Gertrude Stein's Grammatical Breath: An Experiment with Chance
（ガートルード・スタインの文法的呼吸 ——偶然性による実験）

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SUMMARY IN JAPANESE: 本論文は、ガートルード・スタインの著作に見られるカンマに対する拒絶が結果として生み出す広範な影響について考察する。カンマに対する拒絶に関して、「詩と文法」の中でスタインは、「カンマはせいぜい劣ったピリオドにすぎない。カンマが来ると人は思わずそこで止まり、一呼吸することになるが、もし呼吸したいのであれば、呼吸することを知らなければならない」としている。ガートルード・スタインを読むうえで、また彼女の作品について書く上で、呼吸はどう関係するのだろうか。この問いに取り組む——答えるのではなく——ために、2 人のスタイン研究者を参照する。アレグラ・スチュワート（Allegra Stewart）は 1967 年の著作の中で、スタインの有名な「ヒューマン・マインド」や「存在している」ことの概念が、日常生活に生じる偶然の中断へのクリエイティブな反応のあり方に部分的に基づくとしている。そして、近年では 2014 年のアストリッド・ロランジ（Astrid Lorange）の研究では、スタイン研究者が解釈学から離れ、スタイン作品を読み、その読解について書く上での新しい方法を見出す必要性が示唆されている。これら 2 つの説を融合し、また読者がテクストの意味生成における必須の構成要素となるという 20 世紀後半の理論を援用しながら、スタイン読者がテクストにとってある種の偶発的要素

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となりうること、そして従来のモダニスト的考え方から脱却してそのような新たな可能性を創造しうることを論じる。このペーパーはスタイン作品と筆者自身のそのような偶然的出会いに従うと同時に、そんな手法の論理的根拠を提示するものでもある。

Prelude: The Truth in a Calm World

This paper is not about Wallace Stevens or the following poem, but the following poem by Wallace Stevens has everything to do with this paper.

The house was quiet and the world was calm.
The reader became the book; and summer night

Was like the conscious being of the book.
The house was quiet and the world was calm.

The words were spoken as if there was no book,
Except that the reader leaned above the page,

Wanted to lean, wanted much most to be
The scholar to whom his book is true, to whom

The summer night is like a perfection of thought.
The house was quiet because it had to be.

The quiet was part of the meaning, part of the mind:
The access of perfection to the page.

And the world was calm. The truth in a calm world,
In which there is no other meaning, itself

Is calm, itself is summer and night, itself
Is the reader leaning late and reading there.

Perhaps better than any other text I've read, Stevens' poem illustrates a central premise around which my following discussion of Gertrude Stein has its being: the notion that a *poem is an event in time*. Louise Rosenblatt explains this concept in her book about the transactional theory of literature as follows: "The poem . . . must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text" (12). It is not only the truth within the text that we are after: as Stevens wrote, this truth "itself / Is calm, itself is summer and night, itself / Is the reader leaning late and reading there." That is, the truth of the poem is the event of the poem. The eventness of the poem will be a given here, and it is the nature of that event—the encounter of the "reader leaning late" and "the page" and the "calm world" in which he sits—that will be the object of study. The study I am proposing, as is evident in my title, is an experiment. And experiments often fail. But that should cause no worry. Rosenblatt dismissed concerns about definitive interpretations and rigorous scholarship by stating bluntly, "all readings are failures" (143). Instead, she gives us something else to examine: "The emphasis should be rather on a creative transaction, a coming-together of a human being (with all that implies of past experiences and present preoccupations) and a text (with all that implies of potentialities for participation)" (143). Now, then, to Gertrude Stein.

Proposal: Why Don't You Read the Way I Write?

In the introduction to the book *Primary Stein*, Sharon J. Kirsch and Janet Boyd provide an overview of the various approaches scholars of Stein's work have taken over the years in their study of her work. Very early criticism tended to focus on Stein's "renowned salon and famous friends" (1). During the 1970s and 1980s, her theoretical link with cubism was taken up, along with her queer sexuality and "a more general subversion of the process of signification" (1). Later scholars would focus on her contributions to notions of American identity. Much of the work done in the 21st century so far has focused on "politics and friendships, as well as on Stein the collector, the celebrity, and the visual icon" (2). Yet, Kirsch and Boyd write, much of this

valuable work over the decades has tended to neglect the aspect of Stein's life that the author herself most valued: her writing. As such, the essays collected in *Primary Stein* tend to take as their starting point the primary text: the poems, essays, plays, and novels.

