novels by tracing the repetitive structure of 'Dead on Arrival', opening chapter of *The Soft Machine*. With its many jarring juxtapositions of content, often impossible for the reader to interpret, the chapter functions as a kind of large scale, consciously manipulated cut-up (although, as can be seen in the following tables of repetition, the cut-ups themselves are never created completely apart from conscious authorial intervention).

The first strange juxtaposition in 'Dead on Arrival' occurs in the third paragraph.[87] This paragraph contains the first textual unit that will be repeated within the chapter

> The croaker lives out Long Island … light yen sleep waking up for stops.change.start … everything sharp and clear antennae of TV suck the sky … The clock jumped ahead the way time will after 4pm. (Burroughs, 2001:5)

The first instance of metalinguistic repetition in the chapter occurs in paragraph 11, where the clause 'everything sharp and clear like after the rain' is (re-)presented. When the reader notices the direct repetition at this stage then that strange experience of reading paragraph 3 will be remembered and brought to bear on the interpretation of the current section. It is difficult to account for the appearance of this fragment in paragraph 3 at all, and its later repetition makes it even more ambiguous: is the text repeating or re-describing an event that has already happened, or was the original occurrence of this fragment a premonition on the part of the narrator, or is this a completely new occurrence of a similar event, only described in the exact same words? It is not possible to move beyond these questions to define the relationship the narrative repetition has to events in the story world. The most satisfying (if somewhat thin) description of the effects of repetition that can be ventured at this stage is that it will function in two opposing ways: making paragraph 3 seem slightly less odd, as one of its fragments can now be placed in a different, more coherent context, and conversely, making the meaning of paragraph 11 much less stable as its interpretation is now dependent to a certain extent upon an earlier version of one of its component parts. In short, the interpretations of each instance of the repeated fragment depend upon each other to some degree and this relationship of interpretive interdependence is true of all further repetitions.

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[87] I will be referring to paragraph numbers throughout, these numbers refer to the 1968 version of *The Soft Machine*. For more information on different editions of Burroughs' novels see Miles (2002).

The first definite a cut-up repetition in the chapter occurs in paragraph 15 which contains direct linguistic repetition (occasionally with slight alterations) of fragments from preceding paragraphs 1,2,4,6,7,8 and possibly 12:

> There is a boy sitting like your body. I see he is a hook. I drape myself over him from the pool hall. draped myself over his cafeteria and his shorts dissolved in strata of subways … and all house flesh … toward the booth … down opposite me … The Man an Italian tailor… I know bread. 'Me a good buy on H.' (Burroughs, 2001b:6)

The following is a table showing the structure of repetitions in paragraph 15[88]

Table for P15:

Cut-up segment	**Source Paragraph(s)**	**Changes**
There is a boy sitting	2	
Like your body.	6,8	Inserted 'your'
I see he is a hook.	2, (12)	Inserted 'a', 'hooked' becomes 'hook'
I drape myself over him	8	Previously past tense, 'his' changed to

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[88] Reading down the left hand column of these tables you will follow each cut-up in full, however, presented in this fashion the cut-up seems even less coherent than it does within the chapter, where, because it has the appearance of being continuous, the reader may find it slightly easier to create a continuous narrative or gestalt from it. For this reason I have provided full transcriptions of all the cut-ups in the chapter in Appendix B.

		‘him’
From the pool hall.	2	
Draped myself over his	8, *15	
Cafeteria and	2	‘cafeterias’ becomes singular
His shorts disolved in	8	
Strata of subways…	2	
And all		Inserted ‘and’
House flesh…	2	
Toward the booth…	2	Changed ‘my’ to ‘the’
Down opposite me…	2	
The man	1 or 4	
an Italian tailor…	7	
I know	6	
Bread.	4	
‘Me a good buy on H.’	7	Not originally in quotation marks, ‘Me’ has been capitalised.

The effects of the repeated phrase in paragraph 11 are seen again here, only on a much larger scale. Every word or phrase in the paragraph is an exact or near exact repetition of a previous word or phrase. The immediate experience of reading paragraph 15 is one which involves the reader’s memory of the chapter so far to a very high degree. Every fragment in the table above now sets up a relationship of interpretive interdependency with its previous appearance. The interpretation of both instances of each fragment now must take into account not only the fact of the repetition - does this repetition mean that the event is happening again, or simply being described again, or is a new and much stranger event occurring? - but must also consider the two different contexts in which the fragment occurs. As a result of this cut-up repetition, almost half the paragraphs in the chapter up until this point are placed into a state of interpretive interdependency.[89]

Lydenberg traces a similar effect in the cut-ups to that which we noted in Beckett's intratextual repetition whereby 'the reader experiences the flash of recognition as a single word spliced into one episode condenses and recalls an entire routine from some distant chapter. He also feels the pleasure of release as a cryptic image held suspended in mystery from an earlier cut–up collage reappears, finds its context at last, and expands' (Lydenberg, 1987:74). However, Lydenberg's description underplays the radical nature of the reading experience of Burroughs' cut-ups. More often than not, the recognition of repetition in the cut-ups does not lead to any 'pleasure of release', rather there is a steady build up of repetitive links which cannot be interpreted. Cut-up repetition requires that we engage in an inferencing process from which we cannot hope to form propositions. The only way in which any certainty can be recovered is to adopt a meta-view of the cut up, regarding it as a formal mechanical reordering of the 'real' story. This is another way that Burroughs deliberately unsettles and destabilises his fiction, confronting readers with brute mechanical textuality that eradicates our belief in the reality of the story world. Once we take a step back from the cut-up to recognise its textuality, we can no longer really suspend disbelief.

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[89] Like Beckett's intratextual repetition of motifs, which bring the memory of a previous text into the interpretation of the current one, only in a much more condensed form.

This paragraph also cuts and repeats the passage in paragraph two which reads, ‘scored for tea somewhere in grey strata of subways all night cafeterias rooming house flesh’. This concluding list of three noun phrases with no intervening connectives or even punctuation already resembles a cut-up (with the qualification that it is more coherent than most cut-ups). When it is cut-up and repeated in paragraph 15 we encounter a cut-up of a fake cut-up, a repetition of a thing that is a faked repetition, the faked repetition suggesting that either there is another source text outside or before the novel or that there is no original to any of the repetitions in the novel. In addition, when the clause ‘everything sharp and clear like after the rain’ reappears it has a full stop after it but no capitalised letter after the full stop, we see Burroughs manipulating a source text that features in a real cut-up to make the source also appear to be a cut-up, thus problematising any attempt to label one the original and one the copy.[90] This faking of cut-ups is mirrored by the tactics Burroughs’ employs to seamlessly integrate the cut-ups into his non spliced text. Cut-ups often begin in the middle of a paragraph, and at times they are even placed inside quotation marks and made to look like the continuation of a dialogue. In a more conventional novel these tactics would not disguise a cut-up, but because Burroughs’ normal prose style contains so much juxtaposition and often does away with co-ordination and punctuation, it can be difficult to recognise where a cut-up begins and the linear text ends. Burroughs makes his cut-ups seem like source text and makes the source text seem like cut-ups.

The highly repetitive content of the texts also helps to blur the boundaries between cut-up and source. Because Burroughs reuses the same themes and phrases so often

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[90] For more on Burroughs’ creation of meaning through deployment of punctuation in the cut-ups see Lydenberg (1984-89-91).

(e.g. referring to cafeterias, street boys, vacant lots, jock straps, jissom…), everything in the novels comes to seem like a potential cut-up repetition, and when we do encounter a bona-fide cut-up it is impossible to tell which texts are its sources, and how many sources there are, because all the potential sources share the same content. Even the more outlandish content of the trilogy is highly repetitive in this way, with various often repeated motifs (e.g. giant centipedes, crab-men, green lizard boys, strange mutations and diseases of the flesh, transmigration into other bodies…).

Paragraphs 19 and 20 comprise the next cut-up-repetition. The units of this cut-up are a little more difficult to trace than those contained in paragraph 15. (The use of question marks in the middle column indicates that a fragment cannot be traced to a specific point in the coherent text or in another cut-up.)

Table for P19-20

Junky in East	1, (8)	Inserted ‘y’ to ‘junk’
Bathroom	(8), (10)	Doesn’t appear in the chapter anywhere but the scenes described in P8 and P10 suggest bathrooms
Invisible and persistent dream body	???	Insert
Familiar face maybe	2	
Scared[..] for some[…] time or body	2	Dropped words and inserted ‘or body’
in that	???	Insert

Smells of	8	Pluralised smells, ‘from’ became ‘of’
Rectal mucous	8	Changed
Night cafeterias	2	
And junky	1 or 8	Inserted ‘and’
‘room’	(2) or (*19)	Fragment of ‘rooming’ or ‘bathroom’
Dawn smells	8	
Three hours	4	
From Lexington	7	
Made it five times	10	
Soapy [..] egg flesh	10	Ellipsis[91]
Beginning of P20:		
‘these double papers he claims	6	
of withdrawal’	???	Insert. not surprising to see this in the chapter as everything up till this point has concerned withdrawal. For this reason the fragment may even be received as a repetition.

Notes to table:

1.This cut-up spills on to a new paragraph and is made to look like the first line in an otherwise coherent dialogue.

From paragraph 24 onwards it becomes increasingly difficult to create a coherent or continuous gestalt from the chapter, as more fragmentary scenes of junky life are juxtaposed with seemingly random images which Burroughs makes no attempt to explain. The two aspects of the chapter that keep it bound together from now on are interpretive repetition and metalinguistic cut-up-repetition. Cut-up-repetition binds the diverse images together literally, by re-presenting them together in the same sentence/paragraph but also, as the cut-up-repetitions consist of direct metalinguistic repetition, the repeated items exert cohesive force. Repetition of similar signified content also means that the chapter still coheres in a loose way.[92] For example P24, 25, 26, 29 and 37 and their associated cut-up-repetitions still concern drug addiction but do not obviously link in any direct way with the previous heroin narrative. P26 is another description of sexual intercourse in which the phrase ‘we made it’ is repeated directly from P10 and which also refers to drug use: ‘empty Eukodal boxes.’ Within the interpretive repetition there are also repetitions of semantically related words such as ‘codeine’ (P29) ‘junky’ and ‘H’ (P1 and P7). So although the chapter becomes increasingly difficult to interpret it also provides the reader the somewhat aberrant but nevertheless continuous linking device of repetition.

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[91] For a relevance theory account of ellipsis in experimental literature see Thoms (forthcoming).

Cut-up repetition begins to form the largest bulk of the chapter here onwards:

Table for P36 and 37

Bread knife in the heart	39 [cataphoric]	‘kitchen’ becomes[or is it the other way round since bread is the first instance?] bread
Rub and die	37 [cataphoric]	‘curb’ becomes ‘rub’

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[92] For more on the effects of repetition on cohesion and coherence see Halliday and Hasan (1976).

Repatriated by	31	
A morphine script… those	37 [cataphoric]	(here the full stop non capital actually comes from the source text.)
Out of Casa for Copenhagen	31	
On special yellow [..] note	37 [cataphoric]	Ellipsis
Beginning of P37:		
‘all hands	31	placed inside quotation marks
Broke? Have you no pride?’	30	was capital B in 30
Alarm clock ran for a year	30	

Notes to table:

1.cut-up-repetition signalled by reintroduction of celine-esque ‘…’ style.

2.Almost half the references refer forward from this cut-up. All references are to close-lying paragraphs. This cut-up seems to weld the two sections of the chapter together by being a mixture of both and being in between them (cut-up as filmic linking device).

Table for P38

Yesterday	???	Insert
Call	(7)	
Flutes of Ramadan	24	Interesting in that this phrase doesn’t really sit comfortably in either of its placements (but then

		a lot of phrases are like that in the book)
:‘No me hágas cáso	25	Colon inserted between two cut-up fragments, not found in original

Paragraph 39 contains new material about a stabbing and then gives a near repetition of the end of paragraph 26, this time ‘(Girl screaming. Enter the nabors.)’ Paragraph 40 continues the Spanish/Mexican conversation or speech that is directed at ‘william’, and beginning of P41 contains the last coherent original material in the chapter, the rest of the chapter consists of a final long cut-up-repetition.

Table for P41

Paper like	37	
Dust	26	
We made it	26 or 10	
Empty	26	Last three could also be (from 26) ‘dust [..] and we made it empty’ [more likely]
Walls	26	
Look anywhere	???	Insert
No good No bueno		Recurrent phrase in Burroughs’ work, already used several times in NL

Table for P42

He went to Madrid	39	

Alarm clock ran for	30 and ~37	
Yesterday	38 or ~38	(see above)
No me hágas cáso	25 and ~38	
*dead on arrival	26 or ???	Added ‘arrival’ to ‘dead on’ or insert
You might say at	???	Insert
The jew hospital	41	
Blood spilled over	39	Changed to past tense
The American… trailing	29 or 39	
Lights and water	41	
The sailor went so wrong	35	Inserted ‘so’
Somewhere in	2	
Grey	2 and ~19	
Flesh	2 or 10 and ~19	
He just sit down on	37	
Zero	???	
I nodded on	2	to changed to on
Nino Perdido	37	
His coffee over	2	
Three hours late	4	
They all went away and sent papers	???	Inset
The [dead] man	mix 1 and 4 and ~15	[dead] from 4, the man from 1

Write for you like a major	6	
**enter	39	
**vacinos	26	
Freight boat	31	
Smell of rectal mucous	~19 (8 and 26)	
Went down off England with all	31	***‘Sank’ changed to ‘went down’
Dawn smells	~19	Pluralised
Distant fingers	31	
About this time I	7	
Went to	???	Insert?
Your consol	30	
He gave me a	30	‘an’ changed to ‘a’
Mexican	37	
After his death	30	
Five times	10	
of dust	26	
We made it	26	Also ‘dust we made it’ in ~41. and ‘made it’ + ‘five times’ also echoes 10 and ~19
With soapy bubbles of	mix 10 and ~19	‘Soap’ changed to ‘soapy’. Hints at additional cut-up material. this comes from a mix of 10 and ~19

of withdrawal	~20	
Crossed by a thousand	???	Insert
Junky	1	
Nights	2	Pluralised
Soon after the half maps come in by candlelight	???	Insert, again hinting at further material that may or may not be connected to the current ‘narrative’
Occupy	19	
Junk lines falling	???	Insert, also an important phrase
Stay Off	18	Capitalised off
Bill Gains in	29	
Yellow	11 and/or 37	
Sick[ness]	Numerous places	
Looking at dirty pictures casual as a ceiling fan	???	Insert
Short timing the dawn (we made)	1	
(we made) it	26 and/or 10	
in the corn	???	looks forward to chapter 2
Smell of (rectal mucous)	~19	see next comment
(rectal mucous) and carbolic soap	8	Again, due to repeated recycling of phrases it becomes impossible to decide on a source.

Familiar face maybe from the	2 and ~19	
Vacant lot	???	Insert, but appears numerous times as a phrase in Burroughs’ work
Trailing tubes and wires	17	
‘you fucking-can’t-wait-hungry-junkies’	12	not previously hyphenated
Burial in American cemetery	29	
‘Quédase con su medicína’	40	
On Nino Perdido	37 and *42	
The girl screaming	26 and/or 39	article added
They went away	??? and *42	‘way’ changed to ‘away’
Casbah house	26	

Notes to table:

*’dead on arrival’: ‘dead on could come from P26 and ‘arrival’ could just be an added word. Another possibility is that Burroughs has cut the title of the chapter into the body of the text here.

**‘enter vacinos’: ‘enter’ comes from ‘enter the nabors’, and ‘vecinos’ comes from ‘Vecinos rush in’. Both originals happen after one of the instances of ‘girl screaming’ and mean roughly the same thing (as does the cut-up). Definite evidence of conscious control of the cut-up here.