Published in the same year as *Primary Stein*, Astrid Lorange's book *How Reading Is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein* offers the thesis that the traditional literary scholarship methods summarized by Kirsch and Boyd don't actually pair well with Stein and her texts, in part because they rely on a "hermeneutical mode of interpretation" which "reduce[s] the unknown to the already-known, the already determined" (Shaviro 62, qtd. in Lorange 9). Though scholars such as Marjorie Perloff have explored the "indeterminacy" of Stein's texts, Lorange suggests that "critical accounts of Stein depend on determinate notions of indeterminacy, such that the reading of Stein's abstraction is understood as a lesson on abstraction and little more. Once she is read for her lessons on the itinerancy of meaning, there is very little room left to talk about what else Stein's work *does*" (Lorange 9). Another way of framing this issue might be, if the indeterminacy of Stein's texts is taken as a given—surely we can take it as a given at this point—then what do we do next? Or, following Rosenblatt, what are the ways in which we can fail in our reading of Stein?

Let me veer a bit from the path so far established in order to take up an analogy that will, I believe, prove fruitful, and, by way of this analogy, covertly establish something of a methodology for this paper. Philosopher and ecologist David Abram, in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous*, considers the many and various ways in which the development of written alphabetical language has effected a separation of various cultures from the "more-than-human world" in which we humans are embedded. As part of his argument, he considers the function of breath and the wind in the Hebrew language, particularly the absence of vowels in the written form of the ancient language. About this absence of written vowels, he writes:

> The traditional Hebrew text, in other words, overtly demanded the reader's conscious participation. The text was never complete in itself; it had to be actively engaged by a reader who, by this engagement, gave rise to a particular reading. Only in relation—only by being taken up and actively interpreted by a particular reader—did the text become

> meaningful. And there was no single, definitive meaning; the ambiguity entailed by the lack of written vowels ensured that diverse readings, diverse shades of meaning, were always possible. (Abram 243)

As an analogy to Lorange's anti-hermeneutical reading of Gertrude Stein, the comparison to ancient Hebrew texts obviously fails to some extent (all readings fail). Debates among various readers who suggested different vowels for certain words were part of the process of "grappling with God's living word" (Holtz 16, qtd. in Abram 243). This grappling obviously presumes some sort of accessible, though hidden, Truth. In that, it seems to be a search for determinacy amid indeterminacy, though the search itself may indeed be the point. However, what I find interesting about the analogy is that it is the absence of certain tools in the written language—here vowels—that creates the opportunity for relational reading practices in which readers reach different readings and must deal with the difference. The very present reading event that emerges out of the absence of such tools in Stein's texts will be the focus of this paper.

Let's return now to the question of what one should *do* with a Stein text if one wants to really dwell in her indeterminacy. Astrid Lorange's method, which is a neat articulation of my own general approach to Stein, is to leave aside the question of "meaning"—whether that question be "What does Stein mean?" or "How does Stein resist meaning"?—and instead to focus on what she calls "itinerant" ways of *reading* Stein. "We need," she writes, "to keep finding ways to read Stein and to write about our reading" (14). These new ways of reading Stein, though, need to move beyond simply following the latest trends in literary, cultural, gender, or queer studies in order to identify and develop new contexts that locate her within or without literary history. Her own history of English literature should disabuse us of the notion that adherence to strict disciplinary modes of inquiry will help us to coax her texts into clarity. About 19th century British literature she writes, "What was outside was outside and what was inside was inside, and how could there be a question of god and mammon, when what is inside is inside and what is outside is outside there can be no confusing god and mammon. Perhaps and perhaps not but that is at any rate one way in which living can be lived, literature can be made" (*LIA* 21). A tautology that becomes a causal chain, followed by the possibility of its own negation—this is what Stein offers in

what is honestly one of her clearer pieces of writing. What obligation have we to hold ourselves to strict logical and scientific methods in the face of such joyous, insistent fallacy?

Luckily, Stein seems to have anticipated exactly such a conundrum occurring to her readers both casual and devoted. One of the most delightful anecdotes about Stein to come out of John Malcolm Brinnin's biography, *The Third Rose*, depicts an American journalist who, having listened to her talk during her celebrated lecture tour after the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, asks her, "Why don't you write the way you talk?" Her response, simply, was, "Why don't you read the way I write?" (Brinnin 334). It seems that answering Lorange's call to find new ways to read Stein can be accomplished by simply asking Stein herself for guidance. We could try, instead of approaching her texts hermeneutically, *to read them as she wrote them*. The "as" in this sentence is, qua Stein, intentionally vague. Prepositions, which she loved, can easily be mistaken, which is why she loved them. This will come back up later. I use it to mean a very loose methodology. By what method did Stein write her texts? And what happens when we read her texts following that same method? These questions will constitute the experiment that I am conducting in this paper. That is, I will attempt to read Stein's texts following Stein's own way of writing. If, as Kristin Bergen writes, "A basic feature of Stein's modernism . . . is the primacy of the immediate phenomenological situation, the prolonged moment of perception" (Bergen 220), then what happens to a reading methodology whose basic feature is the same prolonged moment of perception?

Method: What Does the Human Mind Write

In order to approach the question of "how did Stein write?" I want to take two different and perhaps meandering paths, paths that will eventually converge. The first will be the more abstract, wherein I'll look at Stein's exploration of the way the human mind deals with the present when it is perceived as a complete break with the past. Then, I'll take up the more practical concern of the method by which she, with Alice B. Toklas's support and help, actually put pen to paper and composed her texts. Together, these paths will provide a way forward into this experiment in chance readings.

With that in mind, I'll turn to Stein's "human mind."

The "human mind" is one of Stein's trickier, yet pervasive, concepts. It was expounded on most fully in her 1936 book *The Geographical History of America*, subtitled *The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind*. It is difficult to say with clarity what the human mind and human nature actually are. It is much easier to say what each "has to do with." Human nature has to do with remembering, with all the practical actions that fill everyday life, and with the sense of identity that comes from one's place in history (both family and nation). In terms of writing, human nature has to do with "beginnings, middles, and endings." It is an aspect of the human person that is bound tightly by our perceptions of past, present and future and how our limited self fits into those concepts. The human mind, on the other hand, has to do with "what is written":

> What does the human mind write.
> The human mind writes what it is.
> Human nature cannot write what it is because human nature can not write.
> The human mind can write what it is because what it is is all that it is and as it is all that it is all it can do is to write. (*GHA* 105)

The human mind, as I understand it, is a creative outreaching. It is *to write*, if *to write* is less about an historical accounting of events and more about the mind in the process of discovering what it discovers. Allegra Stewart describes the human mind as an expression of Stein's concept of "being existing," which the former says is "the interplay of self-activity (an individual's entelechy) and his life history (his 'existing')" and which "seems to express fullness of being, clarity of perception, and detachment from egocentric claims" (Stewart 30). The human mind expresses one's ability to meditate on the fully present *now* amid the thrust of history, identity, and future becoming. Further, there is a permanent disconnect between the more active, meditative "being" and the more passive "existing," a disconnect that one *can*, but *may not*, be aware of. Awareness of the disconnect between being and existing, and the "depth of reality" that emerges from it, fuels Stein's poetics of creativity, in part by focusing her intentional perspective on the world through a fully realized present moment. "In the present, and

the present alone," Stewart writes, "ideas are disengaged from the matter that fills them and the matter itself is open to new forms. Because the real present constitutes a gap, where past and future, idea and actuality, form and matter, are momentarily unhooked . . . and separated, novelty is possible" (Stewart 38-39). That is, writing for Stein is not simply a matter of finding new forms for ideas, or approaching topics in a new way. Rather, writing of the human mind is the *process* of developing new ways to see once a gap in reality is encountered.