*** ‘Sank’ changing to ‘went down’ also indicates conscious manipulation of the cut-up.

This final large cut-up is the most complex of all the repetitions in the chapter. As can be seen in the above table, it contains repetitions of material from many of the preceding paragraphs and it is also a second degree cut up of the earlier cut-ups in the chapter. Into this mix Burroughs also introduces entirely new fragments and images and then even repeats these internally to the cut-up. P42, in terms of gestalt forming, forces a reinterpretation of the whole chapter. Many of the fragmentary events already interpreted by the reader are re-presented in a new (though not entirely new) context, and often in an even more fragmentary fashion. Two events that seemed completely separate now seem like the same event, two events that happened successively now happen simultaneously. The final cut-up also has the effect of creating a jumbled and accelerated run through of the preceding chapter, like a summary that confuses rather than clears up what has gone before.[93]

The overloading of repetitive links in the opening – and highly representative – chapter of *The Soft Machine* – allows us to see that the cut-up is not simply a means of escape from the controls of normal language and syntax. The tables provided above have shown just how many relationships of interpretive dependency are set up by the introduction of cut-up-repetitions into 'Dead on Arrival'. Cut-up repetitions, which make up just under a third of the chapter, cannot be interpreted without also considering the 'originals' and in a reciprocal movement, the 'originals' cannot be effectively decoded without recourse to their cut-up-repetitions. Formally, like the word-virus, cut-ups are repetitions and mutations - mutation is apparent on two levels, at the level of reorganisation, the actual cutting-up, and in the slight changes made to words (tenses are altered, 'curb' becomes 'rub' etc.) – and interpretively they are dependent upon their originals, which in turn become dependent on them (the addiction metaphor that is omnipresent in Burroughs' texts). Repetition, mutation, and dependency: the three basic traits of the virus all contained and created by the cut-up.

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[93] See Baldwin's linking of a passage from *Naked Lunch* with films which showed a post film montage of shots during the credits (Baldwin, 2002: 159).

The aesthetic outcomes of Burroughs' viral cut-ups are staggering. The repeated insertion of cut-up repetitions into these already repetitive novels means that almost every part of every chapter contains formal links to multiple other parts of the texts. These formal links imply a semantic relationship, and set us on a seemingly endless inferencing process with little possibility of propositional outcomes. The trail of repetition created by these novels is circular and unlimited. Each recognition of repetitive fragments sending readers to multiple other instances scattered throughout the novels with no possibility of discovering an original or, more importantly, an interpretation. The trail of repetition becomes effectively infinite when we consider that the transparency of Burroughs repetitive strategies means that, like Beckett's *Lessness* and many Oulipo texts, the cut-up novels contain the potential to generate many further repetitions of themselves. When Burroughs shows us second and third degree 'cut-ups of cut-ups' he proves that there is literally no limit to the potential of his repetitive strategies and significantly, any further repetitions will be available without intervention from the author.[94]

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[94] Lydenberg (1987) links the cut up with the writings of Roland Barthes, claiming that the cut-ups 'escape closure' and display 'an energy which "can know no halt", which endlessly defers finality or totality of meaning' and in which 'the cycle is always recharged'. She also highlights the fact that certain cut-ups contain references to images and characters who we never encounter again, further supporting the feeling of unlimited potential for expansion 'outside' the novels (Lydenberg, 1987: 66).

Gerard-Georges Lemaire (1979) describes the unlimited potential set in motion by the cut-up trilogy as follows:

> The Burroughs machine, systematic and repetitive… eventually escapes from the control of its manipulator; it does so in that it makes it possible to lay down a foundation of an unlimited number of books that end by reproducing themselves: “The machine that exploded-the nova ticket-the soft express/the nova machine-the soft ticket-the express that exploded/etc.: we are dealing with a false trilogy, and the three books actually form a whole. Not a single book repeating itself, but rather a book that completes itself in the form of three versions each envisaging a certain number of problems under a different angle. (Lemaire, 1979:17).

As we saw with certain texts of Stein and Beckett, repetition in Burroughs’ cut-up novels creates an experience of the unlimited for readers. Not only is there an unlimited circuit of self referentiality within the published texts, there is also an unlimited number of potential cut-up novels, and each of these, were they to be actualised, would also contain an endless circuit of non-interpretable formal links which would refer to not only internally to the new novel, but to all actualised cut-up novels. The outcome of any attempt to interpret such texts must inevitably lead to the defective propositional attitude discussed in the previous chapters as readers are forced into an endless inferencing process related to a potentially unlimited circuit of repetition.

5. Event, story, narrative

In Burroughs' repetitive mini narratives and scenes, the relationship of story to narrative is 1S/1N. There is resemblance between the components of the story and resemblance between the components of the narrative but each narrative statement is new and each story event is new. The idea of progression may not be strong in the trilogy due to the almost constant experience of *déjà-vu* that results from the high degree of resemblance between events and extreme continuity of content, but undoubtedly a lot of events, many of them spectacular, happen in these novels. Burroughs does not dwell on one event for long, events are not analysed, nor does he revisit events to interpret or draw comparisons. There is a constant movement in the content of the novels, characters are always involved in travelling, sex, combat, and so on, and the flat narration races through each set of events without any respite or reflection.

Although in many ways these novels are the opposite of Stein's practice in *The Making of Americans* with its lack of events and its torturous repetition of a very few psychological observations, Stein and Burroughs' very different methods of composition have both been compared to film's creation of moving pictures. Baldwin defines Burroughs' aesthetic as:

> primarily one of image in flux, motion created in effect from scattered verbal images, what he terms "pinpoint photos of arrested motion." His intent is to create the literary equivalent of being able to see an entire painting, or photographed tableau, at once. These individual "photographed" images are then in effect sped across the reader's imagined eye in a recreation, as it were, of the film's origins in "persistence of vision" or "phi effect" – the physical and

> psychological phenomenon whereby the movement of, for instance, twenty four photographic stills per second creates “moving pictures” in the viewer’s eye. Burroughs prose forces the viewer-reader to create the sense of a moving picture from the rapidly presented still images. (Baldwin, 2002:160)

There seems to be some confusion in Baldwin’s argument here. He claims that the intent is to create the effect of a painting where the reader can see everything at once, the (simultaneous experience of many images), then suggests that the images force the reader to create a kind of moving picture effect because they are presented so rapidly (the successive experience of many images). However, this confusion may arise as a result of the difficulty regarding simultaneity and successivity that is always present in repetitive texts. As we saw earlier, this co-presence of the seemingly contradictory notions of simultaneity and successivity is also present in the interpretation of Stein’s ‘cinematic technique’ texts.

Burroughs’ practice of presenting many fragmentary images in quick succession is seen to create the same moving picture effect that Stein is aiming for in her repetition with minute variation. The difference is that Stein’s repetition mimics the highly repetitive form of the *film itself*, without recreating any of the experience of viewing the film (readers cannot read that fast). Stein’s repetition, in its actual outcome, is far removed from the experience of the moving image (except perhaps in experimental cinema). Firstly, there are very few represented images or events in her abstract prose. She repeats units of language that are just barely representational. When events are described, movement and progression is lost because the events are described so many times. Burroughs on the other hand, creates the cinematic experience of movement simply through juxtaposition, and without attempting to make his work resemble the physical medium of film.

All this proliferation of movement, images and events in Burroughs' texts creates little in the way of narrative progression however. Burroughs' employment of formulaic and repetitive scenes and motifs means that, although they contain a high occurrence of dramatic events, his novels never really move forward. In any case, most of these highly dramatic mini-narratives are halted by the appearance of cut-up repetitions which recycle their components before closure can be reached. Just as the macro structure of the trilogy recycles repetitive events, the cut-up repetition means that on a micro-level many of the story events, are re-presented and recycled, both in full and in fragments, so many times and in so many different contexts that the texts create a feeling of simultaneity, suggesting that all the events are always happening, or at the very least always have the potential to happen (not just in one book but across all the cut-up novels).

We have seen that clause order generally exists in an iconic relationship with event order and that repetition can alter this relationship, at least in cases where we assume that multiple statements are referring to the same event. The cut-up repetition further strains the relationship between event and clause order by placing events (or fragments of their descriptions) in several different places in a text (positions in the narrative). Further, the nature of the syntax in a cut-up-repetition also confuses tenses or places incompatible tenses side by side.

There are short periods of sequentiality in the cut-up novels during the many mini-narratives, but when these textual units re-appear or pre-appear within cut-up-repetitions the original sequence is lost as the spliced fragments are recombined in new orders. And when cut-ups are spliced with other sections of text we get a second degree cut up in which events that have already been merged with other events are recombined with yet more events. The cut up repetition is the most radical way in which to manipulate the relationship between narrative and story.

Murphy (1994) links this feature of the trilogy to a Deleuzian model of fiction, and quoting Borges' 'Garden of Forking Paths' he describes Burroughs' practice as one which 'demands a subject who does not exclude alternatives but rather "chooses – simultaneously – all of them. He thus *creates* various futures, various times which start others that will in their turn branch out and bifurcate in other times"' (Murphy, 1997:44). Similarly, Lydenberg argues that

> Burroughs extends the Proustian moment of involuntary memory… to the future as well. In the cut-up or fold-in narrative, reading is non-linear, every reading already a rereading in which the whole exists simultaneously, sensed almost subliminally by the reader in vague feelings of familiarity, dislocation, premonition. Burroughs' experiments with narrative deny the reader all continuity, even that of a narrative persona, and the temporal dislocations of his style cannot be framed or explained by an omniscient narrator or by the scope of any single character's subjective perception. (Lydenberg, 1987:48)

Overall, the story order of events comes to mean very little in the cut-up novels. These texts are so repetitive, and so uninterested in presenting any sort of overall sequence or narrative arc that they support a non-linear reading process in which it makes little difference which order the chapters, or even the books are read. Like Beckett's *Lessness,* Burroughs' texts work against sequence at both a micro and macro level. The cut up repeats and disperses individual events making them exist in several different places in the novel, it also merges events that were once successive. On a wider scale, the fact that most of the scenes and narratives in the novels echo each other, and that that there is no indication of any overall sequence to the wider events, means that the novels are radically non-linear. The origins of these narratives is untraceable, and there also appears to be no end, and certainly no closure to the story. Like the word-virus and, as we shall see in the next section, like Plato's 'writing' these narratives have the potential to proliferate endlessly through repetition.

6. Plato, Derrida and the *Pharmakon*

Burroughs' call to 'rub out the Word' in the cut-up trilogy holds many similarities to Plato's derogation of writing in the *Phaedrus* and the fact that Burroughs alludes to Plato's *Republic* in *The Soft Machine* suggests that similarities between the two authors' views on language should be taken seriously. The scene from *The Soft Machine* involving the shadows of three boys having sex in a cave (when considered alongside the general investigation of the nature of representation in the cut-up novels) seems to allude to the famous analogy from *The Republic*, describing men held captive in a cave and able to see nothing but shadows on the cave wall. This analogy is employed by Plato to illustrate his schema of representation. In this schema

Burroughs's characters would be representations of the lowest level; poetic/linguistic imitations of appearances which are in turn representations of ideal forms. Burroughs takes this series of representations one stage further by depicting the shadows of the boys on the cave wall. (Although a shadow would not generally be considered a form of representation, it can be understood as symbolising a further level of representation because Plato's original uses shadows in this way to symbolise the process of representation). This makes Burroughs shadows representations of representations of representations of ideal forms.

This structure of representation appears in a scene which is also a repetition of all of the previous sex scenes in the novel and - to some extent – in Burroughs' entire canon, before and after *The Soft Machine*. This scene involves interpretive repetition of the previous and forthcoming sex scenes in the book. As we have seen, in almost all its occurrences in Burroughs' texts, repetition which holds interpretive resemblance also holds metalinguistic resemblance, in this particular case the repeated motif (which occurs in a large percentage of the sex scenes throughout the Burroughs' oeuvre) of 'the boys cock flipped up and out' is only one of several examples. There are also various other descriptions of shadows across the trilogy. We also saw earlier how Burroughs' sex scenes can be considered as echoic/parodic representations that may or may not have original sources.

The status of the representations in this scene then, is a very complex one. But so too is the status of the representations in Plato's text. In *The Republic*, Plato the author creates a set of (fictional) representations of his (historical) associates, among them Socrates. The fictional Socrates, in order to illustrate his ideas about the nature of reality and appearance, creates a linguistic representation of fictional men who are held captive in a cave. What these men see in the cave are shadows of statues of things that exist outside the cave. So the shadows depicted in *The Republic* are representations of representations which exist within a fictional representation created by a fictional representation of a historical character. The scene from *The Soft Machine* represents and repeats this highly embedded representation. The representations in Burroughs' scene are then many stages removed from ideal forms. The *Republic* presents four stages of representation: shadows of statues of things, statues of things, shadows of the things represented in the statutes, the things themselves (Plato, 1990a). Pappas (2003) points out that these correspond to the four stages of objects of cognition in Plato's theory of forms (from bottom to top: visible shadows and reflections - visible plants, animals, artefacts - intelligible mathematical objects - intelligible forms). The lowest level corresponds to image making and art. Burroughs' novels belong to this lowest level but they contain representations of shadows of representations of men who are involved in scenes which are themselves echoic representations and repetitions of previous scenes within the fiction.

At first Burroughs' text's echoic relationship to Plato appears to be a playful or ironic one. Burroughs seems to delight in testing just how far down the chain of representation it is possible for his work to fall. Plato's comment that the imitative poet is 'always at an infinite remove from the truth' is certainly being played out in Burroughs' massively embedded representations. But, just as his echoic allusions to outside sources such as pornography are not quite as stable and detached as we may first assume, Burroughs relationship to Plato is a complex and at times complementary one, with the two authors actually holding similar views on language and representation, and Burroughs' statements regarding his 'war on the word' echoing some of Plato's key concerns. In an interview given in 1966 (just after the publication of the cut-up novels) Burroughs discusses why he sees silence as 'the *most* desirable state.' He argues that words stand in the way of 'nonbody experience'. In order to 'leave the body behind,' he suggests that people desist from thinking in language and instead begin thinking in images (Burroughs and Gysin, 1979:2). As Hassan suggests, 'ideally [Burroughs'] aim is to make man bodiless and language silent' (Hassan, 1991:65).[95] Burroughs' wish to experience images directly without the mediation of language recalls Plato's theory of forms in which linguistic representations are debased copies of copies of mental images (intelligible forms), and Burroughs ultimate reason for rejecting the word also echoes Socrates' (Plato's) low opinion of corporeal existence in the *Crito* (Plato, 1990b). However, both authors' views on language and writing are far from straightforward. By turning to Derrida's deconstructive account of the *Phaedrus* we can uncover more important analogies which will eventually lead us to a fuller understanding of Burroughs' repetition and its relation to the word-virus.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato (through Socrates) attacks the Sophists for replacing living memory and true knowledge with mnemonic devices which are 'passive' and 'mechanical', most important among them writing, which is figured as *pharmakon* (both 'poison' and 'remedy'). Derrida shows that for Socrates, the difference between living memory and passive devices like writing is between 'memory as an unveiling (re)producing a presence' and 're-memoration as the mere repetition of a monument'. Living memory is seen by Socrates as *truth* and *being*, whereas mechanical re-memoration is the *sign* of truth and the *type* of being. The danger of writing as a supplement for active living memory lies in this very issue. As Derrida shows, 'its slidings slip it out of the simple alternative presence absence... this is what enables the type always to pass for the original':

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[95] For more on Burroughs against the body see Lydenberg (1987) and Nelson (1991) .

> As soon as the supplementary outside is opened, its structure implies that the supplement itself can be "typed", replacing its double, and that a supplement of the supplement, a surrogate for the surrogate, is possible and necessary. Necessary because this movement is not a sensible, "empirical" accident: it is linked to the ideality of the *eidos* as the possibility of repetition of the same. (Derrida, 2004:109)

Graphic signifiers are one stage further removed from presence than the phonetic signifiers which they represent or replace. Hence a graphic signifier is no longer animate and 'falls outside of life, entrains life out of itself and puts it to sleep in the type of its double'. Thus writing, the *pharmakon*, is both 'external to (internal) memory' and 'yet it still affects memory and hypnotises it in its very inside'. Writing for Plato is at the same time exterior to living memory and yet has the power of 'maleficent penetration, its liability to affect or *infect* what lies deepest inside' (Derrida, 2004:112-3, my emphasis). Plato's description of 'writing' then, is very close to Burroughs' conception of the word-virus, but as we shall see it also closely resembles Burroughs' texts themselves.