This way of conceiving the present moment does not situate it only in relation to the past and the future. We don't have a line stretching in one direction for the past and one direction for the future, with a single dot in the middle to show "now." Rather, it seems to be a way of phenomenologically perceiving one's being, in which time and memory are factors in our conscious experience of the world, but are not the *only* way that we are able to perceive the world. When we intend the world in a time-bound sense, we are intending it through our human nature. Identity-based concerns emerge here, as does narrative and even the idea that a text can be understood in its entirety. For Stein, writing that tries to get at anything "whole" is unutterably dull:

> Now you take anything that is written and you read it as a whole it is not interesting it begins as if it is interesting but it is not interesting because if it is going to have a beginning and middle and ending it has to do with remembering and forgetting and remembering and forgetting is not interesting it is occupying but it is not interesting.
>
> And so that is not writing.
>
> Writing is neither remembering nor forgetting neither beginning nor ending. (*GHA* 150)

Steinian writing, and by extension Steinian reading, must function in a space of *now*, but an always now, a now that stretches beyond the single click of a key on the keyboard or the single dot on the timeline. *Now* must become the intentional reaching out into the world without memory and without any desperate grasping after the whole. That is why writing "has to do with" the human mind and not with human nature. While human nature concerns itself with what is already known (remembering) or what is no longer known

(forgetting), the human mind is the *activity* of knowing, the mind in the process of knowing. This is writing.

The present goal is to learn "how Stein writes" so that we can eventually "read as she writes." Her discussion of the human mind luckily recommends that very strategy to us. That is, the most interesting way of writing—no beginnings, no memories, no endings, no whole—is also the most interesting way of reading:

> I found that any kind of a book if you read with glasses and somebody is cutting your hair and so you cannot keep the glasses on and you use your glasses as a magnifying glass and so read word by word reading word by word makes the writing that is not anything be something.
>
> Very regrettable but very true.
>
> So that shows to you that a whole thing is not interesting because as a whole well as a whole there has to be remembering and forgetting, but one at a time, oh one at a time is something oh yes definitely something. (*GHA* 151)

Reading, following writing, becomes interesting in its lack of wholeness, or, we could say, its lack of comprehensiveness, a noun just close enough to comprehension to recommend a different model of understanding from what we typically use. Here is perhaps our first clue to the task of reading as Stein writes. *Method 1: Do not grasp after the whole, but learn to read one by one by one by one.* My interpretation of this method is not about loosing words from their syntactical positions entirely, though of course that can and might as well be done. But what about reading a book, a whole book perhaps, without any worry whatsoever about the development of the argument or narrative, or even the progression of a single sentence from beginning to end? What if the process of reading a text, particularly a Steinian text, does not necessarily need to lead eventually to remembering what one has read or, for we literary scholars, articulating the whole of the text? Not even to say, "This author pursues a project of incompleteness across her texts." Rather, can we say, "This author pursues, and here I pursue alongside her"?

There is a sort of wildness to this; I cannot even call it a methodology. It is a stance, a way of approach, but not a guide toward completion or comprehension. Completion, to Stein, rendered writing itself unnecessary.

After finishing *The Making of Americans* in 1908, Stein began to reassess how she wanted to write. During a very human nature sort of lecture that recalled this time in her life, she states, "When I was working with William James [during medical school] I completely learned one thing, that science is continuously busy with the complete description of something, with ultimately the complete description of anything with ultimately the complete description of everything. If this can really be done the complete description of everything then what else is there to do" (*LIA* 156). Here, in this recollection, even the hint of completion turns her off from the scientific project of describing everything, even though such a project is what motivated her to write *The Making of Americans* in the first place. Imagining something being finished and in that finished state being whole and complete is enough, so that the completeness might as well exist. "[A]s it is a possible thing," she says, "one can stop continuing to describe this everything" (*LIA* 156-57).

The alternative to completion—both in writing and, as we've seen, in reading—need not be simply "incompletion" or an "unfinished" text. It is, instead, an openness to the unplanned, and now we begin to approach the next reading method I want to discuss. As she left the completion of *The Making of Americans* behind and moved toward the *Long Gay Book*, Stein's attention began to focus on the possibilities of encountering the unexpected: "And so it was necessary to let come what would happen to come because after all knowledge is what you know but what is happening is inevitably what is happening to come" (*LIA* 158). *To let come what would happen to come*. These words suggest a wide openness to the unknown. Knowledge-based writing, or writing what one already knows, turns us again and again to the past, even if at some point in the even recent past the knowledge was new and unexpected. Rather, what we have here is a mind that accepts without judgment what emerges into awareness, welcoming the new and unexpected into its present intentional movements. The truly new, however, does not always adhere to established values of writing. Allegra Stewart notes that Stein's openness to chance results in both "verbal spontaneity" (86) and "beautiful passages, with a strange quality of depth and suggestion" (96), but also "a good deal of dross . . . aimless punning, much trivial playfulness, and a great deal of seemingly frivolous humor . . . [and] failures" (96). If all readings are failures, it seems we are on the right track.