Derrida goes on to show that living memory (*mneme*) and re-memoration, the supplement of memory (*hypomnesis*) both entail a type of *repetition*:

> live memory repeats the presence of the *eidos*, and truth is also the possibility of repetition through recall. Truth unveils the *eidos*... that which can be imitated, reproduced, repeated in its identity. But in the amnesiac movement of truth, what is repeated must present itself as such, as what it is, in repetition. The true is repeated, that is what is repeated in the repetition, what is represented and present in the representation. (Derrida, 2004:113)

In contrast, with regards *hypomnesia*

> What is repeated is the repeater, the imitator, the signifier, the representative, in the absence, as it happens, of *the thing itself*... Writing would indeed be the signifier's capacity to repeat itself by itself, mechanically, without a living soul to sustain or attend it in its repetition, that is to say without truth's *presenting itself* anywhere. (Derrida, 2004:114)

Burroughs' texts, and especially the cut-up repetition, are analogous in many ways to this hypomnesiac writing: capable of infinite repetition, open to infinite substitution of signifiers, capable of operating in the absence of the truth/father/author, and so on. These features of Burroughs' writing have been noted by critics before. Tanner argues that even Burroughs' non-cut-up texts are potentially infinitely repetitive: 'Burroughs has now created a vocabulary – diagnostic and therapeutic – which can engender a theoretically indefinite number of episodes or versions of conflict and victory' (Tanner 1991:112). Lydenberg (1987) suggests that 'what struck both Gysin and Burroughs about the cut up method was the possibility of using this technique to make the writer's medium tangible – to make the word an object detached from its context, its author, its signifying function' (Lydenberg 1987:44). Similarly in linking Burroughs' aleatory techniques with those of John Cage, Zurbrugg (1994) highlights the way in which both artists 'employ chance composition to diminish their own presence in the text' (Zurbrugg, 1994:41).

We can imagine how horrified Socrates would be with Burroughs' description of 'a writing machine that shifts one half one text and half the other through a page frame on conveyor belts... Shakespeare, Rimbaud, etc. permutating through page frames in constantly changing juxtaposition the machine spits out books and plays and poems' (Burroughs, 2001c:51). Not only is the cut-up-repetition passive and mechanical, it seems to be the furthest most dangerous extreme of sophistic writing. (It would not be too great an imaginative leap to rename *The Soft Machine* the *Sophist Machine*.) In the cut-up repetition we see the dangers of the supplement gone out of control. Writing in these novels (through the implementation of *mechanical* devices of repetition) does in fact become the signifier's capacity to 'repeat itself by itself' without even the need of the authorial presence (father/truth) at all. As Brion Gysin (1979) suggests, 'permutated poems set the words spinning off on their own' (Gysin, 2001:132).[96]

Not only do Burroughs' texts represent the most dangerous extreme of Sophistic writing, they are also perfect versions of their own their targets. Just as his echoic repetitions undermine the relationship between original and parody, Burroughs' repetitive, parasitic mutations are enactments of the word-virus. This paradoxical relationship between Burroughs and his target brings him even closer to Plato in the *Phaedrus*. As with Burroughs and the virus, Plato's diatribe against sophistic writing is also sophistic in nature. Derrida comments that Plato's text 'seems to proceed from the sophists' with Plato appropriating sophistic arguments and 'turn[ing] their own weapons against them'. Further, Derrida shows that 'Socrates' whole discourse… is woven out of schemes and concepts that issue from sophistics' and that the Socratic *pharmakon* is 'ceaselessly referred' to the sophistic *pharmakon* until the two cannot be distinguished (Derrida, 1994:111-119).[97]

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[96] Interestingly though, and somewhat counter to our general argument here, Gysin also highlights the way that Burroughs the author never completely recedes from his cut-up repetition, no matter how permutated, claiming that 'one sniff of that prose and you'd say, 'why that's a Burroughs' ' (Gysin and Wilson, 1982:191).

Most importantly however, Derrida shows that Plato's attempt to promote dialectics over sophistic writing is undermined by the fact that he cannot 'explain what dialectics is without recourse to writing' (Derrida, 2004:115). In the end, Socrates must envision true dialectical knowledge as '*another sort of writing*: not merely as a knowing, living, animate discourse, but as an *inscription* of truth in the soul… Yet this borrowing is rendered necessary by that which structurally links the intelligible to its repetition in the copy, and the language describing dialectics cannot fail to call upon it' (Derrida, 2004:149).[98]

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[97] For Plato the sophist is akin to the simulacra, he is the simulator of true knowledge, but, as both Derrida and Deleuze show, the nature of the simulacra eventually overturns the distinction between model and copy making it impossible tell them apart. Socrates then becomes indistinguishable from the sophist. Deleuze: 'simulacra provide the means of challenging *both* the notion of the copy *and* that of the model? The model collapses into difference, while the copies disperse into the dissimilitude of the series which they interiorise, such that one can never really say that one is a copy and the other is a model. Such is the ending of the *Sophist*, where we glimpse the possibility of triumph of the simulacra. For Socrates distinguishes himself from the Sophist, but the Sophist does not distinguish himself from Socrates, placing the legitimacy of such a distinction in question' (Deleuze, 2004a:156)
We have seen that Burroughs' stock scenes are formal simulacra, they create the illusion of resemblance to some prior model but in the end they only bear relation to each other, so too the endless circuit of self-reference that we find in the cut-ups which are never related to anything but themselves. Appropriate here is Baudrillard's notion of the 'gigantic simulacrum - not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.' (Baudrillard, 1994:6)

Similarly, Burroughs' texts, his weapons in the war against the word-virus, have admitted that virus as their model, not simply using the target's weapons against the target, but actually becoming the target. However, just as Plato's *pharmakon* has a double meaning, at once poison and remedy, so too Burroughs' texts are at once virus and cure. Their enactment of the virus is not simply an exposure to the virus/*pharmakon* it is also, as in Dianetics where the signifier is repeated until the engram is exposed and eradicated, the cure, the other side of the *pharmakon*. Writing/*pharmakon*, dianetic triggers, and Burroughs' texts - all eradicate what they resemble by repeating it.

7. Conclusion

We have seen that all aspects of Burroughs' cut-up novels are extremely repetitive, and that aside from Stein's *Making of Americans* no other text comes close to including so many resemblance relationships between its parts. Having said that, this chapter has shown that Burroughs' repetition is of a very different nature to that of Stein (and to a lesser extent Beckett), representing an abundance of content, events and action, and involving some very different formal strategies.

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[98] Derrida's reading of the *Phaedrus* is too intricate and sophisticated for any summary to fully capture, and it is recommended that interested readers follow the argument in full in the original text.

We saw in section 2 that Burroughs’ repetition also differs from that of Stein and Beckett because it is employed in the service of an over-riding strategy: combating the word-virus. In keeping with the general metarepresentational character of Burroughs’ repetition, the cut-up novels seek to eradicate the word-virus by exposing and enacting it. In other words, the very thing that Burroughs so fervently desires to eradicate is also the model for his most challenging novels. To some extent his texts are repetitive, parasitic mutations because they metarepresent an entity with these attributes. Section 2 also contextualised this strategy in terms of General Semantics and, more importantly, the repetition of engrams in Dianetic therapy. However, it was suggested that caution must be exercised in any attempt to ‘explain’ radical formal practices through such contextualisation.

In section 3 we saw that a major source of repetition in the cut-up novels is the widespread use of stock narratives and stock scenes and motifs relating to sex, drugs and violence. Burroughs deliberately creates the impression that his narratives are constructed formulaically, even to the extent of creating fake cut-up passages, and the formulaic nature of the narratives suggests that they are echoic parodic repetitions of other textual sources such as pornography and pulp crime fiction. Burroughs’ widespread use of echoic repetition and metarepresentation sets his work apart from that of Beckett and Stein (who tend only to employ isolated instances of echoic and metarepresentational language). Stein’s work, for example, purposefully avoids representation; Burroughs texts on the other hand, often contain multiple embedded layers of representation. We saw that the unsettling aspect of Burroughs’ echoic repetitions is that while the meta-nature of his representations is clearly detectable, there is no way of fixing a definitive authorial attitude towards the original source representation. His texts have an ambivalent relationship to their pornographic and pulp sources, but it was suggested that the enactment of the pleasures of such source texts may be part of Burroughs' overall strategy to enact the word-virus.

Section 4 introduced another new formal repetitive strategy, the cut-up repetition. Burroughs' cut-up and fold-in devices were seen to present a much more radical departure from standard compositional practice than Beckett's ostensibly similar aleatory method in *Lessness*. Burroughs relinquishes authorial control to a much greater degree, and the purely mechanical nature of the cut-up means that no level of his discourse is protected from reordering with Burroughs deliberately setting out to destroy the original syntax of the source literature, physically cutting into the text and reassembling the fragments as he sees fit.

We also saw in this section that, as with repetition in the work of Stein and Beckett, the cut-up allows Burroughs to generate sublime experience through the creation of a defective propositional attitude. The widespread use of the cut-up repetition creates masses of *formal* links between all parts of the novels, generating a superabundance of potential *interpretive* links. Each resemblance and each repetitive link between different parts of the novels was seen to instigate further inferencing but rarely with any propositional results. Regardless of whether propositional outcomes are possible, repetition forces us to interpret and make inferences, and we saw that it is the existence of such a huge number of potential interpretive links that is far more important than any single interpretation that readers may be able to generate, if indeed they *can* generate any. The transparency of Burroughs compositional strategies cannot block the massive inferencing process generated by the seemingly endless self referentiality and interpretive interdependency of the formal links they create, and the related and impossible attempt to comprehend every repetition in one intuition. Even more than with Stein and Beckett, we saw that in reading Burroughs, our interpretive abilities are tested beyond their limitations. The only possible outcome for this overloading of interpretive possibilities is the sublime defective propositional attitude discussed in the preceding chapters. Burroughs' readers must escape from this impossible interpretive situation by cancelling the mass of potential interpretive links and embedding their newly formed blank representation within an intense propositional attitude, thereby generating a sublime epistemic illusion.

Finally in section 4 we saw that Burroughs' cut up method also suggests an unlimited number of potential further cut-up novels. When Burroughs shows us second and third degree 'cut-ups of cut-ups' he proves that there is literally no limit to the potential of his repetitive strategies and significantly, that any further repetitions will be available without intervention from the author. Each further cut-up novel if it were actualised, would also contain an endless circuit of non-interpretable formal links which would refer to not only internally to the new novel, but to all actualised cut-up novels. The outcome of any attempt to interpret such texts must inevitably lead to the creation of a defective propositional attitude as readers are forced into an endless inferencing process related to a potentially unlimited circuit of repetition.

Again in Burroughs' texts we have seen repetition problematising the relationship between narrative and story (in order and duration). Stein made the temporal relationship between clauses completely ambiguous, and Beckett in *Lessness* employed a set of formal practices to completely eradicate the representation of story duration. Section 5 discussed the highly problematic nature of the relationship between narrative and story in Burroughs' cut-up novels. Burroughs' employment of formulaic and repetitive scenes and motifs means that, although they contain a high occurrence of dramatic events, his novels never really move forward. In any case, most of these highly dramatic mini-narratives are halted by the appearance of cut-up repetitions which recycle their components before closure can be reached. We also saw that Burroughs creates radical temporal confusion inside the cut-ups: story events that were presented successively, and subsequently repeated in other mini-narratives, merge and become simultaneous in the cut-up, and are then recycled into other second-degree cut-ups, leaving the temporality of the novels in utter confusion. (The distinctive manipulations of narrative and story time that each of our three authors produces will be systematised in chapter 7.)

Section 6 returned to Burroughs' overall strategy of enacting the word-virus, drawing comparisons with Plato's problematic attack on writing in the *Phaedrus*. Plato's description of 'writing' was seen to be very close to Burroughs' conception of the word-virus, but we saw that it also closely resembles Burroughs' texts themselves. The comparison with Plato showed us that that not only do Burroughs' texts represent the most dangerous extreme of Sophistic writing, they are also perfect versions of their own their targets. Just as his echoic repetitions undermine the relationship between original and parody, Burroughs' repetitive, parasitic mutations are enactments of the word virus. As with Socrates' argument in the *Phaedrus*, Burroughs' texts, his weapons in the war against the word-virus, have admitted their target as their model; they do not simply using the target's weapons against the target, they actually become the target. However, just as Plato's *pharmakon* has a double meaning, at once poison and remedy, we saw that Burroughs' texts are also at once virus and cure. Their enactment of the virus is not simply an exposure to the virus/*pharmakon* it is also, as in Dianetics where the signifier is repeated until the engram is exposed and eradicated, the cure, the other side of the *pharmakon*.

The analysis in this chapter has shown that none of Burroughs' various repetitive strategies will function as limit cases in our typology of repetitive practice. While Burroughs' cut-up repetition is highly metlinguistically repetitive, drawing the majority of its contents from other parts of his novels, the fact that the cut-ups are repetitions and amalgamations of *multiple* source texts, and the extremity of the reordering that the source material undergoes means that they fail to maximise metalinguistic repetition. In terms of interpretive repetition, the many newly created meanings generated by the cut-ups are experienced simultaneously with fragments of previously encountered semantic content, meaning that they approach but do not reach the limit of minimum interpretive repetition. Burroughs' other main repetitive practice, the repetition of stock scenes and motifs, is less exactly metalinguistically repetitive and also tends to generate less new meanings than the radical re-orderings of the cut-up, and hence it will be situated closer to the mid-point of the chart in chapter 6.

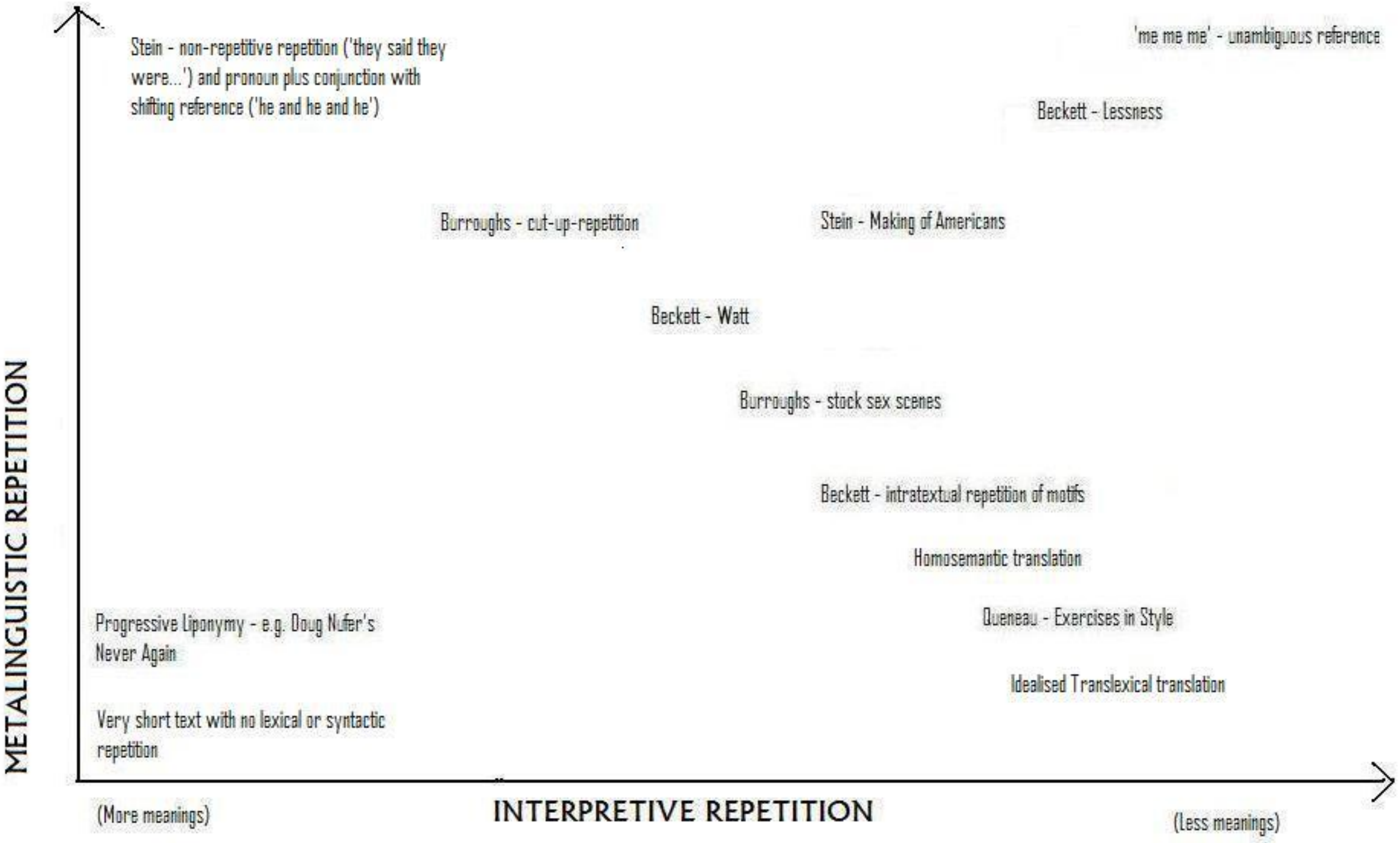
As in our analysis of Beckett, there has been less need to rely on purely pragmatic readings of Burroughs' texts in this chapter than there was with Stein's work, and the reason for this should be beginning to emerge. Beckett and Burroughs' work, radical as it may be, is still distinctly literary, and as such can be much more readily approached using the tools of literary and stylistic analysis. Stein's texts seem fundamentally to be pragmatic games (or meaning games). If we do not view Stein’s texts through a pragmatic apparatus then they cease to be obviously valuable as communicative strategies. Beckett and Burroughs, on the other hand, are still interested in dealing with specific content throughout their novels, in this sense, although they are her successors, their work is much more traditional than Stein’s.

That being said, this chapter has still relied on a pragmatics to analyse Burroughs’ use of echoic language and, most importantly, to show that his texts are constructed in such a way that they make the experience of a sublime defective propositional attitude inevitable. They achieve this effect within texts that are much more immediately appealing than those of Stein and Beckett. Depending on how relaxing or disturbing the reader finds the content of Burroughs’ grotesque science fiction and pulp mini-narratives to be, there is much relief to be had in Burroughs texts, and this relief, as we have seen, is deliberately created by Burroughs in order to potentiate the effects of both the cut-up and the straight narrative. Again we have seen that repetitive texts exploit the effort/reward economy of relevance in the creation of deliberate contrast between effort consuming sections and rewarding sections.

Regardless of the differences this chapter has emphasised between the texts of our chosen authors, we have seen again that the most important aesthetic effects of excessive repetition are all achieved by the same method: a massive (affective) inferencing process that is unrelated to specific propositional outcomes. The most important single discovery made in this chapter is that Burroughs’ texts, perhaps more than those of the other two authors, confront us with the limits of our interpretive abilities, but we have seen that they do this in a way that is analogous in its basic structure to that of Stein and Beckett.

CHAPTER 6. TYPOLOGY OF REPETITIVE PRACTICE

The chart on the following page shows a variety of texts – most of which have been discussed in previous chapters, some of which have been introduced and some imagined for the purpose of this typology – spatially arranged according to the degree of metalinguistic and interpretive repetition they contain.


Stein - non-repetitive repetition ('they said they were...') and pronoun plus conjunction with shifting reference ('he and he and he')
'me me me' - unambiguous reference
Beckett - Lessness
Burroughs - cut-up-repetition
Stein - Making of Americans
Beckett - Watt
Burroughs - stock sex scenes
Beckett - intratextual repetition of motifs
Homosemantic translation
Progressive Liponymy - e.g. Doug Nufer's Never Again
Queneau - Exercises in Style
Idealised Translexical translation
Very short text with no lexical or syntactic repetition
METALINGUISTIC REPETITION
(More meanings)
INTERPRETIVE REPETITION
(Less meanings)

At the four corners of the typology we find the following actualised texts:

1. The text which reaches a maximum of both metalinguistic and interpretive resemblance is an invented one which contains the repeated pronoun ‘me’. A more involved version could read: ‘I am me. I am me. I am me..’ or any number of such repetitions. The pronoun me will always refer to the same person providing the speaker remains constant throughout the text. This results in complete repetition of the meaning of each statement. Of course it may be the case that complete interpretive repetition is impossible because the context in which a repetition is read includes the previous instance/s of the linguistic unit. However, for the purpose of this typology this distinction will be best left aside.

   Of the actual literary texts analysed in this thesis *Lessness* comes closest to this limit case. That it does not stand as a limit case is due to the fact that its repeated sentences are reordered. A version of *Lessness* which repeated its sentences in exactly the same order should be considered more metalinguistically repetitive than the published work. (It should be noted however, that an exactly repetitive *Lessness* was a possibility of its compositional method.) The re-ordering of the sentences also leads to a less than maximum level of interpretive repetition. Different juxtapositions of sentences in the second half create different meanings on a micro level, even though the overall meaning of the two halves is remarkably similar. That the overall meaning of the second set of sentences is not significantly altered by re-ordering is in part due to the fact that Beckett composed the sentences so that they could support any permutation. We must also consider the fact that one highly significant new meaning emerges from the repetition of its sixty sentences, namely, the realisation for readers that time cannot pass in the story world.

2. The text that contains a maximum of metalinguistic repetition but no interpretive repetition would be Stein's passage 'he and he and he and he…' This text creates a linguistic context in which co-reference cannot occur, repeated pronouns with conjunction must have different referents (unless we read the passage in the continuous present, or as a representation of stuttering). Other of Stein's passages such as 'they said they were they said they were…', go beyond this in generating many more meanings than there are clauses. However, another interpretation of these texts could also place them at the extreme right hand side of the diagram. For example, readers of 'a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose' may perceive an extended tautology in the repetition rather than the creation of further propositional content. In this case the text would approach the maximum in metalinguistic *and* interpretive repetition.
3. The practice of creating texts with maximum interpretive repetition and minimum metalinguistic repetition is called translexical translation. Defined in the Oulipo compendium as 'a form of homosemantic translation that preserves the sense and structure of a source text but substitutes a vocabulary drawn from a radically different semantic field' (Matthews and Brotchie 1998:236). This type of text, once actualised, will never be quite as far to the right of the chart as a completely metalinguistically repetitive text, because the change in vocabulary must necessarily lead - at the very least – to small alterations in

meaning produced from repetition to repetition. It is doubtful whether a perfect translexical translation (one which exactly replicates the meaning of the original but which differs from it completely in a metalinguistic sense) could be created. This accounts for the slight curve in the chart as the texts approach the maximum of interpretive repetition coupled with a minimum of metalinguistic repetition. Another Oulipo work, Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style*, is the most successful prolonged literary exploration of this variety of repetition. The book is based on homosemantic translation and translexical translation. In it Queneau retells a banal story ninety nine times, each repetition is stylistically unique but still conveys (almost) the same propositional content. *Exercises in Style* obviously also contains instances of direct linguistic repetition, especially in the versions of the story that are created through permutation of the original vocabulary.

4. Another Oulipo-related practice comes close to providing the limit case of non-repetition. In 'progressive liponomy', any word, once used, cannot be repeated. The most extended example of progressive liponomy is Doug Nufer's *Never Again*, which runs to two hundred typewritten pages without a single lexical repetition (Matthews and Brotchie, 1998:179). This practice obviously creates a text which is completely non-repetitive in terms of vocabulary. However, a text composed using progressive liponomy necessarily becomes repetitive in its combinatorial practices, because the amount of 'grammatical' words available to the writer decreases as the length of the text increases. For this reason progressive liponomy is not the limit case of non-repetition. The limit case, it seems would need to be an extremely short text which does not repeat lexically or syntactically. However, such a text

would probably be ruled out for the reason that, being so short, it would barely allow for the possibility of repetition.

Possible and Impossible texts

Now that the typology is populated with real texts it is possible to see which limit cases of repetition (or non-repetition) are achievable and which are not. It seems that such a thing as a completely non-repetitive text which lasts longer than a few sentences is inconceivable.[99] It also seems highly unlikely that any text could achieve a maximum of interpretive repetition while maintaining a minimum of metalinguistic repetition. The lexical difference required to keep metalinguistic resemblance low will inevitably lead to the production of different micro-level meanings in a repetition.

At the other end of the scale, when metalinguistic repetition is involved then both maximums can be reached, whether the texts that reach these maximums can be regarded as literature is another question. However, such highly regarded works as Beckett's *Lessness* and Stein's 'a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose' approach the extremes of repetition.

As discussed in chapter 1, this typology does not account for the quantity of repetition (whether actualised or potential) that a text contains, or whether that repetition exists at the level of narrative or of story. The following chapters will examine the outcomes of these aspects repetitive textual practice in more detail.

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[99] Even if it were conceivable then the experience of reading such a text could paradoxically be a repetitive one as we face the endlessly repeated experience of the new.

CHAPTER 7. NARRATIVE AND STORY DURATION

In the course of our analysis of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs we have seen that repetition frequently problematises the representation of time within texts. This chapter will draw together and expand upon prior discussion relating to repetition and time, seeking to outline a general argument about the ways in which repetition can interact with story duration (the represented time of the fictional world) and narrative duration (what Genette calls the ‘pseudo-time of reading’) (Genette, 1980:34). In effect this chapter investigates the ways in which Genette’s category of ‘narrative frequency’ interacts with his category of ‘duration’. More specifically this chapter will seek to form a typology of the relations between narrative repetition and narrative and story duration, illustrated with actual and imagined texts; examine the actual texts in terms of optimal balance of practices; discuss some special cases of interaction between narrative and story durations; and investigate the ways in which the reader is able to experience the various typological possibilities.

Story duration is the amount of fictional time that is represented as elapsing in the course of a text. In most traditional narratives and in many more progressive ones, this duration is relatively easy to calculate. For example, with reference to certain dates mentioned in the text, we can infer that the story of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* occurs within a seven year time frame approximately, and however radical Joyce’s stylistic experiments in *Ulysses* may be, however difficult it may be to trace the chronology of certain of its sections, every reader knows that the novel as a whole represents the events of a single day (Hawthorne, 1994) (Joyce, 2000). However, Richardson (2002) identifies several post-modern narrative structures which cannot be contained within Genette’s framework, such as those which represent circular, backwards, or contradictory story durations, and we shall see that the formal experimentation of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs creates other difficulties over the interpretation of story duration.

Strictly speaking, narrative duration is a spatial measurement and not a ‘duration’ at all. As there is no means of objectively measuring the speed with which a written narrative will be consumed, Genette decides to measure what he calls the ‘pseudo time’ of narrative duration by ‘number of pages per duration of event’ (Genette, 1980:34, 2002:28-9). Richardson suggests that for a more precise measurement of narrative duration word-count is preferable to page-count (Richardson, 2002:54). Whenever necessary I will provide rough calculations of both word and page counts.

We can now turn our attention to the four types of frequency relationship between narrative and story outlined by Genette:

(1) Narrating once what happened once. 1N/1S. E.g. ‘yesterday I went to bed early’. *Singulative* in Genette’s terminology.

(2) Narrating n times what happened n times. nN/nS. E.g. ‘Monday I went to bed early, Tuesday I went to bed early’. Genette argues that since the repetitions of the narrative correspond in an iconic relationship to the repetitions in the story this is just another case of *Singulative*. However, we have already encountered examples of narrative repetition which problematise this iconic relationship.

(3) Narrating n times what happened once. nN/1S. E.g. yesterday I went to bed early, yesterday I went to bed early...’ other examples given by Genette are

recurrent scenes, as in the work of Alan Robbe-Grillet, or narration from different point of view of the same events e.g. an epistolary novel or Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. *Repeating* in Genette's terminology.

(4) Narrating one time (or at one time) what happened n times. 1N/nS. E.g. every day I went to bed early. *Iterative* in Genette's terminology.

Genette also speculates about the possibility of the further relationship nN/mS, where what happens a number of times is related a different number of times. He indicates that there may be no actualised examples of this type. We have seen that Stein's underdetermined repetitive texts can be interpreted as holding such a relationship, although they can just as easily be interpreted as straightforward cases of type (2) or of type (3) (Genette, 1980:114-6).

Strictly speaking only types (2) and (3) will interest us in this chapter as types (1) and (4) do not actually involve any repetition in language. Our fundamental categories of interpretive and metalinguistic repetition both depend on the existence of narrative repetition and although story repetition and interpretive repetition are very often found together, we must avoid equating the two. In the statements 'John went to the cinema on Monday' and 'the man travelled to the pictures on Tuesday' we have a co-occurrence of story and interpretive repetition: two story events resemble each other and two narrative units resemble each other semantically. In the statements 'John went to the cinema on Monday' and 'The man travelled to the pictures on Monday' there is interpretive repetition but no parallel story repetition because the *same* event is being narrated by two linguistic units which resemble each other interpretively. A much more elaborate and extended version of this type of repetition can be found in

Raymond Queneau's (1981) *Exercises in Style*, which contains one series of events in the story world, but narrates this series of events in 99 different styles. Each of Queneau's exercises involves narrative repetition that holds interpretive resemblance, but there is no parallel repetition of story events. Cases where one narrative statement or passage refers to multiple repetitions of story events, as in Genette's categories (1) and (4), involve no actual metalinguistic or interpretive repetition (i.e. they are not based on resemblance of linguistic/narrative units) and will be discussed separately in the next chapter which considers the aesthetic effects of story repetition.

The interaction of narrative repetition and narrative and story duration suggests nine potential outcomes:

1.narrative repetition = decrease in narrative duration, decrease in story duration
2.narrative repetition = decrease in narrative duration, same story duration
3.narrative repetition = decrease in narrative duration, increase in story duration

4.narrative repetition = same narrative duration, increase in story duration
5.narrative repetition = same narrative duration, same story duration
6.narrative repetition = same narrative duration, decrease in story duration

7.narrative repetition = increase in narrative duration, decrease in story duration
8.narrative repetition = increase in narrative duration, same story duration
9.narrative repetition = increase in narrative duration, increase in story duration

Aside from a few cases related to the special possibilities of fictional representations, repetition always automatically entails an increase in duration on whichever level it appears; for repetition to exist there must be movement in time. For this reason it seems correct to immediately rule out two thirds of these examples as impossible because there does not appear to be any way in which narrative repetition can be present and *not* lengthen narrative duration. This must be the case since narrative time is a 'pseudo time' which can only be judged objectively by the amount of pages or words in the narrative. That being said, we have seen a few texts which manipulate this relationship between narrative repetition and narrative duration in interesting ways.

Repetition allied to certain types of variation in *Play, Quad* and *Waiting for Godot* manages to convey a possibly infinite succession of similar story events. This narrative repetition actually reduces the reading time required for readers to represent to themselves the infinite duration of the story world. In reality, however, repetition is avoiding rather than reducing narrative duration in these cases. If Beckett had ended any of these plays after act one with an iterative narrative statement to the effect: 'the situation just presented will most likely happen again and again indefinitely' then he would have spared us the narrative duration of the second act but still have generated the same increase in story duration. This, of course, would not be a truly repetitive textual practice, and in removing the repetition, our aesthetic response to the text would almost certainly be altered for the worst, not least because in order to properly understand the purgatorial situation of texts like *Play* and *Waiting for Godot* we must have some direct experience of the repetition these situations involve.

These examples from Beckett do not, in any objective sense, stand as exceptions to the rule that repetition in narrative must mean an increase in narrative duration. So far, this leaves us with six possible outcomes in terms of interaction between narrative repetition and narrative and story duration. Another batch of outcomes that we may want to rule out are those involving any decrease in story duration. Is it possible for narrative repetition to decrease story duration? This is a more difficult question to answer because while narrative duration can be measured by plain word counting, story duration - unless it is obviously sign-posted - is something that is interpreted, and which is not an objectively verifiable quantity in some cases.

We have encountered some examples of possible decrease in story duration emerging from narrative repetition in earlier chapters of this thesis. Burroughs' cut-up repetitions merge story events, making initially successive events appear simultaneous. This means that there is a recurrence of the exact same events but seemingly all at the same time, and that the cut-up is either re-presenting events in a way that suggests less story time passes, or that there are two parallel time series in the cut-up novels, one for the coherent sequential events, and one in which the events all happen simultaneously. This confusion of story duration is paralleled by the nature of the syntax in a cut-up-repetition which often places incompatible tenses side by side. The meta-level references to time travel through textual manipulation in the novels (and in *The Third Mind*) suggest that we interpret the cut-ups as reducing story duration, or of allowing us to traverse story duration in previously impossible ways.[100]

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[100] The nature of the repetitive scenes and mini-narratives in the cut-up novels, which include no evidence which would allow us to interpret an overall sequence to the set of highly similar events, also adds to this effect.