An example of the practical implications of this writing by chance will help to clarify what is meant by "let come what would happen to come." In a study that has become a touchstone for all 21st century Stein scholarship, Ulla E. Dydo explores Stein's writing process through an analysis of manuscripts, drafts, and notebooks. Two key points from her explanation of Stein's writing process support the idea that chance was a fundamental feature of Stein's writing. First, Dydo explains that Stein usually carried around in her pockets very small notebooks called *carnets*. In these notebooks, she would write shopping lists, make reading lists, or exchange comments and ideas with Toklas, who occasionally wrote her own responses (for example, in public settings in which spoken conversation might be rude). She would also write ideas for new pieces of writing, some of which might show up word for word in the final version, and some of which would not. Dydo suggests that these *carnets* show how "inseparable working and living were" (34). Further, she writes that "The scribbled notes tell what she did, what she saw, what she thought, where she went, and how she worked, all interlocked in the service of composition" (36). While Dydo says that this indicates a very conscious effort in writing—that is, not at all spontaneous—there is a hint of chance occurrence here. Occasionally, "what she saw" casually around her, including even the cover image of a notebook, might become part of the text she wrote.

Taken alone, this seems far from noteworthy. All writers, one presumes, develop ideas based in part on chance observations of or responses to the world around them. However, Stein's technique seems to have been a concentrated, conscious effort to be open to that chance. Here is another example from Dydo's study. After the small *carnets*—only a few of which have survived in Stein's papers at Yale—a full manuscript would have been written in a composition notebook which Dydo calls a *cahier*. A key point about this process gestures at the possibility of chance: often, it seems, Stein's manuscript drafts filled up the *cahier* notebook *all the way to the last space on the last line* of the notebook. Dydo compares this process to that of a painter who allows the physical space of the canvas to determine in part the shape of the work (41). Here the physical space of writing—the notebook itself and the size and spacing of the handwriting—serve as functions of chance which determine the trajectory and conclusion of the work. Stein, Dydo writes,

> was reluctant to plan endings that suggested the premeditated or the mechanical, and she refused to organize content chronologically or hierarchically. There is rarely a sharp end point, although her forms of rhetorical completion can be astounding. . . . Stein's is a world—a space—of unending process, which does not unroll toward a climax or conclusion but *goes on*, steadily and simultaneously, in many forms. (41)

This process is different from a self-imposed limitation, which we might find in the poetry of Marianne Moore, known for creating her own strict formal rules, or Lyn Hejinian, whose book *My Life* followed a fairly strict, self-created limitation of sentence and section number. Instead, we are seeing an unplanned but acknowledged limitation from the extra-textual aspects of a given work, or, we might say, from the physical and intentional reality of the writer. And so we come to the second method for reading Stein that I propose: *Method 2: Read such that the reading lets come what would happen to come; or, read with an openness to chance and even an openness to failure.*

Let me summarize what has been examined thus far: First, I have followed the suggestion of a number of Stein scholars who recommend that we find new ways to read Stein and to write about our readings. Second, that perhaps the best way to discover these ways of reading is to follow Stein's own advice, to read the way she writes. Finally, the ways Stein writes. That one can read by a method of one and one and one without ever seeking after the whole thing. Then, that one can read with an openness to chance occurrence, letting happen whatever may happen both in the reading and in the writing about that reading.

This brings me at long last to my proposal. A certain kind of Steinian reading of Stein—not the only one, of course—allows for chance readings. One way of doing this (not all ways, but one and one and one) is to recognize that the reader herself *is* a chance element of the text. A reading of a text that respects this chance must find a way to accommodate the unexpected, unplanned happening of the reader. I'll requote Louise Rosenblatt, with whom I opened. Rosenblatt calls the poem an "event in time": "It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text" (12). The reader in such an event cannot be planned for. The reader's context, history, life experiences, interests, motivations,

knowledge, expertise—none of this can be planned. Yet the reading event remains. Stein's texts remain.