Beckett's *Lessness* should also considered in this category because it requires narrative repetition to prove that the story world has no extension in time; in reading the text we realise that all combinations of its sixty sentences are timeless only after we experience two of them. Without repetition we would not become aware that movement in story time is impossible within this text.[101] Richardson also sees this timelessness in Beckett's *Ping* which he claims has '(perhaps) no real events' (Richardson, 2002:56). But although *Ping* does feature high levels of repetition, this repetition is not directly responsible for the representation of timelessness.

Interesting as these cases may be, we cannot use them as unqualified evidence that narrative repetition can lead to a decrease in story duration. The cut-up text does not really lessen or eradicate the duration represented by the original coherent narratives, and the repetition of sentences in *Lessness* confirms the non-existence of story duration rather than actually *reducing* it. What we are left with after these considerations are the following outcomes:

8. narrative repetition = increase in narrative duration, same story duration
9. narrative repetition = increase in narrative duration, increase in story duration

The options in terms of the manipulation of story and narrative durations through narrative repetition are then, relatively restricted. Aside from the few cases already mentioned which bend these rules in a qualified manner, authors can really only vary the degree to which their repetition results in (8) or (9). Let us now turn to the range of possible quantity relationships that exist within these parameters, attempting to discover (or create) the optimal or limit-case arrangements as we proceed.

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[101] Genette's example of the Proustian 'pseudo-iterative' is another potential candidate here. Proust often narrates what he claims to be a regularly occurring scene, but makes the scene so singular that we fail to believe that it happened more than once (Genette, 1980:117-127). This means that what is being presented as a succession of events is felt to be one. This is not entirely relevant to the current discussion since it usually involves no narrative repetition.

Within (8) and (9) we have the potential limit cases

(8a) maximum increase in narrative duration with same story duration
(8b) minimum increase in narrative duration with same story duration

(9a) minimum narrative duration with maximum increase in story duration
(9b) maximum narrative duration with minimum increase in story duration

The second option in each case is the least interesting and we can imagine any number of dull examples of repetitive practice that meet these criteria. Optimisation of (8b) - minimum increase in narrative duration with same story duration - would be fulfilled in a text such as ‘I got home late last night. I got home late last night’ (one repetition, no increase in story time). Optimisation of (9b) - maximum narrative duration with minimum increase in story duration – would be fulfilled in a text such as ‘time moved on by a millisecond, time moved on by another millisecond, time moved on by another millisecond…..’ (story duration is increased infinitesimally with each of the many repetitions). The much more aesthetically productive categories (8a) and (9a) are optimally exploited in real texts by Stein and Beckett.

If we were to generate all the possible versions of the sixty sentences of *Lessness* then we would achieve the optimisation of maximum increase in narrative duration with same story duration. Each of the potential 8.3×10^{81} sets of the text’s sixty sentences would fail to have any impact upon the story duration while extending narrative duration to an extraordinary length.

Aside from the potential optimisation achieved by *Lessness, The Making of Americans* is the place where repetition most affects narrative duration, but ostensibly there is no major imbalance in this text between narrative and story durations because the novel ostensibly represents a long period of time. The balance is roughly 900 pages, or roughly 600,000 words, to narrate the lives of three generations of characters. As a comparison Genette records Proust’s biggest imbalance in the two durations as 150 pages (which in my Vintage Classics edition translates to roughly 58000 words) covering two or three hours of story time (Genette, 1980:92) (Proust, 1996). The problem with judging *The Making of Americans* in this way is that while Proust fills his narrative with descriptions and events which represent - or from which we can at least infer – the passing of story time, Stein’s language is such that the temporality of events and states in *The Making of Americans* is represented very strangely, almost to the point of not being ‘represented’ at all.

While it is true that the story duration of *The Making of Americans* spans many years, the novel being a history of several generations of two families, most of the repetitive narrative statements in the text are about indefinite times in the past or in continuing time. Much of the difficulty over time reference is created by Stein’s attempts to keep her narrative statements in the present tense wherever possible. A page taken at random presents us with the narrator fluctuating between partly repetitive statements about the character Alfred Hersland’s personality traits (in the present tense, as they exist for her) and people’s character traits in general, in the present tense (with claims of universal truth), and statements that Alfred had these traits in the past tense (Stein, 1995:522). There is no movement in time in all of this mass of repetition. There is a present where ideas about people are held, and there is an indefinite past where these people exemplified these ideas. Narrative repetition allied with certain syntactic structures creates for the reader a place where time has definitely passed but it has always passed ‘off stage’, where readers will not witness it. Any meagre representations we manage to create when reading the novel will exist in a kind of temporal limbo.

Another randomly selected page from earlier in the novel presents the same difficulties:

> David Hersland was such a kind of men, men who have sometime in them a feeling of being as big as all the world around them. David Hersland had a mixture in him. He mostly came all together from the bottom nature in him but there was in him too a mixture in him, and this made him, in his later living, full up with impatient feeling. There was in him a mixture in him but with him it made a whole of him. (Stein, 1995:152).

This mildly repetitive passage, elements of which are repeated many more times throughout the book, does not involve any specifiable period of time, or any movement in time. We are told things (pseudo-things?) about David Hersland: he ‘had’ certain qualities, and at ‘sometime’ he had a particular feeling, and ‘in his later living’ he was impatient. But apart from there being a specific trait of his indefinite later years there is no time scale to any of the states of David, he simply ‘had’ these things in him for an indefinite period. These statements about David Hersland are repeated many times throughout the early stages of the book, creating a situation in which narrative repetition hugely increases narrative duration, but in which the represented story duration is neither long or short but simply indefinite. The narrative is lengthy because it repeatedly refers to characters' knowledge and experiences held for indeterminate durations and unrelated to specific events.

The Making of Americans is a description of feelings, states and knowledge, it is very rare to encounter events in the novel and even rarer to encounter an event that can be definitely fixed in time. So while there is ostensibly no imbalance between narrative duration and story duration, in practical terms there is a huge imbalance between the time the reader spends and the time that is represented to her. Further, when we consider every narrative repetition that refers to the same state, knowledge or feeling, then the imbalance between narrative duration and story duration is extremely large, with several hundred narrative statements referring to just one state which existed in an indefinite past time or in the present of the narration. Considering the novel in this way, we can see that the majority of the half a million plus words in *The Making of Americans* actually represent little or no story duration.

Richardson (2002) suggests that alongside the more established postmodern narrative forms (circular, backwards, contradictory… etc) we should consider 'additional notions like the quasi-temporal or even pseudo-temporal to describe the kinds of works that simultaneously seem to invoke and resist temporal analysis [such as] partially nonrepresentational texts by Stein' (Richardson, 2002:58). This leaves us with two choices when categorising the relationship between narrative and story durations in the *Making of Americans*. Simply looking at the repetitive narrative statements, the text approaches the limit of narrative duration > story duration, but viewed as a whole, we may prefer to categorise the novel as an example of pseudo-temporal narrative. For a text such as *Lessness* we may wish to create the further category of ‘a-temporal narrative’ although it is doubtful whether we can characterise that text as a narrative at all, since it is probably best understood - in Labov and Waletsky’s (1967) terms - as an extended orientation, entirely lacking in events. We have seen that Richardson believes Beckett’s *Ping* challenges the concept of narrative, ‘inviting us to speculate on whether minimal narrative can exist without temporality’ and although he does not mention the text, *Lessness* obviously invites similar speculation (Richardson, 2002:56).

Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot, Play,* and *Quad*, exhibit the other extreme in the relationship between the two duration levels. In these texts repetition creates the optimal balance of minimal increase in narrative duration with maximum increase in story duration. The narrative/story imbalance in these repetitive binary plays has been discussed at length already so I will summarise and add only a few additional comments here. We have seen that in these plays one large scale narrative repetition results in a potentially infinite extension of story duration. This increase in story duration, as in *The Making of Americans,* is not witnessed directly by readers. In *Godot* and (more strongly) in *Play* we are asked to interpret the narrative repetition of the purgatorial story situation as one of many: these other repetitions have probably happened before we began to watch the first act, and will probably carry on after we stop watching the second. It is even possible that there have been other repetitions in between acts one and two (the blossoming of the tree in *Godot* is one indication that this may be the case). In *Quad* the situation is slightly different. The slowing of pace and shift to black and white shows that the situation in act two is markedly later, in Beckett's words 'a thousand years later' (Esslin, 1987:44). There is little or no suggestion that these two repetitions are back to back, instead the off-stage repetition is definitely between the acts. However, the entropic nature of the repetition means that the situation in *Quad* will also be repeated indefinitely after the second act, with the ever decreasing energy of the performance never being completely exhausted. From this we may also surmise thousands of repetitions prior to the first act, each one a little faster and a little more colourful as we follow the trail of repetitions back to its original.[102]

Much of the significance and aesthetic pleasure of these difficult texts of Stein and Beckett emerges from their optimisation of narrative/story imbalances, and we will see in the next chapter that such imbalances can be responsible for creating sublime experience for readers. Burroughs' texts do not approach either of our limit case arrangements of narrative and story but they do pose particular complex interpretive difficulties when it comes to understanding story duration.

In both our limit cases of imbalance between narrative and story duration the vast majority of the story duration is not actually present in the text. There is a relatively lengthy abstract story duration to *The Making of Americans* but it cannot be experienced directly by the reader, and there is a huge story duration in a play like

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[102] We must be clear that by presenting one repetition and suggesting countless more, Beckett creates the optimal relationship of minimal narrative repetition allied with maximal story repetition and duration. He does not, however, create the optimal balance of minimum narrative *duration* and maximum story duration, such a balance would be created by a statement such as, 'this event has always been happening and will have infinite extension in time' or 'this event has always been repeated and will be repeated infinitely'.

Quad but it is exists as a potential between the acts and probably also before the first act and after the second. Burroughs differs from Stein and Beckett by directly representing (and then subsequently problematising) story duration in his repetitive texts. Burroughs' characters experience many events in quick succession and the rapid pace and economic style of the coherent passages of the narration means that a relatively large amount of story time is represented by relatively few narrative statements.[103] However, Burroughs' two main types of narrative repetitive practice retrospectively problematise this seemingly straightforward relationship between narrative and story duration. Repetition of stock scenes and motifs makes it difficult to decide if any of the scenes (which internally represent duration in a straightforward manner) happen before or after any of the others. None of the repetitive scenes is presented as succeeding any of the others unless there is a repetition of similar scenes *within* one section of the text which has clearly demarcated duration (usually within a single chapter or mini-narrative). In terms of the story world there are no clues as to the relation between many of the events that are narrated, there is no underlying story sequentiality to the cut-up novels, or at least none that we can recover, instead the novels present an array of mini-narratives which are never explicitly related to one another. This means that although a lot of duration is being narrated, there is no way of being sure about the overall duration or order of the events.[104]

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[103] We should also remember here that the cut-up novels occur over a huge time scale, with temporal settings ranging from the dawn of language through the present day and beyond. Our interpretation of these settings are not directly affected by Burroughs' repetitive practices however.

[104] Lydenberg provides an interesting analysis of circular narrative in *The Soft Machine* in which, 'the narrator proceeds backwards in time through the "good old" 1920s… through the controlled civilisation of an ancient agrarian Mayan community, and finally in to the primeval life of the jungle. In this most primitive outpost the narrator sees to have come full circle, rediscovering there the modern savagery of bureaucracy (the Indian Commission) and big business (the Total Oil Company)' (Lydenberg 1987:57). She points out that during this narrative 'the most minimal signs of narrative continuity ("So" and "Well") are repeated with an almost farcical frequency and speed… these markers of narrative progress and their implied logical and casual connections gradually lose their force. Through repetition they become exhausted as signifiers and are reduced to empty habitual gestures which belie the underlying immobility of this dead-end itinerary' (Lydenberg 1987:60-61).

Most of the repetitive scenes also resemble each other so strongly as to merge retrospectively in reader memory. This is especially true of *The Soft Machine* where, upon finishing the novel, it is extremely difficult to remember which sex scenes occurred in which mini-narratives, or even to distinguish one sex scene from another, because all such scenes hold so high a degree of interpretive and metalinguistic resemblance to each other. The cut-up repetitions perform a smaller scale but more unconventional version of this merging of events when they take a scene which has internal duration and mix its elements up into a simultaneous representation or, even more radically, when the cut-up mixes two scenes with internal duration into one simultaneous representation. The fact that these scenes closely resembled each other in the first place further strengthens the overall representation of a world of events which are not fixed or ordered in time in any traditional sense. Everything that happens in these novels is always happening and has the potential to happen again and again, on both narrative and story levels.

There are three other special cases of the interaction between narrative frequency and narrative and story duration that must be mentioned here. The first involves a meta-level communication between characters (actors) and audience and is best exemplified by *Waiting for Godot*. When the characters in *Godot* discuss the possibility that the events they are involved in are repeating the previous day's events, there is often a hint (dependent upon the style of production) of some meta-theatrical humour whereby the audience understands that the actors are also discussing the fact that they literally have done all these things the previous day, when the were acting the play.

This is a case of what seems like repetition in the story time being used to refer to repetition in narrative (real-world) time.

Secondly, there is intratextual narrative repetition. If we read and recognise in two of an author's texts two different linguistic units as repetitions (metalinguistic or interpretive) then we may wish to label these as intra-narrative repetitions. One interesting question is whether any of these intra-narrative repetitions should be considered as story repetitions. If the story world that is being referred to is the same one, which contains the same characters living the same lives (e.g. detective fictions, like Chesterton's, which feature a central detective character) then the narrative repetition seems likely to be a story repetition. The problem posed by the intratextually repetitive texts of Beckett and Burroughs is that they present close resemblance repetitions that happen to different characters in different stories who seem to have no link to each other except the repetition itself. The effect this has on the reader's representation of story frequency and duration will depend upon their understanding of how the fictional worlds of different texts by the same author are related to each other. Most likely a complex and irrational view of story time will emerge for any reader who is well versed in the intra-narrative repetitions of these authors.

Thirdly, there is the problem posed by the distinction between recurrence and repetition, recurrence meaning the *first event happening again* (impossible in terms of standard conceptions of time), and repetition meaning *an event happening for a second time*. Recurrence requires a cyclical model of time in order to occur, but this is perfectly plausible in fictional story worlds. For example, if upon reaching the end of

Finnegans Wake we return to the beginning and start reading again, as the text seems to suggest that we should, the fictional story events will recur. Our interpretation of the events may be effected by the repetition but in terms of story time, there is recurrence instead of repetition.[105] Richardson (2002) points out several other examples of what he calls ‘circular’ narratives, among them Queneau’s *Le Chiendent* and Nabokov’s *The Gift*, claiming that ‘such texts problematise Genette’s notion of frequency, since they are infinitely repeated instances of otherwise singulative events’ (Richardson, 2002:48). Recurrence is also possible *within* one reading/viewing of a text, for example David Foster (2008) argues that if the ‘repeat play’ instruction at the end of *Play* is followed exactly, as opposed to the director introducing variations which suggest succession in time, then the play presents a version of recurrence. The characters would not have any memory of the previous occurrences of these events because this is the first time the events have happened (*again*). Thus the characters would be in a similar situation to the Steinian narrator, as imagined by Kawin, who does not repeat because she has no memory of her previous utterances. As should be clear however, recurrence is never really possible for the reader, repetition always occurs for the reader in the context of previous occurrences.[106]

We have seen that narrative repetition can affect narrative and story duration in relatively few ways but that within these parameters a diverse range of outcomes can be effected. Many of the texts analysed in this thesis use repetition to stretch and problematise the relationship's between narrative and story outlined by Genette, falling into Richardson's general category of 'metatemporal' and supporting his call for 'a more comprehensive model of narrative temporality' (Richardson, 2002:57). Much of the significance of our chosen authors' texts lies in their ability to either problematise or optimise the relationships between narrative and story duration and frequency, creating interpretive difficulties and/or large imbalances between the two spheres. The next chapter will investigate the aesthetic effects of such imbalances in more detail.

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[105] Our interpretation of the opening words of the novel will certainly be affected because they now form the end of a sentence, preceded by the novel’s final words.

[106] Obviously, recurrence can also be created in fiction by stating that recurrence has happened. If for example a narration were to bluntly tell us that, ‘**Bill went out to the street**. Due to the cyclical nature of time, this *same* event happened again. **Bill went out to the street** again, not later in continuing time but at the exact same time that he already went out into the street,’ then we would have repetition in terms of words in the narrative, but recurrence in terms of the story.

CHAPTER 8. STORY REPETITION, AESTHETIC EFFECTS AND THE SUBLIME

We have seen throughout this thesis that narrative repetition can create intense aesthetic effects. This chapter will investigate whether the experience of story repetition can be similarly effective. For Weiskel (1976) the possibility of sublime experience is opened up when an imbalance arises between the planes of signifier and signified. This opposition is roughly analogous to the opposition of narrative and story and to our previously discussed pragmatic opposition between utterances and the propositional content that is generated from their interpretation. While it is tempting to use Weiskel's claim as a starting point for the contention that excess of story over narrative can create sublime experience, we must be cautious when it comes to equating terms from different disciplines.

Although these three sets of opposed terms (semiotic, narratological and pragmatic) are related, they are certainly not interchangeable. The propositional content of a narrative statement like 'I walked this road a million times' is one proposition, not a million propositions, but this narrative statement does represent a million repetitions in the story. Likewise, it does signify more events than the statement 'I walked this road once'. Propositional content can be massively outweighed by utterances as a result of narrative repetition - repetition of signifiers - but it can't really be maximised as a result of repetition in the story - repetition of what is signified - because the utterance 'I went to bed a million times' does not produce more propositional content than the utterance 'I went to bed ten times'.

Similarly an imbalance of signified over signifier is not exactly the same as an imbalance of story over narrative. Story and narrative have two factors on which an imbalance can be effected: frequency and duration. An event can happen more often or can last longer in either one of the two spheres. In an utterance such as 'the infinite universe' I am signifying a great deal using a very small amount of signifying language, this does not translate into an imbalance of story over narrative in Genette's terms however, because there is no comparative spatial distinction, Genette's terms are wholly temporal. In fact, as we have seen, Genette actually uses the spatial attribute of the amount of pages in the narrative as the way of measuring narrative *duration*.

It is more accurate to think of the categories of propositional content and story representations as sub-parts of the category of 'signified'. For example, the single short utterance, 'they said they were they said they were' generates a huge number of co-present propositions, creating an imbalance of propositional content over utterance, which translates to an imbalance of signified over signifier. Likewise the statement 'I walked that road a million times' presents an imbalance of story over narrative which is also an imbalance of signified over signifier. This means that any imbalance in pragmatic or in narratological terms will result in an imbalance in semiotic terms, thus opening up the possibility of sublime experience. We can also include the existence of potential repetition, whether of narrative or story, inside the category of signified, enabling us as a by-product of the investigation in this chapter, to decide whether the repetitive potential of texts such as *Lessness* and can generate sublime experience.

We have already seen that the narrative repetitions of *The Making of Americans* create sublime experience because they ensure that the text holds a large imbalance of signifier over signified. While story repetition such as ‘I walked that road a million times’ displays a large imbalance of signified over signifier it is not clear whether the experience of such represented repetition can create the type of aesthetic effects we have seen arising as a result of narrative repetition. This chapter investigates whether the experience of story repetition can generate sublime feeling by asking what would happen if we encountered the sublime repetitions of *The Making of Americans* as a story representation of repetition rather than as an attribute of the narrative.

This course of action is partly suggested by a comment of Jorge Luis Borges in the prologue to his *Fictions*, where he writes:

> The composition of vast books is a laborious and impoverishing extravagance. To go on for five hundred pages developing an idea whose perfect oral exposition is possible in a few minutes! A better course of procedure is to pretend that these books already exist, and then to offer a resume, a commentary. (Borges, 1998b:13)

Borges carried out just such a strategy, creating books within stories in ‘Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Teritus,’ ‘A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain,’ ‘Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote’ and ‘The Book of Sand’. More generally, when we come to consider examples of maximum story representation from minimum narrative length, Borges’ work stands out. Borges short but highly dense texts represent ideas, objects and time scales that are often unthinkably vast, but which are expressed with considerable narrative economy. If *The Making of Americans* is our most excessive case of signifier > signified, in works such as ‘Parable of the Palace,’ ‘The Library of Babel’ and ‘The Aleph,’ Borges approaches the limit case of signified > signifier. In addition, the highly intratextually repetitive nature of Borges’ work, with its obsessively recurring themes, of infinity, eternity, recurrence, doubles, and simulacra, what Castillo (1991) calls Borges’ ‘adamant insistence on a few intensely imagined symbols,’ also makes his work a highly relevant choice for this thesis (Castillo, 1991:22).[107]

Among the many books that Borges would have advocated describing rather than writing we can perhaps include *The Making of Americans*. The experience of reading Stein’s book is a highly unusual one because its nine hundred pages consist of massive amounts of minutely varying repetitions. It is reasonable to consider the cognitive experience generated by this novel (‘good’ or ‘bad’, pleasurable or not) to consist much more in the actual experience of reading its sentences than in the overall description or representation we construct of the book as we read it. This is true of any book to a certain extent; the schematic version of the ‘meaning’ of the novel that we create in any description is unlikely to capture our reading experience. The unique form of *The Making of Americans* simply increases the distance between experience and description because there is so much to experience and so little to describe. The basic problem with any attempt to describe *The Making of Americans* lies in the fact that the entire importance of the novel resides in our experience of its form. When Borges describes his imaginary books, his description is adequate because the importance of these books to us resides in attributes that can be schematised. For example, the importance of the books in ‘Tlon, Uqbar, Orbs, Teritus’ is that that they are encyclopaedias of imaginary worlds. The importance of the book in ‘The Library of Babel’ in which the letters MCV are repeated from the first to the last line of its 400 pages that it illustrates the total nature of the library’s collection of books, making us aware that every conceivable book is contained within it. The aesthetic experience of *The Making of Americans*, on the other hand, is an experience of an excess of form, not of an interesting or affective idea. This is also why it seems much more satisfactory to describe Borges’ ‘Library of Babel’ as ‘a story which describes a library which contains every conceivable book’ than it is to describe *The Making of Americans* as ‘a nine hundred page book which consists of masses of minutely varying repetitions’. It is obviously necessary to say more about *The Making of Americans* than about ‘The Library of Babel’ in order to successfully transmit the experience of reading the text because it is not the idea of *The Making of Americans* that is overwhelming, only the first hand experience of it. The idea of a nine hundred page book which is highly repetitive does not exhaust our imaginative capabilities as the idea of seeing infinite space inside the titular aleph of Borges’ story clearly does. However, once we begin reading *The Making of Americans* it affects us like the aleph because it becomes *effectively* infinite, but we must be ‘on the inside’, actually reading the book to experience this effect. It seems that *The Making of Americans* is only impossible to comprehend when you are reading it.[108]

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[107] Those interested in tracing intratextual repetition in Borges’ work should consult Agheana’s (1990) *Reasoned Thematic Dictionary of the Prose of Jorge Luis Borges*. Although it does not involve any experiments with excessive repetitive form, viewed as a whole, Borges’ oeuvre is still one of the most repetitive in twentieth century literature. Borges is also a repeater in his non-fiction, with themes, and at times even sentences being repeated across different works. The themes of the essays also repeat those of his fictions (or vice versa). Weinberger (1999) comments on Borges’ ‘lifelong fascination with the way old elements can be reassembled, by chance of design, to create new variations, something entirely different, or something that is exactly the same but now somehow different’ (Weinberger, 1999:xv).

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[108] In this respect, the novel is like a labyrinth, it cannot be comprehended from the perspective of the

This remainder of this chapter will ask how exactly our experience of *The Making of Americans* would differ if we encountered it not as a 'vast' and 'laborious' novel but rather as an imagined work encountered in the 'few minutes' of a Borges short story, and what form the story description would need to take in order for it to transmit the sublime experience of reading the novel to readers of the description. Throughout this chapter I will refer to the work of Borges and Wordsworth for examples of how it is possible to generate sublime feeling through the experience of an imbalance of signified > signifier. A further aim of this chapter is to gain a better understanding of the nature of the aesthetic experience of literary texts by analysing the different responses that could be generated by a text and its description. To this end I will also reflect on whether the description of reading *The Making of Americans* that I provided in chapter 3 can create any of the cognitive effects outlined in that chapter and in this one.

The first thing to consider is that the description of *The Making of Americans* given in chapter 3 is a highly schematic description of the novel *plus* a description of its cognitive/aesthetic effects. In this respect my description fits Borges' call for a resume and a *commentary* on the vast book. I have suggested that the unique form of the novel means that it may not be possible to accurately represent it in any way other than that in which Stein has written it; nonetheless I have shown that it is possible to describe in some detail various cognitive responses that the novel generates.

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maze treader but seen as a whole, from the outside it poses less of a problem to comprehension. Borges, of course, features Labyrinths in many of his stories and Doob's (1990) description of labyrinths holds many similarities to the experience of the sublime. Doob suggests that '[labyrinths] simultaneously incorporate order and disorder, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity, artistry and chaos…' and later that the idea of the labyrinth is analogous to 'the attempt to make sense of too many pieces of data at once' (Doob 1990:1, 48).

The fact that *The Making of Americans* is unlikely to be adequately described or represented in any form other than the one in which it exists does not preclude attempts to transmit the sublime experience of reading the novel through a description. This fact makes the task of description both impossible and perfect. It is impossible because the object which creates sublime feeling cannot be represented, and perfect because all descriptions of sublime experience are representations of the un-representable. Whether the sublime is triggered by an excess of signifier or of signified, the final result for the person (author or reader) who has had the experience, is of an un-signifiable content. The task of transmitting sublime experience is always paradoxical in this way and any successful attempt to relate a sublime experience must ultimately result in the generation of a blank content by readers.

Wordsworth discusses this difficulty over the description of sublime experience in *The Prelude* - where he admits that it would take ‘colours and words that are unknown to man/ To paint the visionary dreariness’ that he has beheld - and also throughout ‘Tintern Abbey’, in which Weiskel sees ‘a mind in recovery, unable to signify what has occupied it…’ (Wordsworth 1986: 480) (Weiskel, 1976:30). In contrast to the ‘negative,’ ‘metaphorical’ or ‘reader’s’ sublime of the signifier > signified imbalance, Wordsworth’s sublime is that in which Weiskel sees an imbalance of signified > signifier, which he variously labels the ‘positive’, ‘metonymical’ or ‘poet’s’ sublime. In texts which display this type of imbalance we encounter a poet overwhelmed by meaning, finding that he cannot signify his experience satisfactorily but attempting to describe it nevertheless. We must be clear however, that this attempt to describe sublime experience does not necessarily generate sublime experience for the reader. Weiskel remains uninterested in, and makes no claims to the effect that Wordsworth is able to generate sublime experience for readers as a result of describing his own sublime experience, or whether the reader is even able to participate in the 'poet's' sublime; his study is one of 'various careers of egos within poems' rather than 'questions of form and its makers' and he does not seek to trace the effects of the poet's sublime on readers (Weiskel, 1976:33).

Even if Wordsworth's description does succeed in generating sublime experience, readers may not necessarily experience the sublime of the type signified > signifier. For no matter how large the imbalance between the two poles in the poet's original experience, its representation is always absent for the reader. It is just as likely that in reading the poet's struggle to transmit his experience the reader will face a mass of signifiers related to a blank signified, thus generating the 'reader's' sublime of signifier > signified. This is arguably the case when we read 'Tintern Abbey'. Encountering a poet who is compelled to write but who cannot signify (in Weiskel's words) 'the hidden sense of presence' located in the poem, readers, unlike Wordsworth, will potentially experience an imbalance of signifier > signified (Weiskel, 1976:29).

A fundamental difference between the Wordsworthian situation and that of anyone attempting to describe *The Making of Americans* is that for the latter there will be no poet's sublime in the first place. Wordsworth's original experience is signified > signifier, but the experience of *The Making of Americans* is of signifier > signified. If Wordsworth successfully generates sublime experience in 'Tintern Abbey' he turns the *poet's* sublime into either the poet's or the reader's sublime. If the initial sublime experience is created by an encounter with *The Making of Americans* then we must turn the *reader's* sublime into one of the two versions.

I have suggested that *The Making of Americans* creates the experience of the reader's or negative sublime in two ways. Firstly, reading the repetitions in the novel involves us in a repeated inferencing process with no resultant increase in propositional content, creating an intense attitude of belief decoupled from any specific content, i.e. sublime experience. Secondly, in Kantian terms, as a vast and featureless object with its infinite (for aesthetic judgement) series of repetitions, the novel is impossible to comprehend in a unity, however, reason demands the repetitions be exhibited as a totality nonetheless and this triggers the awareness of a supersensible power within us, the feeling of the sublime.

The first factor of the sublime experience given here will almost certainly be lost if repetition is transferred from narrative to story, as we would lose the online inferencing process related to reading repetitions, and the cognitive effects resulting from this process. We would not experience the affectiveness of the difficult and extensive inferencing process nor would we experience the imbalance between the amount of processing and the strength or number of propositions generated as a result. However, I will argue below that it may be possible to create an *analogous* pragmatic experience through story repetition, if it is presented in the right way.

It is harder to say whether the second factor outlined above would also be lost. Repetition is the experience of contiguous events simultaneously; that is to say that when we recognise a repetition, we experience two events that were successive in time simultaneously, one as a current presentation and one as a memory. It is the attempt to represent an effectively infinite set of repetitions in one intuition which creates the experience of the mathematical sublime. This experience is a process with several stages (the mind encounters an object, this object poses a problem for the imagination as comprehension reaches its limit, reason over-rides this problem, we experience the sublime). The difficulty with story repetition is deciding whether it does away with these earlier stages or whether we can move through the sublime process even if the problematic object is encountered in a description and then internally represented by the reader.

It seems reasonable to assume that without experiencing the actual repetition we are not required to hold contiguous events in the mind simultaneously and hence, in turning the narrative repetitions into story repetitions we would lose the sublime experience of representing an effectively infinite object as a totality. When we are told ‘there are huge amounts of repetition’ or even ‘I walked this road at the same time every morning’ we are already experiencing these repetitive sets as totalities because they are presented as totalities. In this view we would not be required to go through the process, described by Kant, whereby comprehension cannot keep up with apprehension, because the object that we are comprehending is in effect pre-totalised.

In reading *The Making of Americans* we experience the repetitions as a series but we have sublime feeling when we represent this series as a totality. If I create a description that says: ‘there are so many repetitions in this novel that it is impossible to comprehend them all at once’ or, less leadingly, ‘this novel contains a huge amount of repetitions’ then it is the case that the reader of this description will internally represent a ‘massive amount of repetitions’ in a schematic form. The problem lies in deciding whether the reader has gone through the prior stages of the sublime process or if this schematic totality is achieved immediately without any prior difficulty for comprehension.

Looking again at the nature of the sublime experience created by Stein’s shorter passages of underdetermined repetition will allow us to get a better handle on this problem.

> And after that what changes what changes after that, after that what changes and what changes after that and after that and what changes and after that what changes after that (Stein 1967:26).

We saw that passages such as this created sublime feeling as a result of our attempt to internally represent a huge number of interpretations as a totality and the pragmatic experience of cancelling these co-present interpretations and substituting a sublime propositional gap - a blank representation protected under an intense propositional attitude - in their place. In addition, the affectiveness of the inferencing process related to generating these interpretations adds to the intensity of our response.

In processing this type of passage we experience the mathematical sublime because we represent a massive set of potential interpretations to ourselves as a totality, effectively by cancelling the content altogether, but only after generating enough interpretations to require us to make this cancelation. This means that we experience the mathematical sublime from representations that exist completely internally and not in the form of the text. It is not the amount of repetition on the page that causes us to have sublime feeling but the amount of propositions that we represent in our minds. This at least proves that sublime experience can result from the attempt to hold too many internal representations. However, it is clear that when we read a story repetition statement such as ‘there are 500 repetitions of clause x’ or ‘there are infinite interpretations of clause y’ the statements do not make us internally represent these repetitions or interpretations in the same way that the interpretations of the ‘after that what changes…’ passage must be represented. We have an inferencing process related to the interpretations of ‘after that what changes’ which means that we *must* internally represent the individual interpretations, this is not the case in processing the statement ‘there are a massive amount of interpretations of the repeated clause ‘after that what changes’’, because in this case we are not by necessity required to generate and take account of any of the individual interpretations. The representation is received as pre-totalised.