Having laid the groundwork for this proposal, I will turn now to the experiment itself. That is, I want to document, in writing, my own experiment with a chance reading, unplanned, based on no particular theoretical perspective or previously articulated critical lens. In this reading, I, the reader, am a wild variable, completely unexpected by Stein. My intention is no longer to illuminate Stein or argue on her behalf, but to make present the past chance event. I am reminded, as I write, of a single, tiny sentence from Lyn Hejinian's book *My Life*, which reveals in its dearth of words the way that memory creates presence. She writes, "That morning, *this* morning" (4). The rest of this paper, then, makes present *that* chance event, my reading of a text by Gertrude Stein.

Experiment: A Long Complicated Sentence Should Force Itself upon You

Here is the scene as it happened: Earlier this year, I was approached by Tomoyuki Iino about giving a paper at a colloquium exploring Modernism and its impact into the Cold War years of American Literature. When the email came through, I had not done any real, dedicated work with Stein for several years, having focused on poetry pedagogy for EFL students, with some diversions into Elizabeth Bishop and Ivan Illich. The chance email called me back to a line of work that I hadn't been planning on pursuing. And there lay the rub, for I was without a present Stein-related research project, and thus without a topic. But I knew I wanted to return to Stein in some capacity. Around that time, I also happened to be reading a book that has become one of the most riveting and invigorating philosophical investigations into our relationship with language that I have ever read, David Abram's book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. That book had come to me, as did the email, by chance, my having stumbled across a reference to it in another chance-encountered article about ecopoetry by autistic writers (Martin). Immediately, I had felt a mighty pull to read the book as soon as possible. So there I was, with an author and upcoming presentation in one hand and a book that I could not shake in the

other. Thus was Gertrude Stein introduced to David Abram.

Abram first: In a chapter of his book that brings together Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty with North American Indigenous traditions, Abram portrays how and why the future is often expressed in indigenous traditions (and others as well) as the horizon that we move toward. The horizon, he says, is always gradually approached, but never actually reached, just as the future can be imagined, but never experienced, our experiences being always already in the present. In this phenomenological perception of space, what is beyond the horizon is invisible, but can eventually be made visible, once the body moves toward the horizon. So too, the future is gradually revealed into the present. The past, meanwhile, cannot simply be "what is behind us," because we can simply turn our head, and the horizon—the future—shifts into the other direction. The past, Abram writes, is usually conceived as what is under the ground, a different, more impervious sort of invisibility. It is this "under-the-ground" sense of the past that provides a literal grounding for the present. Here, Abram summarizes these divergent but mutually supportive landscapes of time:

> While the open horizon withholds the visibility of that which lies beyond it, the ground is much more resolute in its concealment of what lies beneath it. It is this resoluteness, this *refusal* of access to what lies beneath the ground, that enables the ground to solidly support all those phenomena that move or dwell upon its surface. . . . *The beyond-the-horizon, by withholding its presence, holds open the perceived landscape, while the under-the-ground, by refusing its presence, supports the perceived landscape.* The reciprocity and asymmetry between these two realms bear an uncanny resemblance to the reciprocity and contrast between the *future* (or "what is to come") and the *past* (or "what has been") . . . . (214)

The reciprocity and asymmetry also, in my imagination, bear an uncanny resemblance to a diagrammed sentence. The movement of an English sentence at the most basic grammatical level—Subject to Verb to Object—stretches laterally across the page, while the depth of the sentence, those elements that support and give context and establish position, move down the page, so that reading such a sentence in its diagrammed form involves the

eyes moving in a more circular motion, creating a landscape of the sentence.

Gertrude Stein loved diagramming sentences, which is why it is so fascinating to note that her sentences—many of them at least—simply cannot be diagrammed. While the diagram shows us very precise relationships between clauses and words, those precise relationships are resolutely refused in a typical Steinian sentence. We try to move forward across the page, reading from left to right into the future, expecting the sentence to gradually reveal itself to us, as the landscape is eventually revealed as we walk toward the horizon. When that future fails to reveal itself to us, we stop, we turn around, and we dig deep. We look down the diagram at the relationships between clauses. Perhaps there we will find the support we need to read as we expect to read. But again, we are stopped. For it turns out that reading down into the sentence provides the same sort of impeded movement that reading across it does. Oh sure, we are looking at different things along the way. But ultimately we are left turning and turning, with Stein off declaring herself a genius instead of helping us through her texts.

Of course, this is the point.