Another related reason why sublime experience may not be generated by story repetitions lies in the fact that both aspects of the sublime experience outlined above arise as a result of huge effort. The Relevance theory notion of effort vs. reward supports a sublime reading of *The Making of Americans* and of ‘after that what changes’ because to achieve relevance there must be a large pay off for the large effort required either in reading all the narrative repetitions (*Making of Americans*) or generating all the mundane interpretations (‘after that what changes’). The difficult inferencing process is affective on its own but it also makes us demand a large cognitive reward; the reward is sublime experience. Similarly Weiskel says that in the mathematical sublime ‘the mind confronts an object whose extreme magnitude challenges the imagination (as the faculty of sensible representation) to an *extraordinary effort*'(Weiskel, 1976:39, my emphasis). It is highly doubtful whether this extraordinary level of effort would be required to process any description of story repetition even if we attempt to represent these repetitions internally.

Considering these strong doubts regarding the possibility of story repetition causing sublime experience, the exact form in which the repetitions are presented becomes extremely important. It is not enough that the story representation is one of extreme size or temporal duration, there must be formal features which make a story representation more or less likely to generate sublime feeling. Consider the following short descriptions of *The Making of Americans*.

a. 'there is a novel and it consists of a massive amount of repetitions'
b. 'there is a novel and it consists of a massive amount of repetitions and these create a pragmatic situation which leads to the experience of the sublime'
c. 'there is a novel and it consists of a massive amount of repetitions and these create a pragmatic situation which leads to the experience of the sublime, this pragmatic situation can be described as……..[describes the pragmatic situation]'
d. 'I read a novel and it consists of a massive amount of repetitions'
e. 'I read a novel and it consists of a massive amount of repetitions and these created a pragmatic situation which lead to my experiencing the sublime'
f. 'I read a novel and it consists of a massive amount of repetitions and these created a pragmatic situation which led to my experiencing the sublime, this pragmatic situation can be described as……..[describes the pragmatic situation]'

g. ‘I read a novel and it consists of a massive amount of repetitions, I had an incredibly strong [sublime] reaction but, although I will try, I cannot accurately represent the novel or my experience of it’

Two important distinctions here are between descriptions which include a metarepresenting subject (d), (e), (f), and (g) and those that do not (a), (b) and (c) and between those representing an object that creates sublime feeling as in (a) and (d), and those representing the object along with the aesthetic experience generated by that object (b),(c),(e),(f) and (g).[109] In this latter group we can make a further distinction between those descriptions which include a technical or pragmatic description of our aesthetic experience (b),(c),(e),(f), and that which will give a less accurate, more impressionistic and emotive description of the experience (g).

Most of the descriptions above differ from our direct experience of Stein’s novel in an important way. Stein gives no indication that she intends to represent sublime feeling or to create sublime feeling. As I have suggested, she may be using language to create the feeling that there is something unpresentable behind her text, but this is not an explicit or obvious goal that she holds for the book. Texts such as Wordsworth’s *Prelude* and Borges’ ‘The Aleph’ have as an explicit goal the representation of intense affective experience that is also explicitly un-representable. In contrast, it is doubtful whether Stein is interested in representing anything at all, certainly not representing sublime experience, and it is partially due to this fact that her novel can create sublime feeling for readers. Wordsworth’s sublime is a metarepresentation of the sublime whereas Stein creates sublime feeling by avoiding representation wherever possible and creating a signifier > signified imbalance.

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[109] The fact that there is a narrator between ourselves and Stein in *The Making of Americans* should not make a difference here because it is our experiences of the actual language of the novel that creates the sublime. Sublime experience is never mentioned or described by Stein’s narrator and hence is not mediated through her.

Of the various labels that Weiskel gives to the two sublime semiotic imbalances the relevant ones for the current discussion are the *reader's* sublime and the *poet's* sublime. *The Making of Americans* as it exists, generates the reader's sublime, overwhelming us with the sheer amount of signifier (narrative) that we must process without parallel gains in the representations that can be formed from the text (story). *The Making of Americans* is not a description of sublime experience by a narrator, it functions for readers in the same way a huge mountain range might function for a romantic poet, i.e. it is an object that cannot be comprehended and which is directly responsible for creating sublime experience. Statement (g) above, like *The Prelude* and 'The Aleph', is an example of the poet's sublime, the poet/narrator has had an experience which seems to mean too much for them to signify, but they attempt to describe it nonetheless. In reading this type of literature we are one stage further removed from the sublime than when reading *The Making of Americans*. In *The Prelude*, for example, Wordsworth creates a poem which attempts to represent his experience of the sublime (or of intense aesthetic experience) as triggered by a series of events which the poem also represents. The following two chains of events are analogous:

(1)Narrator has an experience which causes sublime feeling.
(2)Narrator attempts to describe this experience.
(3)Reader has sublime feeling as a result of reading the narrator's description of sublime experience.

(1)Narrator reads *The Making of Americans* and has sublime feeling.

(2)Narrator attempts to describe this experience.

(3)Narrator's reader has sublime feeling as a result of reading narrator's description of sublime experience.

Our perspective as readers of *The Making of Americans* is simply stage (1) above. Anyone can have sublime experience when reading *The Making of Americans*, just as anyone can have sublime experience when looking at a huge mountain range or standing at the edge of a great abyss, and we can with some degree of accuracy describe the means by which this sublime experience is generated. More difficult to explain is whether, and by what means, the poet transfers this sublime experience to the reader, i.e. how he can make his story representations generate sublime experience. The answer is not through a psychological or pragmatic technical description of the *process* of sublime experience. Although we can describe in a technical fashion the means by which *The Making of Americans* generates sublime feeling, this technical description will not in itself transmit sublime feeling to its readers, anyone in doubt of this should recall the entirely non-transcendent experience of reading chapter 3 of this thesis. Instead we must look more closely at the narrative/linguistic form these representations take.

As we have already discussed, any description of the book itself, if it attempts to go further than the concise descriptions given above, will necessarily run into the obstacle of the book's un-representability. The act of describing an indescribable book which creates sublime feeling is similar to Wordsworth relating his experiences in the

Prelude which lead him to have sublime feeling, both descriptions must admit that they cannot accurately represent the original experience. This is not necessarily a hindrance, as attempts to transmit sublime experience are potentially stronger because they admit the ineffability of the original experience. Without suggesting that there is something unrepresentable in the experience there may be no means of effectively transmitting sublime experience, because the describer must create an analogous experience for readers if the sublime is to be generated. In other words, while a narrator may admit that they do not have the means of accurately representing their original experience, they can attempt to create an analogy of this experience for the reader by making their representation as ineffable as their original experience. If the narrator leaves a gap in their representation, then the reader has a gap to fill. Fabb argues that this is what happens in Wordsworth's famous representation of his experience on mount Snowdon:

> This passage… presents an irresolvable contradiction between two coexisting realities: the mountains are also islands, the cloud is also water and so on. Contradiction of this kind is fundamental to most of the profound experiences described in the *Prelude*. My suggestion is that the reader experiences a complexity from it, which is arousing, and that the arousal is the basis perhaps of an emotional experience, but also potentially of an experience of attitude. This attitude is experienced but it is impossible to fix a representational content for it (partly because the passage works by denying any fixed meaning). Hence the reader fills in a dummy content, which is experienced as a sense of non-discursive knowledge, a knowledge which can not be paraphrased, basically because it does not exist except as a phenomenological illusion. (Fabb, 1994)

This experience of an attitude without fixed content, for which we must ‘fill in a dummy content,’ is also apparent when we read Wordsworth’s other great description of sublime experience, ‘Tintern Abbey’. As discussed above, in reading the poem we cannot achieve a fixed representation for what Weiskel calls the ‘hidden sense of presence which cannot be signified’ (Weiskel, 1976:29).

So far then, we have discovered that for story descriptions to successfully transmit sublime experience they must do so through analogy. The inclusion of an ineffable blank at the centre of the representation, and an experience of contradictory representations in Wordsworth’s texts serve to aid the creation of sublime feeling for readers. I would like now to turn to examples of the signified > signifier imbalance in Borges’ work in order to see if these or any other attributes of the description will be seen to aid in his creation of the sublime.

Borges’ short stories tend towards the succinct description of vast, often infinite objects, spaces and series of events. ‘Parable of the Palace’ contains the purest example of the tendency to maximise representation and minimise narrative length in Borges’ work. The story tells of a poet who achieves the limit case of signified > signifier imbalance by finding ‘the word for the universe’. The poet creates a poem that consists of either a single line, or a single word which describes ‘whole and to the last detail’ the Yellow Emperor’s ‘entire enormous palace.. and every forlorn or happy moment of the glorious dynasties of mortals, gods and dragons that had lived within it through all its endless past’ (Borges, 1998a:318). Here, at least inside the story world, we have the absolute minimum in narrative length describing an ‘endless’ maximum of complete description in terms of story representation. Unfortunately, we cannot actually hear or read this poem, and Borges’ description does not really allow us to imagine it in any meaningful way. The result is that its effects are not transferred from the story world to the reader.

The poet and the poem in this tale are symbolic of Borges’ general practice in his stories; obviously he cannot hope to achieve the same completeness of description as the fictional poet, but whereas the effects of the impossible fictional poem are non-transferable to Borges’ reader, his descriptions of vast or infinite objects and spaces in stories such as ‘The Library of Babel’ and ‘The Aleph’ do generate for readers the imbalance between signifier and signified that opens up the possibility of sublime feeling.

The description of the titular object of ‘The Aleph’ is Borges’ most successful attempt to transmit the poet’s sublime to readers. In order to see how Borges transmits sublime experience through his story representation, it is essential to quote the narrator’s description of the aleph at some length:

> I come now to the ineffable centre of my tale; it is here that a writer’s hopelessness begins […] how can one transmit to others the infinite Aleph, which my timorous memory can scarcely contain? […] the central problem – the enumeration, even partial enumeration, of infinity – is irresolvable. In that unbounded moment, I saw millions of delightful and horrible acts; none amazed me so much as the fact that all occupied the same point, without superposition and without transparency. What my eyes saw was *simultaneous*; what I shall

write is *successive,* because language is successive. Something of it though, I will capture.

Under the step, toward the right, I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brightness. At first I thought I was spinning; then I realised that the movement was an illusion produced by the dizzying spectacles inside it. The Aleph was probably two or three centimetres in diameter, but universal space was contained inside it, with no diminution of size. Each thing (the glass surface of a mirror, let us say) was infinite things, because I could clearly see it from every point in the cosmos. I saw the populous sea, saw dawn and dusk, saw the multitudes of the Americas, saw a silvery spider web at the centre of a black pyramid, saw a broken labyrinth (it was London), saw endless eyes, all very close, studying themselves in me as though in a mirror, saw all the mirrors on the planet (and none of them reflecting me), saw in a rear courtyard on Calle Soler the same tiles I'd seen twenty years before in the entryway of a house in Fray Bentos, saw clusters of grapes, snow, tobacco, veins of metal, water vapour, saw convex equatorial deserts and their every grain of sand, saw a woman in Inverness whom I shall never forget, saw her violent hair, her haughty body, saw a cancer in her breast, saw a circle of dry soil within a sidewalk where there had once been a tree, saw a country house in Adrogue, saw a copy of the first English translation of Pliny (Philemon Holland's), saw simultaneous night and day, saw a sunset in Queretaro that seemed to reflect the colour of a rose in Bengal, saw my bedroom (with no one in it), saw in a study in Alkamar a globe of the terraqueous world placed between two mirrors that multiplied it endlessly, saw horses with windwhipped manes on a beach in the Caspian sea at dawn, saw the delicate bones of a hand, saw the survivors of a

> battle sending postcards, saw a Tarot card in a shopwindow in Mirzapur, saw the oblique shadows of ferns on the floor of a greenhouse, saw tigers, pistons, bisons, tides, and armies, saw all the ants of the earth, saw a Persian astrolabe, saw in a desk drawer (and the handwriting made me tremble) obscene, incredible, detailed letters that Beatriz had sent Carlos Argentino, saw a beloved monument in Chacarita, saw the horrendous remains of what had once, deliciously, been Beatriz Viterbo, saw the circulation of my dark blood, saw the coils and springs of love and the alterations of death, saw the Aleph from everywhere at once, saw the earth in the Aleph, and the Aleph once more in the earth and the earth in the Aleph, saw my face and my viscera, saw your face, and I felt dizzy, and I wept, because my eyes had seen that secret, hypothetical object whose name has been usurped by men but which no man has every truly looked upon: the inconceivable universe.
>
> I had a sense of infinite veneration, infinite pity. (Borges, 1998a:283)

This passage is a clear example of the poet's sublime, the text enacting Weiskel's description of an author overwhelmed by his experience, unable, but still attempting to signify what he has seen and felt. This passage also perfectly illustrates Weiskel's suggestion that '[this] mode of the sublime may be called *metonymical*. Overwhelmed by meaning, the mind recovers by displacing its excess of signified into a dimension of contiguity which may be spatial or temporal' (Weiskel, 1976:29). In the list's long succession, Borges turns his simultaneous vision of the aleph into a contiguous experience for readers.

The aleph itself is the furthest extreme of the infinite existing within a compact space, and Borges' single paragraph description of the aleph approaches the limit of the relationship signified > signifier. The absolute limit would be to say 'the aleph is a tiny space which contains the whole world' but unlike this limit case, Borges description communicates the sublime to readers through holding the following crucial attributes:

Infinity: The aleph contains infinite space seen from infinite angles, inside the aleph there is the infinite recursion of the universe inside the aleph, the aleph inside the universe, the universe inside the aleph and so on. The aleph also contains another image of infinite recursion: the 'globe of the terraqueous world placed between two mirrors that multiplied it endlessly'. Although the narrator would see all books when looking into the aleph, he singles out for description a translation of Pliny, the first encyclopaedia, one of the first attempts towards total description of the world.

Contradiction: The aleph is at once three centimetres in diameter but contains the whole universe; the universe is still the same size even though it is contained within this small space. The aleph allows us to see the 'inconceivable' universe. Like the poem discussed in 'Parable of the Palace' the aleph is an impossible fantasy object, but unlike the poem it is actually possible to partially imagine what the aleph contains, although not simultaneously.

Simultaneity and Successivity (*this can also be understood as a form of contradiction*): The narrator apprehends the infinite simultaneously. Although it is perceived in a single instant it must be described, and read successively, readers are then to imagine (impossibly) the long list of things (which could be expanded indefinitely) as being perceived simultaneously. The Kantian sublime lies in the attempt to represent something in whose a single *simultaneous* instant an object of which the *successive* apprehension would proceed indefinitely, the perception of a 'multiplicity in a unity'. This is the narrator's experience but he must in turn perform the opposite task of representing successively what was experienced simultaneously.

Form: The narrator's long breathless list of things that can be seen in the aleph transfers the sublime experience from the story world to the narrative. This list is an extract of the potentially infinite list the narrator could have made, and the narrator presents enough objects, and enough variation of objects, to convey the infinity of what he has seen to the reader. From the vast to the microscopic, the abstract to the concrete, the important to the mundane, even incorporating the narrator and the reader, the list stacks up more and more meaning for us to process, and the more the narrator tells us, the more we realise the massive potential for further expansion of the list. We move from a highly schematic vision of what it would be like to see the whole world simultaneously (an un-affective representation because extremely vague – much like our idea of the poem from 'Parable of the Palace') to imagining the specific details we would see, and then imagining all the other specific details that these details suggest (highly affective because the concept 'the world' is now impossibly, infinitely meaningful). In reading through this list we experience Weiskel's imbalance of signified over signifier because by making the list so suggestive – the list appears random but is in fact highly structured - Borges creates unlimited meaning from only a page of words. When we think about the aleph after reading the list, we potentially might never cease populating our representation of it with further places and objects. This unlimited meaning in turn moves back to a new, affective variety of empty representation when we evacuate the potentially infinite list of meanings and protect the newly empty representation within an intense propositional attitude of belief.

This story succeeds in transferring the narrator’s sublime experience to the reader not only because it contains such a strong sense of the infinite in its story representations but also because creates an analogous contradictory experience inside an affective formal structure (the list). It is unlikely that vastness of represented content is sufficient on its own to generate sublime experience, the contradictory, simultaneous nature of what is being represented and the form of the representation, which forces us into a defective propositional attitude, are also essential attributes.

Armed with this information it is now possible to attempt to draw some conclusions regarding the possibility of a description of *The Making of Americans* creating sublime experience. We can conclude that it is highly doubtful whether described story repetition can, on its own, take us to the limits of our interpretive abilities in the sublime because it does not, on its own, engage us in a difficult inferencing process, and does not require us to go through the process of first representing the repetitions and then cancelling this impossible representation by generating a defective propositional attitude. It seems that the best way a story description could replicate the pragmatic experience of reading the repetitions in *The Making of Americans* is by following Borges’ lead in ‘The Aleph’, creating an analogous experience for the reader, an experience that recreates some of the complexity of actually reading the text. In shifting narrative repetitions to story repetitions we would need to create an experience of complexity and contradiction as part of – or in addition to - the description, if the pragmatic experience of the sublime were to be recreated.

The following is the suggested formula for creating sublime experience from story repetition: explain at the start of the description that the repetition you are about to describe is actually ineffable; make the amount of story repetition too vast to comprehend (or infinite); make the description of story repetition contradictory and build in a complexity over simultaneity and successivity, e.g. the repetition happens in time but also somehow simultaneously (this will be acceptable only in a fictional representation); make the description of the repetition pragmatically taxing, leading to a great deal of inferencing effort; include an extract that is suggestive of the further repetition the reader would encounter. The inclusion of all or some of these traits in the description might lead to the creation of a sublime defective propositional attitude for readers. It would not be too difficult to imagine a story which held such a description, and in fact the potential repetitions that we encountered in *Lessness* and those suggested by Burroughs cut-up novels do match several of these criteria and can most likely be regarded as generators of sublime feeling. It is also clear that any factual description of *The Making of Americans* would not meet this criteria. Likewise, the potential repetition suggested by Beckett’s *Watt* and by his binary plays appear to conform to too few of our criteria to be considered sublime.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis has traced the outcomes of excessive repetition, describing the kinds of literary text that can be created by pursuing repetitive forms to their limits, and analysing the aesthetic effects of such texts. We have seen that the work of Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett and William Burroughs tests the limits of repetitive textual practice and that in testing these formal limits their texts also test the limits of our interpretive abilities. Far from being a redundant textual practice the perceived 'excess' of repetition in these authors' works is balanced by their generation of intense aesthetic effects.

In order to understand the cognitive processes through which repetition generates these effects it was necessary to employ a pragmatic framework (based on Sperber 1985, Sperber and Wilson 1995 and Fabb 1998) which allowed us to trace the online effects of repetition as it is read in context. At their most affective, the texts of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs were all shown to generate what Fabb has called a sublime defective propositional attitude. These authors employ large quantities of repetition in ways that ensure that readers are faced with impossible interpretive situations which necessitate the evacuation from the mind of all possible interpretations, and the protection of the newly formed empty representation within an intense propositional attitude.

Repetition in these texts then, subordinates that creation of specific meanings to the process of the creation of 'meaning' in general, and these repetitive texts then come to be ‘about’ the creation of meaning, and the way that meaning is generated. Discussing the difficulty of Stein’s work, Doane (1986) remarks that ‘Stein ultimately came to perceive the “impossibility” of meaninglessness… An active mind, she was sure, would always search for ways to create meaning.’ Doane goes on to state that ‘it would be more appropriate, then, to view her transgressions against the requirements that establish truth and meaning, as attempts to provoke us to create meaning in a new way’ (Doane, 1986:xx). We have seen that Stein, Beckett and Burroughs use repetition to do just this: their texts provoke us to create meaning new ways. That being said, it is also clear that Stein’s texts are the most unconventional of the three; almost completely abandoning regular literary conventions, they are best understood as meaning games which force the reader into a difficult and highly affective inferencing process based on semi-propositional representations. The amount of meaning that her short passages of underdetermined repetition generate through this method results in the generation of sublime experience for the reader willing to expend the proper degree of effort.

Although their texts are very different from those of Stein (and of each other) Beckett and Burroughs generate sublime experience through the same methods. In each case, readers are involved in a lengthy and affective inferencing process that is unrelated to specific propositional outcomes. All three authors are united in exploiting our propensity to always interpret form; repetitive form demands interpretation in their work, and meaning (mainly non-propositional) arises as a by-product of such interpretation. Such is the case with Stein’s *Making of Americans* or Burroughs’ cut-up novels, where it is highly unlikely that either author has specific propositional outcomes in mind when creating such large quantities of repetition, but where this realisation cannot halt the inferencing process that is set in motion by the repetitive form.

In the case of Beckett and Burroughs, more so than with Stein, it was less necessary to rely on pragmatic analysis of repetition; the more conventional nature of their work (based much more on the representation of objects and events) meant that it was possible to use more conventional methods of literary criticism to trace the effects of their repetitive practices. The most significant general outcome of repetition in all three authors works that was not directly related to pragmatic analysis was the creation of problematic or unconventional relationships between narrative and story order and duration. This outcome was systematised in chapter 7 where we discovered that Burroughs texts were the most problematic with regard the interpretation of narrative and story, and that Beckett and Stein managed to produce various optimisations of the repetition-to-story-duration relationship.

Finally, we have seen that these authors all exploit the economy of relevance in original ways. Sperber and Wilson (1995) claim that the relevance of communication depends on its optimisation of the balance between the effort we must expend on it and the rewards (propositional or otherwise) which it provides. In the texts of Stein, Beckett and Burroughs, it seems that effort almost becomes its own reward. We saw in chapter 8 that it is not possible to experience the sublime without undergoing a relatively arduous process; with the sublime, as with other aesthetic effects, the effort expended feeds into the eventual reward, and not least because (as Sperber 1985 claims) inferencing based upon semi-propositional representations is rewarding in itself. It is clear, for example, that part of the reward of Stein’s repetitive texts resides in the effortful process we go through when interpreting them and not simply in the sublime result of their generation of excessive meaning. If we were simply given the meanings directly by the texts, the aesthetic effect would be greatly reduced. On a related note, we saw all three authors exploiting the economy of effort and reward by producing deliberately fatiguing passages which serve to potentiate the effects of their more poetic passages through contrast. While it is clear that effort does not exactly equal reward, effort *must* be expended to get reward, and it appears that the expenditure of effort itself feeds into reward. The analysis in this thesis suggests that repetitive literature is able to exploit the complexity of the relationship between effort and reward in the reader’s mind, and that in so doing it produces the most rewarding of aesthetic outcomes: the sublime. It is in their creation of sublime experience that texts which approach the limits of repetition confront us with the limits of interpretation.

Appendix A: narrative clauses and transitivity in *Lessness*

We can better understand the extreme mobility of the language of *Lessness* if we analyse the text in terms of narrative clauses. Fundamentally, narrative clauses convey temporality by expressing the *sequence* of the events being narrated. Non-narrative clauses, often referred to as 'orientation clauses,' do not convey sequence or temporality. The highly mobile nature of the language marks the clauses of *Lessness* as non-narrative and analysis of the clauses' transitivity supports this claim.

Labov and Waletsky define as 'narrative' clauses whose position relative to other clauses encodes the temporal location of the event which it describes (Labov and Waletsky, 1967). Orientation clauses do not refer to temporally ordered actions and thus can often be moved within the narrative without changing the way they refer. We have seen that all of the sentences of *Lessness* are completely mobile. Although this may not be as readily true of all the individual clauses within the sentences, it does mean that many of the clauses can be moved with ease (and many of the sentences consist of only one clause). The text also demonstrates that movement of sentence-internal clauses and phrases is possible in many cases because most clauses and phrases appear in different combinations in different sentences (see Coetzee 1973).

Another typical characteristic of orientation clauses is that they are low in transitivity, they describe 'what is'. Narrative clauses, on the other hand, are high in transitivity, they describe 'what happens'. Hopper and Thompson (1980) set out ten variables which can be marked for high or low transitivity. These variables are: number of participants; kinesis; aspect; punctuality; volitionality; affirmation; mode; action caused by agent; affectedness of object; and individuation of object (Hopper and Thompson, 1980:252). A clause which is marked for the highest possible transitivity will be as follows: the clause will have at least two participants; it will describe the transfer of action rather than a state; the action will have an end point and will be 'carried out with no transitional phase between inception and completion'; the action will be performed purposefully; the action will be affirmed to have happened and will actually have occurred; the clause will have an agent; the patient will be totally affected by the action; the patient will be distinct from the agent, distinct from its own background and will be as singular and concrete as possible (Hopper and Thompson, 1980:252-253).

The lack of verbs in *Lessness* means that designation of clauses is somewhat arbitrary and within the confines of this appendix it will not be impossible to include a description of every clause, or the means by which every clause has been designated, so I will limit myself to a few typical examples which we can almost certainly describe as clauses. Firstly, two typical examples from the text of clauses with almost no transitivity:

1. 'earth sky as one'
2. 'Scattered ruins same grey as the sand' (Beckett, 1995:197)

In both of these examples there are two participants; this means that the clauses have the potential to be high in transitivity. Both clauses, however, express a state and not an action so they have low transitivity in terms of kinesis. There can be no endpoint, punctuality, volitionality, mode, agent or affectedness in either clause because no action is being described. The individuation of the objects described is also fairly low as words like ‘earth’, ‘sky’, ‘ruins’ and ‘sand’ are generic and non-specific. We are also told that the earth and sky are ‘as one’, and that the objects described in clause two are of the same colour making them even lower in terms of individuation. In fact, the only other marker of high transitivity in these clauses is in terms of affirmation, as both clauses affirm a state of affairs. These two clauses have been chosen as typical examples of the clauses in *Lessness* and they are best described as non-narrative orientation clauses.

The next two clauses are two of the most transitive in *Lessness*

1. ‘heart beating only upright’
2. ‘On him will rain again as in the blessed days of blue the passing cloud’ (Beckett, 1995:197).

‘Heart beating only upright’ is the first clause to describe action in the text suggesting that the clause will be high in transitivity; but the lack of end point to the action and the lack of any auxiliary verb to indicate tense means that this clause has low transitivity in both aspect and punctuality. The clause contains only one participant and hence no transfer of action, which again indicates low transitivity. Although action is said to happen, leading to high transitivity through affirmation, there is low transitivity in regards to volitionality, as the heart can not really be said to beat on purpose. The heart is best described as a patient rather than an agent, as it undergoes rather than performs the action of beating; and this again indicates low transitivity. Individuation is moderate here as ‘heart’ is not specified as being the heart of anyone in particular, although it can be inferred from the previous clause that the heart belongs to the ‘little body’ (Beckett, 1995:197). There is high transitivity in terms of mode as the action does happen, but it is unclear whether the heart can be said to be affected by the action of beating, leading to another marker of low transitivity.

The second of the two clauses has high transitivity in terms of participants as it contains two, the ‘passing cloud’ and ‘him’. Again here, there is definitely action being described in the verbs ‘will rain’ and in the description of the ‘passing cloud’, so the clause is marked for some transitivity. However, there is no end point to either of these two actions so the clause is marked for low transitivity in terms of punctuality. There is no agent in this clause, the cloud should be regarded as a *causer*, it cannot be said to act volitionally, so again we have two indicators of low transitivity. There is no mention of the affectedness of the patient, ‘him’. Again the individuation is fairly low with both ‘him’ and in particular ‘the passing cloud’ being generic and unspecific. This clause is high in transitivity in terms of affirmation but this strong affirmation and others like it throughout the text are continually negated in other clauses by denials of any end to stasis and timelessness. These denials suggest that all such affirmations are fictions and so we may wish to regard the clauses containing the affirmations as low in transitivity in terms of mode. The two examples cited have four and five markers of high transitivity respectively out of a possible ten each. This must lead us to the conclusion that in *Lessness,* even the clauses which one would designate as narrative are only marked for moderate transitivity.

Lessness contains clauses which are mainly low in transitivity; the vast majority of clauses in the text describe a state of affairs, not an action. When action is described it is often not deliberate. In addition, there is no point in the text which could be regarded as being about the effects of one individual on another as within the text there is only one (completely immobile) individual.

It is notable that Beckett's language in *Lessness* actually meets the criteria of both of these two separate definitions of orientation clauses and is evidence of a possible correlation between the two definitions.

Appendix B: full transcription of cut-ups from 'Dead on Arrival'

[Paragraph 3]

The croaker lives out Long Island … light yen sleep waking up for stops.change.start … everything sharp and clear antennae of TV suck the sky … The clock jumped ahead the way time will after 4pm. (Burroughs, 2001:5)

[Paragraph 15]

There is a boy sitting like your body. I see he is a hook. I drape myself over him from the pool hall. draped myself over his cafeteria and his shorts dissolved in strata of subways … and all house flesh … toward the booth … down opposite me … The Man an Italian tailor… I know bread. 'Me a good buy on H.' (Burroughs, 2001b:6)

[Paragraph 19]

Junky in East bath room … invisible and persistent dream body … familiar face maybe… scored for some time or body … in the grey smell of rectal mucous … night cafeterias and junky room dawn smells. three hours from Lexington made it five times … soapy egg flesh …
'These double papers he claims of withdrawal.' (Burroughs, 2001b:6)

[Paragraph 36]

bread knife in the heart … rub and die … repatriated by a morphine script … those out of Casa for Copenhagen on special yellow note …
'All hands broke? Have you no pride? Alarm clock ran for a year. (Burroughs, 2001b:7)

[Paragraph 38]

yesterday call flutes of Ramadan: No me hágas cáso.' (Burroughs, 2001b:7)

[Paragraphs 41-42]
[…]paper-like dust we made. empty walls. Look anywhere. No good. No Bueno.

He went to Madrid … Alarm clock ran for yesterday … 'No me hágas cáso.' dead on arrival … you might say that the Jew Hospital … blood spilled over the American … trailing lights and water … The Sailor went so wrong somewhere in that grey flesh … He just sit down on zero … I nodded on Nino Perdidio his coffee over three hours late … They all went away and sent papers … The Dead Man write for you like a major … Enter vecinos … Freight boat smell of distant fingers … About this time I went to your Consul. He gave me a Mexican after his death … Five times of dust we made it … with soap bubbles of withdrawal crossed by a thousand junky nights … Soon after the half maps came in by candlelight … *Occupy* … Junk lines falling … Stay Off … Bill Gains in the Yellow Sickness … looking at the dirty pictures casual as a ceiling fan short-timing the dawn we made it in the corn smell of rectal mucous and carbolic soap … familiar face maybe from the vacant lot … trailing tubes and wires … 'You fucking-can't-wait-hungry-junkies! …' burial in the American Cemetery. 'Quédase con su medicína' … on Nino Perdido the girl screaming … They all went way through Casbah House … 'Couldn't your write me any better than that? Gone away … You can look anyplace.'

No good. No Bueno. (Burroughs, 2001b:8)

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‘Co-authors are all the conference participants who took part in discussions, whether they talked or made others’ talk possible by listening. All have agreed to let their voices be woven together. They are Abdel-Rahman Abu-Melhim, Laura Anderson, Valerie Balester, Martha Bean, A.L. Becker, Tina L. Bennet-Kastor, Jeutonne P. Brewer, Jill Brody, Suzanne Cherry, Steven Cushing, Masako Dorrill, Susan Ehrlich, Kathleen Ferrara, Philip J. Glenn, Rebecca S. Gault, Laurie Haynes, Robert Hopper, Thomas John Hudak, Katherine E. Kelly, Annette Kirk, Diane Kirk, Laurie Knox, Michael Macovski, Bruce Mannheim, Delma McLeod-Porter, Marilyn Merrit, J. Lawrence Mitchell, Robert E. Nofsinger, Neal R. Norrick, G. Genevieve Patthey-Chavez, James E. Porter, B. Hannah Rockwell, Dennis Rygiel, Cynthia Schnebly, Susan C. Shepherd, Dina Sherzer, Joel Sherzer, JoEllen M. Simpson, Deborah Tannen, Russell S. Tomlin, Greg Urban, and Elizabeth A. Winston. Wolfram Bublitz did not attend the conference but did submit questions for discussion, and Delma McLeod Porter prepared the transcripts from which I have worked. After the conference, Jill Brody sent detailed and very useful notes about the discussions she attended, and Neal Norrick wrote with more thoughts. Robert Hopper, Neal Norrick, Larry Mitchell, Dina Sherzer, and Joel Sherzer helped edit a draft of this chapter.