David Abram expresses a similar confusion as he ponders the nature of the invisible and the withheld in an open landscape. Not only the future reaching horizon, not only the depths of the past earth, but something else must give itself to us in order for us to perceive the very idea of a present moment, not only a now, but presence itself. He describes his own event, wandering into the desert near his home, considering the land around him, and then, finally, simply breathing. "My thinking begins to ease," he writes, "the internal chatter gradually taking on the rhythm of the in-breath and the out-breath, the words themselves beginning to dissolve, flowing out with each exhalation to merge with the silent breathing of the land" (223). He has found the final invisibility, that which forms the presence out of the intersection of the past and future: "It is the invisibility of the air" (223).

Citing traditional Navajo beliefs and their correspondences with the Greek and Latin foundations of Western culture, Abram shows that the concepts of the mind, the psyche, the anima—all have traditionally been associated with the air. For the Navajo, he writes, "that which we call the 'mind' *is not ours*, is not a human possession. . . . One's individual awareness, the sense of a relatively personal self or psyche, is simply that part of the enveloping Air that circulates within, through, and around one's

particular body" (237). He suggests that traditional oral cultures maintained this conception by keeping human symbolic language tied not only to the body but to the breath, that life-giving force that we share with the earth around us. The gradual development and wide dispersal of written language eventually separated our language from our breath and body, allowing us to turn away from the "more-than-human world" and retreat into a human-only world of symbolic markings. Breath and language still of course come together when we speak, but our historical past, our stories, our science and religions, our poetry—this is all separated from us onto the page or screen. Our breath can express it, but our breath is no longer an essential, enlivening force.

So let us go back to Stein. What chance offerings does Abram bring to our reading of her? Stein's lecture "Poetry and Grammar" lays out an entirely, resolutely personal grammar. Her use or abuse of various parts of speech, word forms, and punctuation comes from her very intimate relationship with these aspects of the English language, having nothing at all to do with what one might learn in a grammar school. If we could make a general claim, before zeroing in on "one" point, she prefers any element of language that is "lively" and which "can be mistaken." The more possible mistakes a language component introduces into any piece of writing, the more she likes it, something to keep in mind in this experiment with chance. Perhaps the more mistaken my reading is, the better. But here we reach the final moment, the four pages of Stein that insisted upon being introduced to David Abram to see what would happen: the four pages in which she explains how commas work.

Stein had a great antagonism toward commas because of their tendency to force a stop in the middle of a sentence. Periods, which also stop, are necessary and acceptable, because, as she says, "Inevitably, no matter how completely I had to have writing go on, physically one had to again and again stop sometime and if one had to again and again stop some time then periods had to exist" (*LIA* 217). We are reminded here of her notebooks, which served as a chance (that is, entirely unplanned) ending to her manuscripts. Physical reality insists upon endings, whether that be because of the last page of a notebook or the body's need to sleep. Commas, though—commas are much more condescending and insidious: "A comma by helping you along holding your coat for you and putting on your shoes keeps you from living

your live as actively as you should lead it" (*LIA* 220). That is, while a period is just an acknowledgment of the necessity of ending, a comma determines how one experiences the present on the way to that ending. A page later, she explains exactly how this happens:

> A long complicated sentence should force itself upon you, make you know yourself knowing it and the comma, well at the most a comma is a poor period that it lets you stop and take a breath but if you want to take a breath you ought to know yourself that you want to take a breath. It is not like stopping altogether which is what a period does stopping altogether has something to do with going on, but taking a breath well you are always taking a breath and why emphasize one breath rather than another breath. (221)

On the one hand, Stein's conception of the comma seems to emphasize the way written language separates us from our breath, as the rhythm of one's breathing need not be in alignment with the movement of the sentence. On the other, much more interesting hand, we could suggest that the breath of the reader—in and out, inhale and exhale—gives life not only to the reader herself, but to the sentence, that the liveliness and the mistakenness that keep Stein's language alive must come from the reader's individual rhythms and individual presence, that presence from which emerges the self that is animated (for the Navajo as for the ancient Greek and Latin) by the more-than-human air. Further, if our breathing of air is in part what connects us to the larger world around us, then perhaps "knowing when to breathe" as a reader is partly a matter of finding ways of reading that unexpectedly enliven the text. This is a reading of presence—the live reading being a reading of now, unplanned, unsupported, ending only because all things end, even breath.

Since the premise animating this entire experiment is the idea that we can learn to read Stein by determining how Stein writes, let's take as our one example (only one, from one and one and one) from her deceptively titled book, *How to Write*:

> How long is there to be once after a while just as they like to know about it which is why they come and stay because now and then where

> they do sound very often as if they were possibly going not to go around more nearly to be shown. (41)

This sentence is a good example of how the forward lateral movement into the future of the sentence does not reveal much to us. But neither does a descent into the depths of the relationships among parts. Take just the first two phrases: "How long is there to be" and "once after a while." The mind hunting after a revelation of meaning will be stymied here, as the latter phrase does not offer completion of the former. Rushing headlong into the rest of the sentence yields "they's" and "it's" with no guiding antecedents, so that while one can suggest possibilities—I tend to imagine guests who stay too long and don't leave the house enough—there is neither noun nor comma to guide us, to hold our hand and hand us our coat and shoes and gently remind us to take a breath. Let us breathe on our own then.

Lyn Hejinian's *My Life* offers another sentence to guide us here: "I was eventually to become one person, gathered up maybe, during a pause, at a comma" (19). I take a breath in, bringing into myself the air from the world around me, sustaining my life for a few moments longer. I read, "How long is there to be," and knowing that I want to take a breath, I pause, I gather myself, and see that I want to complete the phrase that Stein did not. I choose to join my own words with hers. "How long is there to be—this event of reading?" Like Abram, I begin to breathe more slowly, considering my breaths as I go. "Once." I pause again, noting that the finitude of "once" threatens to put a period at the end of the present reading event I added to the sentences a moment ago. But the next phrase—"after a while"—saves me from this finitude, expressing instead a sort of casual duration. I breathe, I pause, letting the while extend through both its meaning and its airy refusal to stop my breath with harsh consonant sounds. After this opening play with time, which my slow breath has revealed to me, the focus of the sentences seems to shift. They pick up the pace, the phrases becoming longer through more sustained grammatical unity, but still absent the syntactical markers that would fill them with symbolic reference. I let my breath match them, choosing now to breathe at the end of a grammatical phrase, my breathing supporting the sense of one and one and one by giving each grammatical arc its own individual moment:

> *just as they like to know about it which is why they come and stay*—Breathe. Who are they? Since in this present while it is my breath animating the sentence, perhaps you, readers, are "they," coming to stay and to know more about it—*because now and then*—Breathe. Shift into a different sense of time, outside the duration of now, into the staccato of sometimes—*where they do sound*—Breathe. Consider. Are we making sound? Or, having come and stayed in order to know about it, are we sounding out a new idea?—*very often as if they were possibly going*—Breathe. The duration of the stay has perhaps ended. The movement of "come" which at the beginning had given way to the stasis of "stay" and "know," now begins again in the opposite direction, as if we have turned from one horizon to another. Breathe again. Now, a rhythmic finish pushes us out of the turning sentence into other things to see—*not to go around more nearly to be shown.*

Focusing on the breath in this chance, completely unplanned reading has allowed me two things. First, when I allow my control of my own breath to shape my reading, I easily allow the sentence to fold itself into the pattern of one and one and one. I read these small phrases, and stitch them together or fill them with meaning as I choose. By slowing my breath to arc with the phrases, I can see how they are self-sustaining, yet connected and more alive when my own reading adds to them. As Stein insisted we do, I read the long sentence and know myself in the reading of it. Second, I lose track of this sentence's place in the "whole" of the essay from which it comes. By breathing through this long sentence, and by knowing myself in that breathing, I reject the human nature that must begin and end, and instead go to the human mind, which writes what is written. I read what is read.

Conclusion

It may be a mistake to appropriate indigenous and ancient concepts of the animating air into a reading of a Modernist poet who has given no indication whatsoever to have been thinking about those concepts. But mistakes create liveliness, and liveliness creates interest, and that to Stein was one of the highest values a work could produce. Allegra Stewart suggested that Stein's

concept of novelty and creativity came from a "break" in the usual, everyday reality each of us experience. Once such a break occurs, for whatever reason, we have the opportunity to go all in for creative, truly new thinking. Without that break, or without the ability to recognize it and respond, we simply exist, moving along from the beginning of the sentence to the end. I don't mean to suggest that Gertrude Stein offers to us a philosophy for living. Just perhaps a way of reading, if we care to try it.

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HTW: *How to Write*
LIA: *Lectures in America*

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